Sample Interview Questions & How to Answer Part 2

**Question 26: Where do you see yourself in 3 / 5/ 10 years’ time?**  
Err...  
  
Not a good response.  
  
So what might an employer be looking for with this question?  
• Are you serious about the company? Is the company part of your long-term plan, or are they a stepping stone?  
• Are you serious about your career?  
• Do you know where you want to go?  
• How does this job help you get there?  
• Are you ambitious? This can be positive or negative.  
• How does this job fit within your longer-term plans? Is this job just a stop-gap? If the job is part of your strategy, how likely are you to want to be promoted?  
• Do you have any longer-term plans? They may use this to judge how far you would plan ahead in your new role.  
  
This question is a good opportunity to show your commitment to the role and knowledge of the company’s structure and vision.  
  
Beware of seeming to threaten your future manager, if they’re interviewing you. A humorous answer we have often heard to this question is “doing your job”. This may be true and may even get a laugh, but some managers are quite insecure and may not want to hire someone who they fear would undermine them.  
Sample Answer: "In five years, I would like to have progressed to the point where I have bottom-line responsibility and the chance to lead an operations unit."  
Advice: Avoid the urge to describe job titles; this makes you seem unbending and unrealistic, since you do not know or control the system of promotion. Describe new experiences or responsibilities you'd like to add in the future that build on the current job you are applying for.

**Question 27: How do you plan to achieve those goals?**  
As a follow-up to the above question the interviewer will often ask how you plan on achieving those goals. A good answer to this question will speak specifically about what you are going to accomplish and how you are going to accomplish it. Examples of good responses include:   
I plan on gaining additional skills by taking related classes and continuing my involvement with a variety of professional associations.   
I noticed that XYZ Company (the company you are interviewing with) provides in-house training for employees and I would certainly be interested in taking classes that would be relevant.   
I will continue my professional development my participating in conferences, attending seminars, and continuing my education.

**Question 28: What drives you to achieve your objectives?**  
An interviewer is looking to fulfil certain competencies, in this case motivation and commitment. “You might say ‘I like doing a job well and perform best when stretched’,” says Tim Forster, the head of UK experienced recruitment at Pricewaterhouse Coopers.

**Question 29: What are you looking for in your next job? What is important to you?**  
You can begin your answer with this question: Tell me, Mr./Ms. Interviewer, what is a typical career path at OPL for someone with my skills and experience?   
(Based on the answer you can then respond to the original question using the phrases from the answer to frame your response).   
What is important to you? Two things are very important to me. One is my professionalism at work; the second is my family life.

**Question 30: What would your current manager say are your strengths?**  
We often find it hard to tell people what we’re good at.  
  
Selling yourself, without appearing arrogant, is one of the most common interview worries. Many people simply don’t sell themselves, for fear of seeming big-headed.  
  
Do you know what your strengths are? You’d be surprised how few do.  
  
One place to start is your recent performance appraisals. What did they highlight as your strengths? Can you supply evidence (provide examples)? Can you relate the strengths to the position you’re being interviewed for?  
  
Still stuck for answers to this question?  
• You could try asking someone. Ask a trusted friend or work colleague. Make sure they give you examples of where you have demonstrated the strengths, so you can quickly use these, if asked.  
• It’s also worth revisiting the job information, to look for which competencies they are looking for. You will make a more favourable impression if you can cover some of these in your answer.

**Question 31: What would your current manager say are your weaknesses?**  
This is not the place to admit your biggest flaws.  
  
It’s also not the time to pretend you don’t have any development areas – it would make you look either conceited or as though you can’t evaluate your own performance.  
  
So how should you handle this type of question?  
  
The main thing is to admit that you have areas to develop, whilst showing that you are already working on them and giving examples of the progress you have made.  
  
If possible, choose a development area that doesn’t affect your ability to do the job for which you are being interviewed.  
  
It’s usually a good idea to make the “weakness” something small. Avoid topics such as “organisational skills” or “time management”! Be ready to turn it into a positive.  
  
What happens if one of your development areas is one of the key strengths required for the role?  
  
Make sure you can demonstrate why it won’t be a problem.

