

# GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES



## Do:

- Arrive 15 minutes early. Late attendance is never excusable.
- Clarify questions. Be sure you answered the questions the employer really asked.
- Get the interviewer to describe the position and responsibilities early in the conversation so you can relate your skills and background to the position throughout the interview.
- Give your qualifications. Stress the accomplishments that are most pertinent to the job.
- Conduct yourself professionally. Be aware of what your body language is saying. Smile, make eye contact, don't slouch and maintain composure.
- Anticipate tough questions. Prepare in advance so you can turn apparent weaknesses into strengths.
- Dress appropriately. Make your first impression a professional one.
- Ask questions throughout the interview. An interview should be a mutual exchange of information, not a one-sided conversation.
- Listen. This is probably the most important ability of all. By concentrating not only on the employer's words, but also on the tone of voice and body language, you will be able to pick up on the employer's style. Once you understand how a hiring authority thinks, pattern your answers accordingly and you will be able to better relate to him or her.

## Don't:

- Don't answer vague questions. Rather than answering questions you think you hear, get the employer to be more specific and then respond.
- Never interrupt the employer. If you don't have time to listen, neither does the employer.
- Don't smoke, chew gum or place anything on the employer's desk.
- Don't be overly familiar, even if the employer is doing all of these things.
- Don't wear heavy perfume or cologne.
- Don't ramble. Long answers often make the speaker sound apologetic or indecisive.
- On the other hand, don't answer questions with a simple "yes" or "no." Explain whenever possible.
- Do not lie. Answer questions as truthfully as possible.
- Do not make derogatory remarks about your present or former employers or companies.

## QUESTION #1

Tell me about yourself...

TRAPS: Beware -- about 80% of all interviews begin with this "innocent" question. Many candidates, unprepared for the question, skewer themselves by rambling, recapping their life story, delving into ancient work history or personal matters.

BEST ANSWER: Start with the present and tell why you are well qualified for the position. Remember that the key to successful interviewing is to match your qualifications to what the interviewer is looking for. In other words, you must sell what the buyer is buying. This is the single most important strategy in executive job hunting.

So, before you answer this or any question, it's imperative that you try to uncover your interviewer's greatest need, want, problem or goal.

## QUESTION #2

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Contact – 09214430541, 09414073127, Email - [poddarcollege@gmail.com](mailto:poddarcollege@gmail.com)

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What are your greatest strengths?

**TRAPS:** This question seems like a softball lob, but be prepared. You don't want to come across as egotistical or arrogant. Neither is this a time to be humble.

**BEST ANSWER:** You know that your key strategy is to first uncover your interviewer's greatest wants and needs before you answer questions. And from Question # 1 you know how to do this.

Then, once you uncover your interviewers greatest wants and needs, you can choose those achievements from your list that best match up.

As a general guideline, the 10 most desirable traits that all employers love to see in their executives are:

- 1) A proven track record as an achiever...especially if your achievements match up with the employer's greatest wants and needs.
- 2) Intelligence ... management "savvy."
- 3) Honesty ... integrity ... a decent human being.
- 4) Good fit with corporate culture...someone to feel comfortable with...a team player who meshes well with interviewer's team.
- 5) Likeability ... positive attitude ... sense of humor.
- 6) Good communications skills.
- 7) Dedication ... willingness to walk the extra mile to achieve excellence.
- 8) Definiteness of purpose . clear goals.
- 9) Enthusiasm... high level of motivation.
- 10) Confident ... healthy... a leader.

## QUESTION #3

What are your greatest weaknesses?

**TRAPS:** Beware this is an "eliminator" question, designed to shorten the candidate list. Any admission of a weakness or fault will earn you an "A" for honesty, but an "F" for the interview.

**PASSABLE ANSWER:** Disguise strength as a weakness.

Example: "I sometimes push my people too hard. I like to work with a sense of urgency and everyone is not always on that same wavelength."

**Drawback:** This strategy is better than admitting a flaw, but it's so widely used, it is transparent to any experienced interviewer.

