

## Sample Interview Questions & Interview Dos and Don'ts

**Behavioral Questions-** The interviewer asks the applicant how he or she handled a particular situation in the past.

- Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to achieve it.
- Tell me about a time when you had to use your presentation skills to influence someone's opinion.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.

If answers seem to be thin on detail, the interviewer can ask follow-up questions:

- What exactly did you do?
- What was your specific role in this?
- What challenges did you come across?
- Why precisely did you do that?
- Why exactly did you make that decision?

**Competency-based interviewing** can give the interviewer a sense of an applicant's job performance and attitude toward work.

- Tell me about a time when you had to encourage others to contribute ideas or opinions. How did you get everyone to contribute? What was the end result?
- Tell me about a situation in which your spoken communication skills made a difference in the outcome. How did you feel? What did you learn?
- Tell me about a situation when you had to persuade others to accept your point of view when they thought you were wrong. How did you prepare? What was your approach? How did they react? What was the outcome?

The **situational approach** is an interview technique that gives the candidate a hypothetical scenario or event and focuses on his or her past experiences, behaviors, knowledge, skills and abilities by asking the candidate to provide specific examples of how the candidate would respond given the situation described. This type of interview reveals how an applicant thinks and how he or she would react in a particular situation.

- You have been hired as the HR director in a 300-employee company and are struggling to perform the necessary HR administrative work by yourself. Your manager, the CFO, tells you that you need to be more strategic. How would you handle this situation?
- You learn that a former co-worker at your last company is applying for an accounting position with your company. You have heard that this person was

- terminated after admitting to embezzling funds from the company but that no criminal charge was made. You are not in HR. What, if anything, would you do?
- You are applying for a customer service position in a cable television company. If a technician visits a home to make a repair and afterward you receive a call from the customer telling you that the technician left muddy footprints on her new carpeting, how would you respond?

Questioning should elicit information that will shed light on a candidate's ability to perform the job effectively. Many experts say it is best to ask open-ended questions ("Tell me about your relationship with your previous manager; how could it have been improved?") rather than closed-ended questions requiring only brief specific responses ("How many people reported to you?").

**Open-ended questions** encourage candidates to provide longer answers and to expand on their knowledge, strengths and job experiences. For interviewers, such questions can provide greater insight into a candidate's personality. They can also help employers gauge an applicant's ability to articulate his or her work experience, level of motivation, communication skills, ability to solve problems and degree of interest in the job. Open-ended questions may **provide the interviewer with a sense of an applicant's potential and whether the person would be a cultural fit in the organization.**

Following are some examples of open-ended questions:

- Tell me about your past work experience.
- What are you looking to gain from your next position?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- Tell me about your relationship with your previous manager: How was it productive? How could it have been improved?
- Why was math your most difficult subject in school?
- Please describe your management style.

**Closed-ended** job interview questions can enable the employer to receive direct responses and specific information from the candidate, and they can help the interviewer control the direction of the interview. But such questions can have drawbacks:

- They do not encourage candidates to elaborate on their feelings or preferences toward particular topics.
- They limit candidates' ability to discuss their competencies.
- They can leave situations unanswered or unclear.
- They can be frustrating for candidates who may want to explain or state relevant information.

Following are some examples of closed-ended questions:

- How many years of experience do you have as a team leader?
- Have you ever worked from home?
- When did you leave your last job?
- Did you have a productive relationship with your previous manager?
- What was your best subject in school?
- What was your most difficult subject?
- What was your GPA?

### **Legal Issues:**

Along with choosing an interview approach and shaping the questions ahead of time, the interviewer should become familiar with the types of questions and statements that must be avoided in any interview. For example, interviewers should not make statements that could be construed as creating a contract of employment. When describing the job, it is best to **avoid using terms such as "permanent," "career job opportunity," or "long term."** Interviewers should also avoid making excessive assurances about job security or statements suggesting that employment would last as long as the employee performed well in the position. In addition, to minimize the risk of discrimination lawsuits, interviewers must familiarize themselves with topics that are not permissible as interview questions.

Provisions of various federal laws affect the types of questions that organizations may ask an applicant during an employment interview. For example, **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, color, national origin and religion.** The **Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 prohibits questions about a person's age.** The wide-ranging **Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) protects qualified individuals with disabilities from discrimination in employment.** The **Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 prohibits employers from collecting and using genetic information.** The Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures of 1978, though not in and of themselves legislation or law, have been given deference by the courts in litigation concerning employment issues. **Questions relating either directly or indirectly to age, sex, race, color, national origin, religion, genetics or disabilities should be avoided entirely.** If information needed about an applicant might fall into any of those categories, the interviewer should make sure that the question relates to a bona fide occupational qualification or as required by federal or state law to be asked.

Employers should also be aware of some of the specific prohibitions contained in the ADA. Employers may never ask if an applicant has a disability. They may ask only if there is anything that precludes the applicant from performing—with or without a reasonable accommodation—the essential functions of the position for which he or she is applying.

Some questions that appear innocent on the surface may be considered discriminatory. The way they are phrased is key. Employers should determine in advance of the interview if the information sought by each question is really necessary for assessing an applicant's competence or qualifications for the job.

**Following are examples of questions *NOT* to ask during an employment interview:**

- Are you a U.S. citizen?
- Were you born here?
- Where are you from?
- What is your ethnic heritage?
- What is that accent you have?
- How old are you?
- When were you born?
- Are you married?
- Do you have any children? What are your child care arrangements? (Questions about family status are not job-related and should not be asked.)
- When did you graduate from high school?
- What church do you go to?
- What clubs or organizations do you belong to?
- Have you ever filed a worker's compensation claim? (You may not ask this question or any related question during the pre-offer stage.)
- What disabilities do you have?
- Do you have AIDS, or are you HIV-positive? (There is no acceptable way to inquire about this or any other medical condition.)

In addition, the interviewer should not ask questions about **arrests that did *not* result in a conviction**. Some states also prohibit employers from asking candidates about marijuana-related convictions. And **employers should never ask an applicant to submit a photograph—even if the request makes clear that providing a photo is optional, not mandatory**.