**Question 32: Are you overqualified for this job?**  
Overqualified? Some would say that I'm not overqualified but fully qualified. With due respect, could you explain the problem with someone doing the job better than expected?  
I'm flattered that you think I'm headhunter bait and will leap to another job when an offer appears. Not really. This job is so attractive to me that I'm willing to sign a contract committing to stay for a minimum of 12 months. There's no obligation on your part. How else can I convince you that I'm the best person for this position?  
As you note, I've worked at a higher level but this position is exactly what I'm looking for. You offer opportunity to achieve the magic word: balance. I'm scouting for something challenging but a little less intense so I can spend more time with my family.  
Salary is not my top priority. Not that I have a trust fund but I will work for less money, will take direction from managers of any age, will continue to stay current on technology and will not leave you in the lurch if Hollywood calls to make me a star. And I don't insist that it's my way or the highway.

**Question 33: Why should we give you this job?**  
This is the time to give them your USP - Unique Selling Proposition - or what makes you different from all the other applicants.  
  
It's really worth working out and practising your answer to this before the interview.  
  
Some businesses use the phrase "30 second elevator speech".  
  
Imagine you have just bumped into the CEO of the company you want to work for, getting into a lift. He or she asks you "Why should we give you the job?". You have the time it takes for the lift to reach its destination (about 30 seconds) to give a compelling answer.  
  
The key is to highlight your strengths and the benefits you can bring to the company. Make sure you avoid sounding desperate!  
  
As preparation, you should refer back to the job advert and also listen carefully during the interview, to make sure your answer meets the needs of the "buyer" (the interviewer).  
  
You are giving your answer from the perspective of the buyer's needs, rather than your own.  
  
Finish your answer with: "I have the qualifications you need [itemize them], I'm a team player, I take direction, and I have the desire to make a thorough success."

**Question 34: We're considering two other candidates for this position. Why should we hire you rather than someone else?**  
Do not be distracted by the mention of two other candidates, you don't know anything about them and they could be fictitious. Focus on what strengths you bring to the table. These should be consistent with the four things most employers are looking for in candidates during the job interview: competence, professionalism, enthusiasm, and likability. Remember, they are looking for chemistry between you and them. Be prepared to summarize in 60 seconds why you are the best candidate for the job. Also, let the employer know you want the job and you will enjoy working with them. A lack of interest in the job may indicate a lack of enthusiasm for the job and them.

**Question 35: What would you do if one of our competitors offered you a position?**  
The interviewer is trying to determine whether the candidate is truly interested in the industry and company, or whether he or she has chosen the company randomly. Contrast your perceptions of the company with its competitors, and talk about the company's products or services that you've encountered. In the long run, which players do you believe are most viable and why? This is also a good place to ask the interviewer for his or her opinion.  
Sample Answer: I'd say no. I'm not interested in other players in this industry. I want to work for Nike because I won a number of races wearing the Nike brand. Because of my positive experience with Nike, I know I'd be convincing selling your product to retailers.

**Question 36: What are your biggest accomplishments?**  
Keep your answers job related. You might begin your reply with: "Although I feel my biggest achievements are still ahead of me, I am proud of my involvement with . . . I made my contribution as a part of that team and learned a lot in the process. We did it with hard work, concentration, and an eye for the bottom line."

**Question 37: What did you like/dislike about your last job?**  
The interviewer is looking for incompatibilities. If a trial lawyer says he or she dislikes arguing a point with colleagues, such a statement will only weaken--if not immediately destroy--his or her candidacy.  
  
Most interviews start with a preamble by the interviewer about the company. Pay attention: That information will help you answer the question. In fact, any statement the interviewers make about the job or corporation can be used to your advantage.  
  
So, in answer, you liked everything about your last job. You might even say your company taught you the importance of certain keys from the business, achievement, or professional profile. Criticising a prior employer is a warning flag that you could be a problem employee. No one intentionally hires trouble, and that's what's behind the question. Keep your answer short and positive. You are allowed only one negative about past employers, and only then if your interviewer has a "hot button" about his or her department or company; if so, you will have written it down on your notepad. For example, the only thing your past employer could not offer might be something like "the ability to contribute more in different areas"  
  
You might continue with, "I really liked everything about the job. The reason I want to leave it is to find a position where I can make a greater contribution. You see, I worked for a large company that encourages specialisation of skills. The smaller environment you have here will, allow me to contribute far more in different areas." Tell them what they want to hear--replay the hot button.  
  
Of course, if you interview with a large company, turn it around. "I work for a small company and don't get the time to specialise in one or two major areas."

**Question 38: Can you work under pressure?**  
You might be tempted to give a simple "yes" or "no" answer, but don't. It reveals nothing, and you lose the opportunity to sell your skills and value profiles. Actually, this common question often comes from an unskilled interviewer, because it is closed-ended. As such, the question does not give you the chance to elaborate. Whenever you are asked a closed-ended question, mentally add: "Please give me a brief yet comprehensive answer." Do this, and you will give the information requested and seize an opportunity to sell yourself. For example, you could say: "Yes, I usually find it stimulating. However, I believe in planning and proper management of my time to reduce panic deadlines within my area of responsibility."