**BEST ANSWER** (and another reason it's so important to get a thorough description of your interviewer's needs before you answer questions): Assure the interviewer that you can think of nothing that would stand in the way of your performing in this position with excellence. Then, quickly review your strongest qualifications.

Example: "Nobody's perfect, but based on what you've told me about this position, I believe I'd make an outstanding match. I know that when I hire people, I look for two things most of all. Do they have the qualifications to do the job well, and the motivation to do it well? Everything in my background shows I have both the qualifications and a strong desire to achieve excellence in whatever I take on. So I can say in all honesty that I see nothing that would cause you even a small concern about my ability or my strong desire to perform this job with excellence."

**Alternate strategy:** (if you don't yet know enough about the position to talk about such a perfect fit):

Instead of confessing a weakness, describe what you like most and like least, making sure that what you like most matches up with the most important qualification for success in the position, and what you like least is not essential.

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Example: Let's say you're applying for a sales position: "If given a choice, I like to spend as much time as possible in front of prospects selling, as opposed to shuffling paperwork back at the office. Of course, I long ago learned the importance of filing paperwork properly and I do it conscientiously. But what I really love to do is sell." (If your interviewer were a sales manager, this would be music to his ears.)

## QUESTION #4

Why should I hire you?

TRAPS: Believe it or not, this is a killer question because so many candidates are unprepared for it. If you stammer or ad lib, you've blown it.

BEST ANSWER: By now you can see how critical it is to apply the overall strategy of uncovering the employer's needs before you answer questions. Knowing the employer's greatest needs and desires will give you a big leg up over other candidates because you will give him better reasons for hiring you than anyone else. Whether your interviewer asks you this question explicitly or not, this is the most important question of your interview because he must answer this question favorably in his own mind before you will be hired. So help him out! Walk through each of the position's requirements as you understand them, and follow each with a reason why you meet that requirement so well.

Example: "As I understand your needs, you are first and foremost looking for someone who can manage the sales and marketing of your book publishing division. As you've said, you need someone with a strong background in trade book sales. This is where I've spent almost my entire career, so I've chalked up 18 years experience exactly in this area. I believe that I know the right contacts; methods, principles, and successful management techniques as well as any person can in our industry.

"You also need someone who can expand your book distribution channels. In my prior post, my innovative promotional ideas doubled, and then tripled, the number of outlets selling our books. I'm confident I can do the same for you.

"You need someone to give a new shot in the arm to your mail order sales, someone who knows how to sell in space and direct mail media. Here, too, I believe I have exactly the experience you need. In the last five years, I've increased our mail order book sales from \$600,000 to \$2,800,000, and now we're the country's second leading marketer of scientific and medical books by mail."

Every one of these selling "couplets" (his need matched by your qualifications) is a touchdown that runs up your score. It is your best opportunity to outsell your competition.

## QUESTION #5

Where do you see yourself five years from now?

TRAPS: One-reason interviewers ask this question is to see if you're settling for this position, using it merely as a stopover until something better comes along. Or they could be trying to gauge your level of ambition. If you're too specific, i.e., naming the promotions you someday hope to win, you'll sound presumptuous. If you're too vague, you'll seem rudderless.

BEST ANSWER: Reassure your interviewer that you're looking to make a long-term commitment...that this position entails exactly what you're looking to do and what, you do extremely well. As for your future, you believe that if you perform each job at hand with excellence, future opportunities will take care of themselves.

Example: "I am definitely interested in making a long-term commitment to my next position. Judging by what you've told me about this position, it's exactly what I'm looking for and what I am very well qualified to do. In terms of my future career path, I'm confident that if I do my work with excellence, opportunities will inevitably open up for me. It's always been that way in my career, and I'm confident I'll have similar opportunities here."

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## QUESTION #6

Describe your ideal company, location and job.

**TRAPS:** This is often asked by an experienced interviewer who thinks you may be overqualified, but knows better than to show his hand by posing his objection directly. So he'll use this question instead, which often gets a candidate to reveal that, indeed, he or she is looking for something other than the position at hand.

