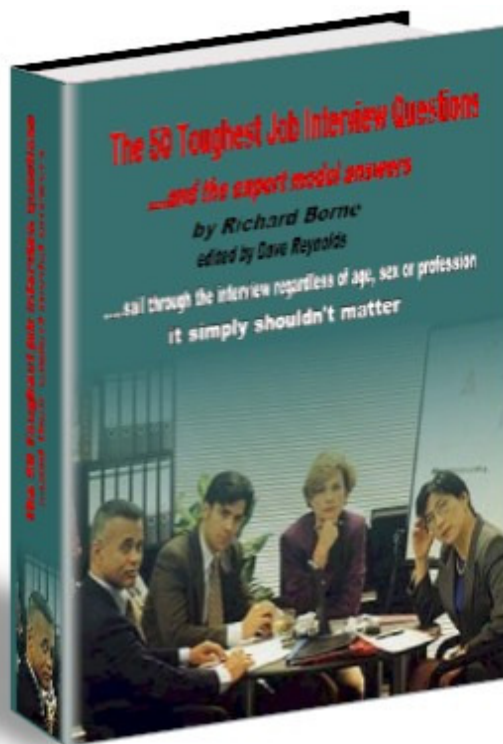


# The 50 most Difficult Interview Questions you will ever hear and the Expert Model Answers



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## ***Introduction***

### ***Introduction to the 50 most common and hardest interview questions and their model answers***

Without further ado let's look at the 50 most difficult interview questions and their model answers.....

In nearly all cases an interviewer will ask similar questions. It doesn't matter whether you are going for a minimum wage job or a senior position in a Fortune 500 company. It is just a question of context although of course the replies will vary.

Interviewing is not just about answering questions. It is about answering questions well and most importantly showing your self in the best possible light. If you find yourself answering with a blunt 'yes' or 'no' then you need to realise that you are missing an opportunity to sell yourself.

The interviewer is looking to assess your strengths, weaknesses, professionalism and suitability. IF you give closed single word replies then you stand no chance of persuading them to take the risk on you.

Of course if you get asked a question and you don't have an answer this will harm your application. So we have prepared the top 50 most common and hardest interview questions which you are ever likely to face.

By reading through these you will find that the way you answer a question is one of the keys to a successful interview. An interview

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is about selling yourself. A skilled interviewer will continually ask 'open' questions which by their nature are probing but will allow you to sell your skills and abilities.

Imagine an interview where the replies were all one word answers or short sentences. It would not be very comfortable for either party to sit through and your chances of getting the job would be almost zero.

You need to show you have personality, enthusiasm and a great team ethic to succeed at interviews. There are basically 5 key elements that the interviewer is looking for in a candidate. These are.....

**Can you do the job?**

**Will you do the job?**

**What is the problem I am here to solve?**

**Will you take direction and conform to the team ethic?**

**Will your behaviour represent the department or manager in a professional manner?**

All your answers should be modelled with the view that this is what the interviewer is looking to hear.

**The toughest questions are the negative ones**

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So which types of questions will pose the greatest difficulty? When you enter an interview the interviewer expects you to say how brilliant you are and how perfect for the job you will be. They discount this from the start. They therefore pay much greater attention to those questions which raise negative points. Here are some examples

**Q. ‘... Have you ever disagreed or argued with your current immediate supervisor?’**

**Q. ‘....Presumably you want this job because you are disillusioned with your current employer?’**

**Q. ‘....You seem to lack experience in area ‘x’**

Pay particular attention to these types of questions. Interviews will usually be won and lost with these types of questions.

These types of questions need to be answered with as much positive upside as you can possibly muster. The more you dwell on the negatives of your experience and career the poorer the overall impression of your abilities.

An interviewer will usually discount the positive aspects of your answers and look much more closely at the potential negatives in your career.

You should not be afraid to discuss the negative aspects of your career. However a series of positive focused answers will put you

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in a strong position. It clears a lot of uncertainty in the interviewers mind and importantly reduces their risk in hiring you.

### **Always answers in the affirmative.**

Never answer a question starting with the word 'No'. There are two reasons for this. Firstly you never want to disagree with the interviewer. Subliminally this will sound like you are disagreeing and to repeat you never want to disagree with the interviewer.

Secondly you want to keep any answers in positive territory. The more negativity that is expressed in an interview the less likely you are to secure the job.

Conversely if the interview is upbeat and positive you will always perform better and be viewed in a favourable light.

### **The same questions phrased in a different way.**

There are always going to be different ways of phrasing the same questions. Do not be intimidated by thinking you need to learn separate answers to dozen of different questions.