**Question 39: What environments allow you to be especially effective?**  
Emphasize your flexibility and your ability to work in many different types of environments. Your answer should not consist of a laundry list of requirements (private office, few interruptions, and so on) or the interviewer may conclude that you will be difficult to satisfy.  
Sample Answer: Although I can work effectively in most environments, I prefer environments where people are their own bosses, within reason. I like to have a goal but be able to draw my own map to get there. To accomplish goals, I rely on asking questions and finding people receptive, so cooperation and access are important to me in a work group.

**Question 40: What do you find are the most difficult decisions to make?**  
These are behavioural interview questions designed to discover how you handled certain situations. The logic behind these types of questions is that how you behaved in the past is a predictor of what you will do in the future.   
Give concrete examples of difficult situations that actually happened at work. Then discuss what you did to solve the problem. Keep your answers positive ("Even though it was difficult when Jane Doe quit without notice, we were able to rearrange the department workload to cover the position until a replacement was hired.") and be specific. Itemize what you did and how you did it.   
The best way to prepare for questions where you will need to recall events and actions, is to refresh your memory and consider some special situations you have dealt with or projects you have worked on. You can use them to help frame responses. Prepare stories that illustrate times when you have successfully solved a difficult situation.

**Question 41: Give us an example of when you have worked to an unreasonable deadline or been faced with a huge challenge.**  
What is an interviewer looking for with this question? Most interviews will contain a question like this, to see how you cope under stress.  
  
They may be checking for integrity – one of the most highly valued skills for a recruiter. They may also want you to demonstrate your commitment to delivering results.  
  
This is a really useful question to prepare some examples for, before an interview.  
Choose examples that show how you went the extra mile, but didn’t do anything illegal, immoral or unethical.  
  
The interviewer will want to see how you rise to a challenge and how you react when put under pressure.  
  
Think about the positive things you did, to achieve the “unachievable”.  
  
Depending on your career history, this is another question where it’s acceptable to use an example from outside work, as long as the skills are clearly transferable to your new role.  
  
You might not have had the experience in your career so far, so most interviewers will accept an extra-curricular illustration that shows how you would add value to their company.

**Question 42a: What is the most difficult situation you have faced?**  
The question looks for information on two fronts: How do you define difficult? What was your handling of the situation? You must have a story, one in which the situation was tough and one which will allow you to show yourself in a good light. Avoid talking about problems that have to do with co-workers. You can talk about the difficult decision to fire someone, but emphasise that once you had examined the problem and reached a conclusion you acted quickly and professionally, with the best interests of the company at heart.  
  
"What are some of the things that bother you?" "What are your pet hates?" "Tell me about the last time you felt anger on the job."  
  
These questions are so similar that they can be treated as one. It is tremendously important that you show you can remain calm. Most of us have seen a co-worker lose his or her cool on occasion--not a pretty sight and one that every sensible employer wants to avoid. This question comes up more and more often the higher up the corporate ladder you climb, and the more frequent your contact with clients and the general public. To answer it, find something that angers conscientious workers. "I enjoy my work and believe in giving value to my employer."  
  
  
**Question 42b: Tell me about a special contribution you have made to your employer.**  
Before an employer makes his/her decision to hire you, they will need to know how you have performed in the past and any other special contributions that you can bring to the company  
"In my last job, I ran the fund raiser campaign for three consecutive years. I believed it was an important cause, and I knew it was difficult for the company to find volunteers."  
Advice: Don’t give long boring answers, instead focus you answers on the actions you took and the positive results that you obtained.

**Question 43: Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an irate customer. How did you handle the situation?**  
How you react when others lose their temper or become upset is very important in most positions, especially those in service industries. The interviewer will be looking for evidence of your aptitude for work that involves a great deal of contact with the public. Give an example of a time when you were faced with a difficult person and how you handled it. Your answer should illustrate your maturity, diplomacy, and awareness of the needs and feelings of others.  
Sample Answer: My customer service position at the telephone company involved dealing occasionally with irate customers. When that happened, I'd try to talk in a calm, even voice, in order to get the person to respond in a businesslike manner and focus on trying to resolve the situation. Most times I was able to rectify the problem and pacify the customer, but I remember one incident in particular in which the caller became verbally abusive. I tried to remain calm and professional and not to let my personal feelings enter into the situation. I didn't respond to the abuse, I just made a knot of it and continued to help he customer as best I could. When the abuse persisted, however, I politely asked him to call back and ask for my manager, because at that point I knew I shouldn't resolve the problem.