**BEST ANSWER:** The only right answer is to describe what this company is offering, being sure to make your answer believable with specific reasons, stated with sincerity, why each quality represented by this opportunity is attractive to you. Remember that if you're coming from a company that's the leader in its field or from a glamorous or much admired company, industry, city or position, your interviewer and his company may well have an "Avis" complex. That is, they may feel a bit defensive about being "second best" to the place you're coming from, worried that you may consider them bush league.

This anxiety could well be there even though you've done nothing to inspire it. You must go out of your way to assuage such anxiety, even if it's not expressed, by putting their virtues high on the list of exactly what you're looking for, providing credible reasons for wanting these qualities.

If you do not express genuine enthusiasm for the firm, its culture, location, industry, etc., you may fail to answer this "Avis" complex objection and, as a result, leave the interviewer suspecting that a hot shot like you, coming from a Fortune 500 company in New York, just wouldn't be happy at an unknown manufacturer based in Topeka, Kansas.

## QUESTION #7

Why do you want to work at our company?

**TRAPS:** This question tests whether you've done any homework about the firm. If you haven't, you lose. If you have, you win big.

**BEST ANSWER:** This question is your opportunity to hit the ball out of the park, thanks to the in-depth research you should do before any interview. Best sources for researching your target company: annual reports, the corporate newsletter, contacts you know at the company or its suppliers, advertisements, articles about the company in the trade press.

## QUESTION #8

What are your career options right now?

**TRAPS:** The interviewer is trying to find out, "How desperate are you?"

**BEST ANSWER:** Prepare for this question by thinking of how you can position yourself as a desired commodity. If you are still working, describe the possibilities at your present firm and why, though you're greatly appreciated there, you're looking for something more, (challenge, money, responsibility, etc.). Also mention that you're seriously exploring opportunities with one or two other firms. If you're no longer working, you can talk about other employment, possibilities you're actively exploring. But do this with a light touch, speaking only in general terms. You don't want to seem manipulative.

## QUESTION #9

What are your outside interests?

**TRAPS:** You want to be well rounded, not a drone. But your potential employer would be even more turned off if he suspects that your heavy extracurricular load will interfere with your commitment to your work duties.

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**BEST ANSWER:** Try to gauge how this company's culture would look upon your favorite outside activities and be guided accordingly. You can also use this question to shatter any stereotypes that could limit your chances. If you're over 50, for example, describe your activities that demonstrate physical stamina. If you're young, mention an activity that connotes wisdom and institutional trust, such as serving on the board of a popular local charity. But above, all, remember that your employer is hiring you for what you can do for him, not your family, yourself or outside organizations, no matter how admirable those activities may be.

## QUESTION #10

Can you work under pressure?

**TRAPS:** An easy question, but you want to make your answer believable.

**BEST ANSWER:** Absolutely...(then prove it with a vivid example or two of a goal or project accomplished under severe pressure).

## QUESTION #11

What changes would you make if you came on board?

**TRAPS:** Watch out! This question can derail your candidacy faster than a bomb under the tracks -- and just as you're about to be hired!

**Reason:** No matter how bright you are, you cannot know the right actions to take in a position before you settle in and get to know the operation's strengths, weaknesses, key people, financial condition, methods of operation, etc. If you lunge at this temptingly baited question, you will probably be seen as someone who shoots from the hip.

Moreover, no matter how comfortable you may feel with your interviewer, you are still an outsider. No one, including your interviewer, likes to think that a know-it-all outsider is going to come in, turn the place upside down and with sweeping, grand gestures, promptly demonstrate what jerks everybody's been for years.

**BEST ANSWER:** You, of course, will want to take a good, hard look at everything the company is doing before making any recommendations.

**Example:** "Well, I wouldn't be a very good doctor if I gave my diagnosis before the examination. Should you hire me, as I hope you will, I'd want to take a good hard look at everything you're doing and understand why it's being done that way. I'd like to have in-depth meetings with you and the other key people to get a deeper grasp of what you feel you're doing right and what could be improved."