Understand the principles behind what is being asked and then concentrate on accentuating the positive and letting your skills and attributes come to the fore.

### **Preparation:**

You will realise that after reading all these questions you need to prepare yourself for the job interview. You need to know and be

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able to clearly express your job skills are and also your personality skills.

Your job skills and experience should be reasonably static. What I mean by that is that if you have one years experience in a role or skill you cannot suddenly claim to have 5 years experience.

However with the personality traits the answers are totally subjective. The interviewer does not know whether you are enthusiastic, energetic, a team-player or possess 100 other professional behaviours. It is entirely up to you to convince them. You will notice above that only one of the 5 key elements described at the start of this book actually refers to whether you can do the job. The other 4 all relate to personality. That's a whopping 80%! Use this to your advantage.

The last big element of your preparation is having suitable examples which show real **benefits** of your actions. If your answers can contain examples with demonstrable benefits then you will sky-rocket your chances of success. It is just a question of making the answer seem real. Every decent interviewer will ask a question and ask for an actual example of just such a situation in your life.

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I have one final piece of advice regarding job interviews. An interviewer will NEVER hire someone they do not like. If you do nothing else make sure that you have been pleasant, charming, warm and friendly it makes all the difference.

So let's look at the top 50 most common and hardest interview questions and good luck! They are in no particular order just as you may receive them in an interview.

## **The top 50 most common and hardest job interview questions and their model answers**

**Q.** Where do you see this industry in 5 years time?

**A.** Although this is the type of question that would be asked in a more senior position everyone should know something about their industry.

The interviewer is not asking for a prediction but looking to see that you understand the current issues facing the industry and what the future trends may be.

Although possible answers are unlimited and will be tailored to each type of business you may find the following suggestions helpful:

- More industry consolidation into larger corporations
- Move away from retail outlets to e-commerce web selling
- More niche players in the market
- Globalisation of the supplier network
- Stronger sales growth in 3rd world countries
- Wider diversity in product ranges
- Increased reliance on software to run the business

A more senior managerial position will require you to have an in depth knowledge of the future direction of the industry. This is because your decisions may have a direct impact on the long term direction the company is taking.

If you are going for a more junior position and the question comes up be grateful. By answering with a full and carefully considered

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reply it will distinguish your application and elevate you above the competition.

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**Q.** What do you know about our company and its product range?

**A.** This type of question is likely to be more akin to a sales position. This is where you should have done your homework and understood what the company was all about. Failure to have done this could be a major setback!

Make sure you have prepared your answer by researching the company. Of course these days the internet is the best medium for doing this.

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**Q.** What has attracted you to this job?

**A.** You may find that you only have a limited amount of information on the role. Your understanding of the role may be limited to what you have read in the job description. You may need to reply to the interviewer looking for clarification about some of the aspects of the job.

Concentrate on describing the challenge, rewarding career, and the experience you will gain. Do not mention money if you can help it. Definitely do not say anything negative about your previous employer/boss and wanting to leave. "I just cannot wait to leave my existing employer" will not go down well.

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However the question will not just be role related but will include the wider organisation. Additionally describe what you perceive to be the forward thinking elements of the organisation and what advantages they appear to offer. For example their use of new technology.

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**Q.** Why do you want to change employer and join our organisation and what as an organisation can we offer that is better than your current employer?

**A.** It is asking for a direct comparison between your current employer and your future employer. An interviewer wants to hear that you are a valued member in your current / previous role. You have worked for an organisation that has trained you to a high level and you have been providing a strong contribution to their skilled workforce. They hope to leverage these skills in their organisation.

A typical answer which deals with such a comparison should read.....

‘My current organisation has been a great career move for me I have learned many new skills eg. x. There is a great team ethic and I feel I have made a strong contribution to their sales team / office / project team etc. However I see your organisation and the role on offer as a new challenge which can leverage my skills and allow me to challenge myself set new goals and further my career

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in a way that the current organisation perhaps doesn't offer.”

Of course this answer needs to be tailored to meet your particular circumstances. Start by listing what you like about your current organisation and the experience you have gained. Compare this with the list of skills and benefits you expect to find in the new organisation. Use this list to tailor your answer.

Stay clear of talking about money. The sub text of this question and so many others like it is the interviewer is asking **‘What’s in it for me?’**

You should be replying I am making a contribution and this is how.....include examples of how you can make the contribution, which backs up your claims. By saying you want to leverage your skills in the new role and show how you can make a strong contribution is precisely what the interviewer wants to hear.

If you say or even imply the reason for the new job is that you are looking for more money or additional benefits, then this does not imply you are making a contribution to the new organisation. You are in fact saying this is “what is in it for me” and does not address the interviewers needs!

