

Business Skills 360 – Tips for your First Job Interview (Part 4: Difficult Questions)

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Discussion Questions

1. What types of interview questions do you think are very difficult?
2. Is it ever okay to say “I don’t know” in response to an interview question?
3. How would you describe yourself in one sentence?

Vocabulary

to tackle - to deal with or handle; “The politician promised to tackle the problem of unemployment if he were elected.”

Oddball – unusual or strange; “I was confused when my boss started asking me oddball questions about my mental health.”

catch you off guard – to surprise someone by doing something unexpected; “Favro Airlines caught the competition off guard when they suddenly reduced their ticket prices.”

Crisp – clear, short, and concise; “Because there wasn’t very much time for questions, the presenter kept his answers crisp and to-the-point.”

rehearse – to practice repeatedly in preparation for something; “Actors and musicians will tell you how important it is to rehearse well before a production.”

stock answers – common and familiar responses prepared beforehand; “Teachers get tired of the stock answers that students provide for not having completed their homework.”

chalk it up to – consider the cause of something; “When Stewart failed his final exam, he chalked it up to the fact that he was very sick when he studied.”

root – the source or basic origin of something; “The root of my success in marketing was my ability to think of new ideas quickly.”

unique selling proposition – the thing that makes a product attractive and different from its competitors; “Domino’s Pizza’s unique selling proposition is that you get fresh, hot pizza at your door in 30 minutes or less, or it’s free.”

reiterate – to say again or repeatedly; “At the beginning of every lecture, Professor Walsh would reiterate the importance of good note-taking.”

Transcript

Hello and welcome. I'm Tim Simmons, your host for Business Skills 360. Glad you could join me. This is the fourth and final part in our 360 series on your first job interview. Today we're going to tackle a few of those really tough questions that interviewers like to ask. You know they're coming, so let's get ready for them.

Getting ready. That's the key. You need to spend time preparing for your interview and crafting good answers to the questions you're going to face. Every interviewer will have one or two oddball questions that will catch you off guard, but for the most part you can predict what you will be asked. So prepare, prepare, prepare. I'll go through five fairly standard 'difficult questions' today and you can prepare your answers.

Let's begin at the beginning, with "Tell me about yourself." This is not an easy task. Interviewers don't want a 10-minute summary of your life. You need to be brief, crisp, and relevant, and everything you say should relate to the job or your career objectives. Describe yourself in three to five sentences, mentioning your key strengths, your most recent related experience, and your basic professional goals. This question normally comes right at the start of the interview, and first impressions are important, so you'd be wise to develop a good answer and rehearse it.

Right. Now how about that question "What is your greatest weakness?" There are several stock answers here that actually twist a positive quality, like "I'm too much of a perfectionist." Avoid those types of answers because employers have heard them all before. You should state a true weakness and then explain how you have tried to overcome it. For example, "Well, I have had some problems with organization, but I have taken a time management course and I'm focused on improving this area." You might just want to avoid talking about something that is a key skill or attribute of the position.

Okay, so some interviewers will ask you to give them an example of conflict and how you dealt with it. This makes a lot of interviewees uncomfortable, but remember that conflict is normal and natural. The important thing is how you deal with it. Tell the interviewer about a real conflict you experienced, but don't chalk it up to a personality difference. Show how the conflict was the result of miscommunication or misunderstanding. Show how you tried to understand the root of the conflict and how you dealt with that directly. Then explain how things improved.

Now there's another common difficult question that relates back to the "tell me about yourself" idea. The question is this: "Why should I hire you?" The worst thing you can do here is to seem confused or have nothing to say. You *must* be able to sell yourself and explain why you are right for the job. Focus on your strengths and how they relate to the company's goals. Many products have a one-sentence unique selling proposition that explains very briefly why you should buy it. You should have a unique selling proposition for *yourself*.

Right. One final tough question is about your long-term objectives or plans. In this case, you should avoid mentioning specific job titles or positions. You should also avoid talking about opening your own business or going back to school. Talk about what you'd like to do for your employer and focus on certain areas of professional improvement. Be ambitious. Talk about your goals. Do *not* say that you don't really have any!

Great. Let me [reiterate](#) one last time here that there is no substitute for good preparation. None of these questions should leave you scratching your head in confusion.

Head over to the Business English Pod website to get a complete transcript of today's show and test your understanding with a free quiz.

Thanks for listening, and good luck on that next interview.

Review

1. Which of the following tough interview questions does Tim Simmons talk about?
 - A. "What type of experience do you have?"
 - B. "Why should I hire you?"
 - C. "What did you do to prepare for this interview?"
 - D. "Tell me about yourself."
 - E. "What is your greatest weakness?"
 - F. "Do you have problems with organization?"
 - G. "Give me an example of conflict and how you dealt with it."
 - H. "What are your long-term objectives?"

2. What is the key to having a good interview?
 - A. experience
 - B. appearance
 - C. preparation
 - D. clear goals

3. According to Tim, in how many sentences should you be able to describe yourself?
 - A. 5 to 10
 - B. 3 to 5
 - C. 1 to 3
 - D. 10 to 15

4. What should you do with stock answers about your weaknesses such as "I'm too much of a perfectionist?"
 - A. memorize them
 - B. ask the interviewer which one he or she prefers
 - C. avoid them
 - D. rehearse them

5. When you talk about conflict with others, Tim suggests explaining how the conflict was the result of _____ or _____.
 - A. miscommunication, misunderstanding
 - B. mistakes, improvements
 - C. discomfort, awkwardness
 - D. personality, inability

6. What is the worst thing you can do when asked why you should be hired?
 - A. explain your unique selling proposition
 - B. have a stock answer
 - C. talk about opening a business or going to school
 - D. seem confused or say nothing

Review Answers

1. Which of the following tough interview questions does Tim Simmons talk about?

B. "Why should I hire you?"
D. "Tell me about yourself."
E. "What is your greatest weakness?"
G. "Give me an example of conflict and how you dealt with it."
H. "What are your long-term objectives?"

2. What is the key to having a good interview?

C. preparation

3. According to Tim, you should learn to describe yourself in how many sentences?

B. 3 to 5

4. What should you do with stock answers about your weaknesses such as "I'm too much of a perfectionist?"

C. avoid them

5. When you talk about conflict with others, Tim suggests explaining how the conflict was the result of _____ or _____.

A. miscommunication, misunderstanding

6. What is the worst thing you can do when asked why you should be hired?

D. seem confused or say nothing