## QUESTION #12

How do you feel about working nights and weekends?

**TRAPS:** Blurt out "no way, Jose" and you can kiss the job offer goodbye. But what if you have a family and want to work a reasonably normal schedule? Is there a way to get both the job and the schedule?

**BEST ANSWER:** First, if you're a confirmed workaholic, this question is a softball lob. Whack it out of the park on the first swing by saying this kind of schedule is just your style. Add that your family understands it. Indeed, they're happy for you, as they know you get your greatest satisfaction from your work. If however you prefer a more balanced lifestyle, answer this question with another: "What's the norm for your best people here?"

If the hours still sound unrealistic for you ask, "Do you have any top people who perform exceptionally for you, but who also have families and like to get home in time to see them at night?" Chances are the company does, and this associates

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you with this other, "top-performers-who-leave-no-later-than-six" group. Depending on the answer, be honest about how you would fit into the picture. If all those extra hours make you uncomfortable, say so, but phrase your response positively.

Example: "I love my work and do it exceptionally well. I think the results speak for themselves, especially in ... (mention your two or three qualifications of greatest interest to the employer. Remember, this is what he wants most, not a workaholic with weak credentials.) Not only would I bring these qualities, but I've built my whole career on working not just hard, but smart. I think you'll find me one of the most productive people here.

"I do have a family who likes to see me after work and on weekends. They add balance and richness to my life, which in turn helps me be happy and productive at work. If I could handle some of that extra work at home in the evenings or on weekends, that would be ideal. You'd be getting a person of exceptional productivity who meets your needs with very strong credentials. And I'd be able to handle some of the heavy workload at home where I can be under the same roof as my family. Everybody would win."

## QUESTION #13

Are you willing to relocate or travel?

TRAPS: Answer with a flat "no" and you may slam the door shut on this opportunity. But what if you'd really prefer not to relocate or travel, yet wouldn't want to lose the job offer over it?

BEST ANSWER: First, find out where you may have to relocate and how much travel may be involved. Then respond to the question. If there's no problem, say so enthusiastically. If you do have a reservation, there are two schools of thought on how to handle it. One advises you to keep your options open and your reservations to yourself in the early going, by saying, "no problem." Your strategy here is to get the best offer you can, and then make a judgment whether it's worth it to you to relocate or travel. Also, by the time the offer comes through, you may have other offers and can make a more informed decision. Why kill off this opportunity before it has a chance to blossom into something really special? And if you're a little more desperate three months from now, you might wish you hadn't slammed the door on relocating or traveling.

The second way to handle this question is to voice a reservation, but assert that you'd be open to relocating (or traveling) for the right opportunity. If the company really wants you, saying this can induce them to sweeten the pot or hire you in a capacity, which doesn't entail relocation or travel.

The answering strategy you choose depends on how eager you are for the job. If you want to take no chances, choose the first approach. If you want to play a little harder-to-get in hopes of generating a more enticing offer, choose the second.

## QUESTION #14

May I contact your present employer for a reference?

TRAPS: If you're trying to keep your job search private, this is the last thing you want. But if you don't cooperate, won't you seem as if you're trying to hide something?

BEST ANSWER: Express your concern that you'd like to keep your job search private, but that in time, it will be perfectly okay.

Example: "My present employer is not aware of my job search and, for obvious reasons, I'd prefer to keep it that way. I'd be most appreciative if we kept our discussions confidential right now. Of course, when we both agree the time is right, then by all means you should contact them. I'm very proud of my record there."

## QUESTION #15

Give me an example of your creativity (analytical skill, managing ability, etc.).

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**TRAPS:** The worst offense here is simply being unprepared. Your hesitation may seem as if you're having a hard time remembering the last time you were creative, analytical, etc.

**BEST ANSWER:** Remember from Question #2 that you should commit to memory a list of your greatest and most recent achievements, ever ready on the tip of your tongue. If you have such a list, it's easy to present any of your achievements in light of the quality the interviewer is asking about. For example, the smashing success you orchestrated at last year's trade show could be used as an example of creativity, or analytical ability, or your ability to manage.