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**Q.** What do you dislike about the role being offered?

**A.** This is an unusual question but reeks of negativity. Keep the

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answer neutral by saying there is no elements that appear to be of any concern. Then try to keep the reply upbeat by saying you are thrilled to be considered for such an exciting position which is a great opportunity to advance your career.

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**Q.** What have you learnt most from your past career?

**A.** Another chance to talk about your successes but a truly open ended question. You should talk about your specific skills and experience that you can offer. Remember the skills need to be transferable to the new employer.

A closing statement like the one below will also add value, it will distinguish your answer and elevate your application.....‘I have learnt many things as you can imagine. But one point always rings true. Every one needs to be treated with respect, their opinion should be valued and they should be encouraged to contribute to the good of the organisation.’

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**Q.** What would you most like not to do in this role?

**A.** Dangerous question. The interviewer is probing for things that you didn't previously like and then they can ask a follow on question about why you didn't like them. Beware of this trap. Turn the question round and give a 'model answer'. ....'In an ideal world.....I would like to avoid any bureaucracy or red tape which

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can delay decisions. Like anyone I am always keen for good progress to be made at all times and everything to run smoothly'. 'I would like to avoid the situation in the last role where we had tight deadlines and 3 of my staff went off on long term sick with the winter flu last year. Although we achieved our targets it was only through hard effort, team-work and long hours'.

See how these answers portray you in a good light and turn a negative into a positive. Make sure you have prepared an answer otherwise you could see yourself stumbling!

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**Q.** Why personal qualities or attributes will you bring to the role or job and .....Why should I hire you? (is the same question just phrased differently).

**A.** This is where you need to have a personal pitch of 2 -3 sentences pre-prepared. This needs to relate to the job description. Go through the qualities listed line by line. Then add in the additional personal qualities that you bring to the role.

It is always worth using a qualifying phrase such as 'colleagues have said of me...I am a great motivator/team builder/technician etc.'. It sounds better if there is a 3rd party endorsement. It doesn't sound like you are bragging but a colleague is speaking on your behalf.

In addition you will need to have relevant examples which you can

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offer to expand on. The personal qualities for the role will be attributes such as hard-working, motivating, good communication skills, desire to succeed

You should end your answer with a statement such as ‘do you think these qualities are what you are looking for from a successful candidate?’. It plants a seed in the mind of the interviewer that they are.

If they reply that they were expecting other qualities then discuss them and offer examples of how you have these and examples of these in action. You need to leave the interviewer in no doubt you have the skills and can demonstrate this with examples.

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**Q.** Have you ever refused to do something at work that you were asked to do?

**A.** Straight rebuttal. No interviewer wants to hear that you may be a trouble maker?

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**Q.** How long would it take for you to start making a real contribution to the organisation?

**A.** There is no point in blurting out an answer here because the contribution could be anywhere and you could go off in the wrong direction. Bat the question back to get a more precise idea. “In



what particular area of my responsibilities did you have in mind?”  
“Of course there will be a short learning curve while I get up to speed but in the past I have prided myself on being a quick learner who can make an effective contribution in a short space of time. I see this opportunity as no different although I accept it will be a challenge.”

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**Q.** What is your typical working week in hours?

**A.** Whatever it takes to get the job done

“I like to think I am an effective and efficient worker who gets through a full workload each week. However there are times when I need to work late and weekends and this is fine. This is often due to uneven demands on my time. I will put whatever effort it takes to complete my role.”

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**Q.** Candidate x has these skills how do you feel your skills match theirs?

**A.** A ridiculous comparison question. Don't be drawn on making comparisons with other candidates, it is a golden rule. Stay away from saying anything negative.

However it does raise an important point in the preparation you need to do. Know your strengths but job related and personality

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related. These should be part of a 3-4 sentence personal summary statement which summarises why you should get the job.

‘I cannot comment on the other candidates and their abilities. All I know is I have these qualities both job related and behavioural (then list them with examples).’

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**Q.** If I said for example another candidate had more experience than you how would you react?

**A.** A less ridiculous comparison question. However still don't be drawn on making comparisons. It is important to show your application in the best most positive light not discuss other fictitious candidates

‘There is little to be gained from me trying to compare myself with other candidates.

All I know is I have these qualities both job related and behavioural (then list them with relevant examples).’

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**Q.** I see from your resume that you have never actually been in this role in any of your previous companies. How are you going to manage?

**A.** Firstly this is an obvious weakness. Weakness means risk to an employer and they are looking for re-assurance that you will adapt to the new environment.

