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English Monthly



Turn on
the Lights!



Work

Interviews - Putting Your Best Foot Forward

Whatever job you are applying for, with the exception of technical questions, the questions that you are asked are usually predictable. There are only so many things that people can ask and what the interviewer wants to know about you will be much the same from one job to another. It is therefore possible to anticipate and prepare for the most obvious ones.

The danger of preparing is that you might want to learn answers word for word which might be counterproductive. It can make you sound rather robotic and uninteresting so have an idea about what you want to say but try to keep it natural. The other big mistake that interviewees make is to make their answers too long. Keep your answers direct and covering no more than three key points. Remember to answer the question being asked. Furthermore, try to give qualified answers. In this, you back up your claim with evidence. If asked, "what are your key strengths?" don't just say, "I am flexible," but support this by saying, "for example, when my colleague was ill, I took over his project at short notice." Some typical questions and possible answers

DID YOU FIND US ALRIGHT?

This is just a polite, ice-breaking question and the model answer is something like, "Yes, the map was very clear and helpful." Whatever you do, even if it's true, do not go into a lengthy tale of missing your bus, getting soaked and struggling to find the place; you won't get the job that way.

TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF

Don't turn your answer into a three hour life story. You should be able to run through it in a minute. Cover milestones such as education and key positions. Why do you want to leave your current employer? Or, Why did you leave your last employer?

Here's the first of the potential trap questions. Avoid saying anything negative, particularly about your boss or colleagues, although it is OK to say that your current employer is unable to offer you the career development that you are looking for. Also, try to focus on the job you are applying for and what attracted you to it.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT OUR COMPANY?

The interviewer wants to test your level of commitment. If you don't know anything then it shows it's not very high. You won't be expected to know everything but you should be able to demonstrate that you've done your homework. Look at the company's website and note a few main facts such as products, markets, locations and number of employees.

WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?

If you don't know, how can the interviewer? Study any information about the job requirements that the company may have sent you. You can then say that you believe you are a good match to their needs because you possess A, B and C.

WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?

This is a trick question encouraging you to shoot yourself in the foot.

The best way to deal with it is by giving a weakness that could also be perceived as a strength, such as, "I'm sometimes too much of a perfectionist," or, "I can be self-critical and expect too much of myself."

DO YOU PREFER TO WORK ALONE OR AS PART OF A TEAM?

Trap! Of course, the answer is that you enjoy working as part of a team but you are equally at home working alone when necessary.

Can you describe a difficult situation and how you dealt with it?

This is a great opportunity to demonstrate your assets; have an example ready. If this question is not asked, find a way to describe such a situation when answering another question.

WHERE WILL YOU BE IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?

This is a test of your future loyalty and ambition. The ideal answer is, "Still working here but in a higher position," possibly adding, "such as"

ARE YOU PREPARED TO WORK - LATE/AT WEEKENDS/AWAY FROM HOME?

This is a fair question as for some jobs travel and unsocial hours come with the territory. You need to be honest with yourself and honest with your interviewer about this. Maybe you can ask how many late nights or nights away from home are standard in this position.

IF YOU GOT THE JOB, WHAT WOULD YOU DO IN YOUR FIRST WEEK/MONTH?

It rather depends on the job but it's something you can give some thought to before the interview. It could be contacting key customers and other department managers, getting to know your team or identifying the issues in most urgent need of attention.

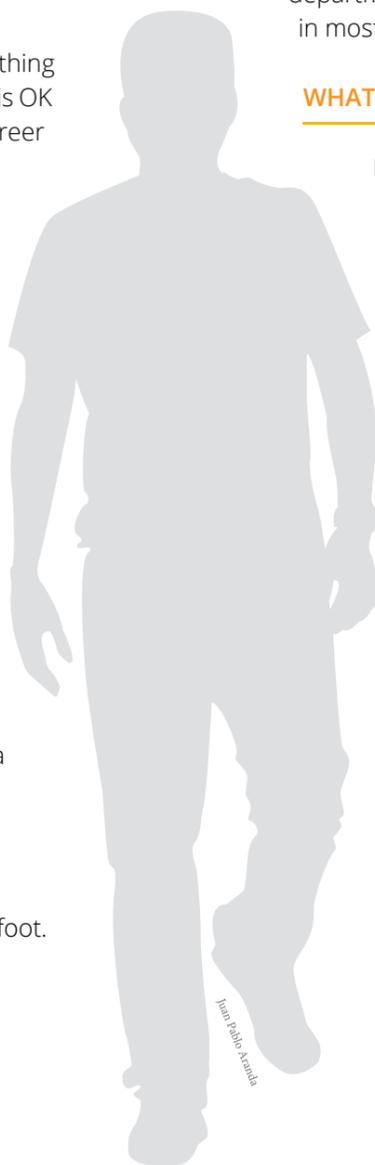
WHAT ARE YOUR SALARY EXPECTATIONS?

In the UK, the salary range of a position is frequently given within the job advertisement and job application pack so everybody knows what to expect but in other countries, it can be more of a guessing game. You need to decide what you think you are worth in the market place, taking into account your skills and experience. Pitch your proposal higher than your current salary to give yourself some room for negotiation. You can also qualify your answer by saying that it would depend on the total benefits package which would include factors such as company car, healthcare and bonuses.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

You can almost guarantee that this question will be asked so have one or two ready. Some good questions are, "If I were successful, how soon could I start?" - This suggests enthusiasm; "What are the main projects for this year?" This acts as if you are already in the job. "What are the career development opportunities within the company?" This demonstrates a desire to develop and advance.

That ends this brief review of interviews - any questions?



Vocabulary

Counterproductive - having the opposite effect to the desired one

Soaked - thoroughly wet

To do your homework - to carry out necessary research

To shoot yourself in the foot - to act in a way that damages yourself

Unsocial hours - times at which most people are not working

To come with the territory - to be an integral part of a situation or activity

Match the question to the advice given on how to respond to it

1	Did you find us alright?	a	if you don't know, how can the interviewer?
2	Tell me something about yourself	b	this is a fair question as for some jobs travel and antisocial hours come with the territory
3	Why do you want to leave your current employer?	c	this is a test of your future loyalty and ambition
4	What do you know about our company?	d	avoid saying anything negative, particularly about your boss or colleagues
5	Why should we hire you?	e	look at the company's website and note a few main facts such as products, markets, locations and number of employees
6	What are your weaknesses?	f	do not go into a lengthy tale of missing your bus
7	Where will you be in five years' time?	g	don't turn your answer into a three hour life story
8	Are you prepared to work - late/at weekends/away from home?	h	this is a trick question encouraging you to shoot yourself in the foot!

ENGLISH FOR INTERVIEWS



GEORGE SANDFORD



A practical guide for non-natives to being interviewed in English. Lots of useful tips combined with language guidance on vocabulary, grammar, idioms and phrasal verbs as well as glossaries and tests. Essential reading for anybody preparing to be interviewed in English.

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