## QUESTION #16

How many hours a week do you normally work?

**TRAPS:** You don't want to give - a specific number. Make it too low, and you may not measure up. Too high, and you'll forever feel guilty about sneaking out the door at 5:15.

**BEST ANSWER:** If you are in fact a workaholic and you sense this company would like that: Say you are confirmed workaholic, that you often work nights and weekends. Your family accepts this because it makes you fulfilled. If you are not a workaholic: Say you have always worked hard and put in long hours. It goes with the territory. In one sense, it's hard to keep track of the hours because your work is a harbor of love; you enjoy nothing more than solving problems. So you're almost always thinking about your work, including times when you're home, while shaving in the morning, while commuting, etc.

## QUESTION #17

Have you considered starting your own business?

**TRAPS:** If you say "yes" and elaborate enthusiastically, you could be perceived as a loose cannon in a larger company, too entrepreneurial to make a good team player... or someone who had to settle for the corporate life because you couldn't make a go of your own business. Also, too much enthusiasm in answering "yes" could rouse the paranoia of a small company, indicating that you may plan to go out on your own soon, perhaps taking some key accounts or trade secrets with you. On the other hand, if you answer "no, never" you could be perceived as a security-minded drone who never dreamed a big dream.

**BEST ANSWER:** Again it's best to:

- 1) Gauge this company's corporate culture before answering, and
- 2) Be honest (which doesn't mean you have to vividly share your fantasy of the franchise or bed-and breakfast you someday plan to open).

In general, if the corporate culture is that of a large, formal, military-style structure, minimize any indication that you'd love to have your own business. You might say, "Oh, I may have given it a thought once or twice, but my whole career has been in larger organizations. That's where I've excelled and where I want to be." If the corporate culture is closer to the freewheeling, everybody's-a-deal-maker variety, then emphasize that in a firm like this, you can virtually get the best of all worlds, the excitement of seeing your own ideas and plans take shape...combined with the resources and stability of a well-established organization. Sounds like the perfect environment to you. In any case, no matter what the corporate culture, be sure to indicate that any desires about running your own show are part of your past, not the present or future. The last thing you want to project is an image of either the dreamer who failed and is now settling for the corporate cocoon ... or the restless maverick who will fly out the door with key accounts, contacts and trade secrets under his arm just as soon as his bankroll has gotten rebuilt. Always remember, match what you want with what the position offers. The more information you've uncovered about the position, the more believable you can make your case.

## QUESTION #18

What are your goals?

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**TRAPS:** Not having any ... or having only vague generalities, not highly specific goals.

**BEST ANSWER:** Many executives in a position to hire you are strong believers in goal setting (it's one of the reasons they've achieved so much). They like to hire in kind. If you're vague about your career and personal goals, it could be a big turnoff to many people you will encounter in your job search. Be ready to discuss your goals for each major area of your life: career, personal development and learning, family, physical (health), community service and (if your interviewer is clearly a religious person) you could very briefly and generally allude to your spiritual goals (showing you are a well-balanced individual with your values in the right order). Be prepared to describe each goal in terms of specific milestones you wish to accomplish along the way, time periods you're allotting for accomplishment, why the goal is important to you, and the specific steps you're taking to bring it about. But do this concisely, as you never want to talk for more than two minutes straight before letting your interviewer back into the conversation.

## QUESTION #19

"The Salary Question" How much money do you want?

**TRAPS:** May also be phrased as, "What salary are you worth?" . . . or, "How much are you making now? This is your most important negotiation. Handle it wrong and you can blow the job offer or go to work at far less than you might have gotten.