Relate your previous experience to similar situations where you moved departments and had a new role or were faced with new technology which you had to learn quickly. Turn this into a positive about 'how you are able to adapt to changing circumstances and have a flexible approach. How you pick up new skills quickly. How you enjoy the challenge of the ever changing technology'.

Try to broaden the answer by saying 'we are all faced with a fast moving and changing environment which constantly presents new challenges. I have always been able to rise to these and perform effectively despite tight deadlines and little support'.

Importantly, then go on to list examples of similar experiences where you have demonstrated such skills. This should close the issue in the interviewers mind and paint a positive picture.

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**Q.** What would you do if you failed to meet your sales target?

**A.** Don't be drawn on a specific answer. Sidestep the question. "I will be giving my very best efforts to ensure this scenario never occurs. Throughout my career I have prided myself on my sales achievements to date and see no reason for me failing in the future"

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**Q.** Are you going to be the best salesman in the company?

**A.** Another odd question that sometimes gets asked just to see the reaction it causes.

“That is a goal which I will be working very hard to achieve. However I am primary focused on ensuring I exceed my own sales targets, I am not necessarily looking at the success of other salesmen but am sure of my ability to compete with the best salesmen in the company”

Take the opportunity to talk about your previous successes. It backs up your argument and paints a picture of success.

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**Q.** Are you going to be ambitious to succeed in the role?

**A.** Over ambition suggest that you will not stay in the role too long before looking to move onwards and upwards. Under ambition suggests you are lacking enthusiasm or drive. 'This is a fantastic opportunity for me. If offered the role I am ambitious to succeed and look forward to performing to the best of my ability with drive and enthusiasm.'

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**Q.** Where do you see yourself in the next 5 or 10 years?

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**A.** Answer needs to show ambition but also a commitment to the role on offer. This is a difficult juggling act where a very neutral answer is most appropriate. 'My first goal is to secure this role and I am ambitious to succeed in it. I am not really looking beyond this. I suppose if pressed I would be looking for career progression like anyone else but 5-10 years is a long time away and I am sure I have many challenges ahead in the current role.

That is a difficult question that would need some thought'. You are unlikely to get pressed further in explaining yourself.

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**Q.** What do you think the organisation will expect from you in terms of responsibilities?

**A.** The interviewer is looking for personal skills. Hard work, enthusiasm, professionalism, passion, honesty. Additionally you can express your enthusiasm for the companies products and services and comment on how you see your responsibilities as adding value or increasing sales/profits/turnover. Of course your answer will need to be tailored to the situation.

Close your answer by asking the interviewer if that was what they were expecting or asking what they feel the main responsibilities are apart from those listed on the job description.

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**Q.** You seem to be a bit young for this job.

**A.** If the interviewer really thought you were too young then they wouldn't be interviewing you. However they may have concerns even though they think you have something to offer. You will again need to fall back on your personal skills and experience.

Explain what you bring to the role? As for your age politely disagree with the interviewer that although you are younger than other candidates it does not mean you do not have the necessary skills. After all it is up to them to decide.

Turn the question round and say youth is an advantage as you are open to fresh ideas, probably have more energy and ambition and are likely to be more satisfied in the role. On most occasions it is the personality traits such as enthusiasm drive, team work and professionalism that will override experience. Of course a good combination of both is ideal! Play on these traits if your experience is lacking.

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**Q.** You seem to be over qualified for this position. Are you going to find the role a bit demeaning?

**A.** This is a complement. Your skills are highly regarded and the interview is going particularly well. A good trick is to smile, confirm this is a good thing and ask the interviewer to clarify why they are thinking. This gives you some time to compose yourself and also to set the interviewers concerns in context.

The interviewer will probably say you could get bored, you might not be challenged enough and look to move roles quickly if you get a better offer. This is a concern for you. The way to convince the interviewer is to express your desire to work for the company. The more you have taken the trouble to understand the company its product ranges and shown enthusiasm for joining them the more convincing you will be.

You will want to focus on the challenges the company will offer you and how they will provide a rewarding career for you. This can mark a changing point in the interview. The interviewer is saying that effectively you are an excellent candidate more than capable of doing the job. Your focus now is on convincing them that you see the company as your next major career step.

If you can additionally add that you do have other options for your career and this role is still your first choice then so much the better. It reinforces what you are saying.

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**Q.** You have been working as a temp as so many different places. Why is this?

**A.** The implication is that you do not fit in or get bored easily. Turn the answer round. Talk about this being a deliberate plan. List the wide range of experiences you have gained working for different companies. They all have different methods of working. Note the fact that you are able to adapt to a new working environment easily and learn new methods of working. You are therefore

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flexible and adaptable. Back this up by referring to your references from these employers and saying how pleased they were with the work you had performed. This gives you another chance to cement your skills and abilities and all round strong candidacy to the interviewer.