**Question 44: How do you take direction?**  
The interviewer wants to know whether you are open - minded and can be a team player. Can you follow directions or are you a difficult, high-maintenance employee? Hopefully, you are a low-maintenance professional who is motivated to ask clarifying questions about a project before beginning, and who then gets on with the job at hand, coming back to initiate requests for direction as circumstances dictate.  
  
This particular question can also be defined as "How do you take direction?" and "How do you accept criticism?" Your answer should cover both points: "I take direction well and recognise that it can come in two varieties, depending on the circumstances. There is carefully explained direction, when my boss has time to lay things out for me in detail; then there are those times when, as a result of deadlines and other pressures, the direction might be brief and to the point. While I have seen some people get upset with that, personally I've always understood that there are probably other considerations I am not aware of. As such, I take the direction and get on with the job without taking offense, so my boss can get on with their job. It's the only way."

**Question 45: What colour is your brain?**  
Be aware that you'll probably be asked zany questions. The point is not to stump you, but to find out what makes you tick. When the standard interview questions are asked, people are prepared, and it's harder for the recruiter to get to know the real person. An advertising recruiter, for example, tries to avoid this. There is no right or wrong answer to this type of question. In fact, the recruiter won't even really care what your answer is. He or she just doesn't want to hear something like, "I don't know, I guess it's blue because that's the way I imagine it." The point is to see how creative you are and how you think. Be sure to explain why you answered the way you did.  
Sample Answer: My brain is red because I'm always hot. I'm always on fire with new plans and ideas."

**Question 46: Do you prefer working in a team or on your own?**  
Think about this one before you answer.  
  
Think about the position for which you are applying. It is likely to require flexibility of working styles, but will probably fall into one of the following 3 categories:  
1. Group /Team  
You don’t have personal responsibility for the outcome, but are part of a group that achieves it. Often everyone has the same role, e.g. in a call centre.  
2. Team / Solo  
Most professional roles require a mixture: you have a defined role and responsibilities, but tend to do much of your work in a team environment.  
3. Mainly solo  
you are responsible for your own outcomes and may be required to spend a considerable amount of time working independently. You will probably still work as part of a team.  
  
The best bet with this question is to try to tailor your answer to the company’s needs, whilst remaining honest. If you say you are a great team player, they’ll soon spot you’re not, once you start the job…

**Question 47: What do your work colleagues think of you?**  
I like to ask people to consider the third person perspective; they have to think on their feet, and it allows me to assess their self-awareness. I’d also ask what their work colleagues would consider were their strengths and areas for development,” says Geoff Hall, the head of human resources for World Duty Free.

**Question 48: Tell me about your salary expectations.**  
Everyone wants to make a lot of money working the job they love. You should be honest here. Saying that you will be ok working for $30,000 when you think you are worth $40,000 is not a very smart idea. Experience will show that you will lose interest in the job pretty quickly.   
Sample Answer: "Current salary information published by our State Association indicates a range of $30,000 to $40,000 a year. While I'm not certain how your salaries compare to this industry, my feeling is that my value would certainly be in the upper half of this national range."  
Advice: You should answer this question in general terms. Mention the market value for yourself.

**Question 49: What will you do if you don't get this position?**  
When you're interviewing for an internal position within your company, you may be asked what you will do if you don't get the job. The interviewer wants to know whether you are concerned about just the advancement opportunity or the company.   
Sample Answer: I am committed to this company and its advancement so, should I not be selected, I will work with and support whoever might get selected. However, I do feel that my experience in the department and with the team would make me the best candidate.

**Question 50: What is the first thing you would change, if you were to start work here?**  
Your answer to this depends on how much you know about the job.  
  
Why are they recruiting?  
  
Are they looking for an “agent of change” or someone to maintain stability? Would you be in a position to change anything?  
  
A good strategy for this question is to precede your answer with a brief explanation of how you would get to know the business, the people, the challenges and your role, before you considered changing anything.  
  
Unless you’ve been specifically recruited to make fast, radical change, few people will appreciate a “bull in a China shop” approach.  
  
It’s important that you illustrate empathy for change that will be acceptable within the corporate culture. However, for management positions, you may be required to make changes that will be unpopular.  
  
It is perfectly acceptable to answer this question with a question; asking them what they would expect from you.  
  
This is quite a sensitive topic and you may find an interview coaching session useful, if you'd like to practise answering it.