**BEST ANSWER:** For maximum salary negotiating power, remember these five guidelines:

1. Never bring up salary. Let the interviewer do it first. Good salespeople sell their products thoroughly before talking price. So should you. Make the interviewer want you first, and your bargaining position will be much stronger.
2. If your interviewer raises the salary question too early, before you've had a chance to create desire for your qualifications, postpone the question, saying something like, "Money is important to me, but it is not my main concern. Opportunity and growth are far more important. What I'd rather do, if you don't mind, is explore if I'm right for the position, and then talk about the money. Would that be okay?"
3. The #1 rule of any negotiation is, the side with more information usually wins. After you've done a thorough job of selling the interviewer and it's time to talk salary, the secret is to get the employer talking about what he's willing to pay before you reveal what you're willing to accept. So, when asked about salary, respond by asking, "I'm sure the company has already established a salary range for this position. Could you tell me what that is?" Or, "I want an income commensurate with my ability and qualifications. I trust you'll be fair with me. What does the position pay?" Or, more simply, "What does the position pay?"
4. Know beforehand what you'd accept. To know what's reasonable, research the job market and this position for any relevant salary information. Remember that most executives look for a 20%-25% pay boost when they switch jobs. If you're grossly underpaid, you may want more.
5. Never lie about what you currently make, but feel free to include the estimated cost of all your fringes, which could well tack on 25%-50% more to your present "cash-only" salary.

## QUESTION #20

The Illegal Question.

**TRAPS:** Illegal questions include any regarding your age...number and ages of your children or other dependents ... marital status ... maiden name...religion ... political affiliation ... ancestry ... national origin ...birthplace ... naturalization of your parents, spouse or children ... diseases ... disabilities...clubs ... or spouse's occupation ... unless any of the above are directly related to your performance of the job. You 'can't even be asked about arrests, though you can be asked about convictions.

**BEST ANSWER:** Under the ever-present threat of lawsuits, most interviewers are well aware of these taboos. Yet you may encounter, usually on a second or third interview, a senior executive who doesn't interview much and forgets he can't ask such questions.

You can handle an illegal question in several ways. First, you can assert your legal right not to answer. But this will frighten or embarrass your interviewer and destroy any rapport you had. Second, you could swallow your concerns over privacy and answer the question straight forwardly if you feel the answer could actually help you. For example, your

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interviewer, a devout Baptist, recognizes you from church and mentions it. Here, you could gain by talking about your church. Third, if you don't want your privacy invaded, you can diplomatically answer the concern behind the question without answering the question itself.

Example: If you are over 50 and are asked, "How old are you?" you can answer with a friendly, smiling question of your own on whether there's a concern that your age may affect your performance. Follow this up by reassuring the interviewer that there's nothing in this job you can't do and, in fact, your age and experience are the most important advantages you offer the employer for the following reasons...

Another example: If asked, "Do you plan to have children?", you could answer, "I am wholeheartedly dedicated to my career," perhaps adding, "I have no plans regarding children." (You needn't fear you've pledged eternal childlessness. You have every right to change your plans later. Get the job first and then enjoy all your options.)

Most importantly, remember that illegal questions arise from fear that you won't perform well. The best answer of all is to get the job and perform brilliantly. All concerns and fears will then vanish, replaced by respect and appreciation for your work.

## QUESTION #21

The "Secret" Illegal Question.

TRAPS: Much more frequent than the Illegal Question (see Question #55) is the secret illegal question. It's secret because it's asked only in the interviewer's mind. Since it's not even expressed to you, you have no way to respond to it, and it can therefore be most damaging.

Example: You're physically challenged or a single mother returning to your professional career, or over 50, or a member of an ethnic minority, or fit any of a dozen other categories that do not strictly conform to the majority in a given company. Your interviewer wonders, "Is this person really able to handle the job?"..."Is he or she a 'good fit' at a place like ours?"...Will the chemistry ever be right with someone like this?" But the interviewer never raises such questions because they're illegal. So what can you do?

BEST ANSWER: Remember that just because the interviewer doesn't ask an illegal question doesn't mean he doesn't have it. More than likely, he is going to come up with his own answer. So you might as well help him out. How? Well, you obviously can't respond to an illegal question he hasn't even asked. This may well offend him. And there's always the chance he wasn't even concerned about the issue until you brought it up, and only then begins to wonder. So you can't address "secret" illegal question...But what you can do is make sure there's enough counterbalancing information to more than reassure him that there's no problem in the area he may be doubtful about.

For example, let's say you're a sales rep who had polio as a child and you need a cane to walk. You know your condition has never impeded your performance, yet you're concerned that your interviewer may secretly be wondering about your stamina or ability to travel. Well, make sure that you hit these abilities very hard, leaving no doubt about your capacity to handle them well. So, too, if you're in any way different from what passes for "normal." Make sure, without in any way seeming defensive about yourself, that you mention strengths, accomplishments, preferences and affiliations that strongly counterbalance any unspoken concern your interviewer may have.

## QUESTION #22

How do you define success... and how do you measure up to your own definition?

TRAPS: Seems like an obvious question. Yet many executives, unprepared for it, fumble the ball.

BEST ANSWER: Give a well-accepted definition of success that leads right into your own stellar collection of achievements.

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## PODDAR MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

Main Campus: Fatehpuria, Vatika, (Sanganer), Tonk Road, Jaipur, Rajasthan, City Campus: Sector-7, Zone-75, Shipra Path, Mansarovar, Jaipur

Contact – 09214430541, 09414073127, Email - [poddarcollege@gmail.com](mailto:poddarcollege@gmail.com)

Website - [www.poddartechnicalcampus.com](http://www.poddartechnicalcampus.com), follow us on [www.facebook.com/PoddarManagement](https://www.facebook.com/PoddarManagement)

# GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES



Example: "The best definition I've come across is that success is the progressive realization of a worthy goal. "As to how I would measure up to that definition, I would consider myself both successful and fortunate..." (Then summarize your career goals and how your achievements have indeed represented a progressive path toward realization of your goals.)

## QUESTION #23

"The Opinion Question"

What do you think about...  
Abortion ... The President...  
The Death Penalty...  
(Or any other controversial subject)?"

TRAPS: Obviously, these and other 'opinion' questions should never be asked. Sometimes they come up over a combination dinner/interview when the interviewer has had a drink or two, is feeling relaxed, and is spouting off about something that bugged him in today's news. If you give your opinion and it's opposite of his, you won't change his opinion, but you could easily lose the job offer.

BEST ANSWER: In all of these instances, just remember the tale about the student and the wise old rabbi. The scene is a seminary, where an overly serious student is pressing the rabbi to answer the ultimate questions of suffering, life and death. But no matter how hard he presses, the wise old rabbi will only answer each difficult question with a question of his own...

In exasperation, the seminary student demands, "Why, rabbi, do you always answer a question with another question? To which the rabbi responds, "And why not?" If you are ever uncomfortable with any question, asking a question in return is the greatest escape hatch ever invented. It throws the onus back on the other person, sidetracks the discussion from going into an area of risk to you, and gives you time to think of your answer or, even better, your next question! In response to any of the "opinion" questions cited above, merely responding, "Why do you ask?" will usually be enough to dissipate any pressure to give your opinion. But if your interviewer again presses you for an opinion you can ask another question. Or you could assert a generality that almost everyone would agree with. For example, if your interviewer is complaining about politicians then suddenly turns to you and asks if you're a Republican or Democrat, you could respond by saying, "Actually, I'm finding it hard to find any politicians I like these days." (Of course, your best question of all may be whether you want to work for someone so opinionated.)

## QUESTION #24

Why should I hire you from the outside when I could promote someone from within?

TRAPS: This question isn't as aggressive as it sounds. It represents the interviewer's own dilemma over this common problem. He's probably leaning toward you already and, for reassurance, wants to hear what you have to say on the matter.

BEST ANSWER: Help him see the qualifications that only you offer.

Example: "In general, I think it's a good policy to hire from within when possible. But the very fact that you decided to look outside probably means you're not completely comfortable choosing someone from inside. "Naturally, you want this department to be as strong as it possibly can be, so you want the strongest candidate. I feel that I can fill that bill because ...(then recap your strongest qualifications that match up with his greatest needs)."

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