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**Q.** If you had to pick one quality you had what would be the best one?

**A.** It is difficult to pick one but it would have to be my honesty or integrity.

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**Q.** What would your job references say about you?

**A.** Try to make sure that any job references have been sought and written before you go interviewing. This is not always possible.

Where you do have job references then you can say you have references and they are very complimentary around a number of aspects of your work.

It is not a problem if you don't have references and the question implies that you would probably imagine what they would say.

Effectively the interviewer is therefore asking to list your

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strengths. Take the time to list your job strengths and behavioural qualities. Start the sentence in the 3rd party with.....'My references would say....'

Any time you are able to reply in the 3rd party it sounds like someone else is endorsing your candidacy which in effect references do.

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**Q.** Did you have the best sales figure in your organisation last year?

**A.** If you did say so. This of course would be a great selling point for you, however if your sales figures were not the best look for positives.

'I met all my targets in a tough economic environment' 'I exceeded the tough targets that were set' 'Nationally I wasn't the number one....but I was for my region'

If you are a salesman then this will be a key area of interest. Make sure you have every detail of the sales memorised and a list of positive achievements. If you do not then how can you expect to get the job if you have a poor track record?

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**Q.** What is the most innovative idea you have come up with at work?

**A.** Quite a tricky question unless you are prepared. You need follow the Situation, Task, Action, Results (STAR) method of describing what you did. Make sure there is a perceived benefit firmly stated at the end. Here is an example.

“About 6 months ago we had an important sales meeting arranged. An hour before the meeting was due to take place in our only meeting room the room got flooded and was out of action. No time to cancel or any further office space in our building. I knew the building across the street have meeting rooms. I went across and asked them and they agreed to lend us a room. In fact they set the room up for us and laid on refreshments.

The sales meeting went ahead on time and was a great success and the customer was impressed with our ingenuity.”

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**Q.** What could you have done better to achieve more sales?

**A.** Oh dear, a very pointed negative question. You need to stay clear of giving a direct answer. If you suggest there were improvements to be made this implies you weren't working at 100%. Of course it will depend on your particular circumstances but for a generic answer try this.

“I was very pleased with the level of sales I made. All the senior management were also delighted with the level of sales I achieved especially in the tough economic environment. I

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exceeded my targets and made a solid contribution to the overall profitability of the company.”

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**Q.** How long have you been looking for a new job?

**A.** This is more important if you are currently out of work. If you have been looking for several months then you need to emphasise that you have been looking for the right role. You do not want to rush into the first job that is offered. “Work is very important to me and I am not going to rush such a decision lightly. That is why I have waited for a role such as this one to become available.”

If you have been offered jobs in this time and turned them down then mention it. Effectively this is an endorsement from another employer that you are worth hiring.

If market conditions are tough and there are plenty of candidates then mention this too. What you want to avoid is the interviewer thinking that you have been out of work for months have applied everywhere and been turned down far too often for this to be just a coincidence. No-one wants to hire someone if they are unwanted by every other employer. A long gap is a series weakness which needs to be handled carefully.

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**Q.** What if I said to you your resume was very poor?

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**A.** This is the type of question where the interviewer is looking for a quick thinking answer. Of course your resume isn't poor otherwise you wouldn't have an interview! Push the question back without disagreeing with the interviewer. In this question the interviewer is criticising the layout of the resume not the content. If the experience on it was poor then you would not have an interview!

"I have had several colleagues review my resume and they all offered suggestions which I have accepted. I would therefore be surprised to find it was poor but I always welcome constructive feedback whether it is good or bad."

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**Q.** Have you been to many interviews recently?

**A.** The answer you of course want to avoid is 'Yes, and I have not been considered suitably qualified for any of them'. Ideally you want to be able to say this is the first role you have applied for as it has so much to offer and although there have been other opportunities at other companies this is by far the most appealing for a number of reasons. If you were offered the job and turned it down then this is also like an endorsement on your abilities.

It is important not to give the impression that you have been to a number of interviews and failed. If this is the case then gloss over this. The interviewer will clearly have no knowledge of your interview history unless it is with the same organisation.

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Best thing is to avoid the question by replying in more general terms.

‘I have been looking for interview opportunities for a while as I wish to challenge myself and further my career. This is the first job opportunity I have spotted for some time where I was truly excited at the prospects of securing the position and working within such an organisation.’

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**Q.** We like all our employees to be comfortable with public speaking. Have you done any presentation in the past?

**A.** Public speaking is worse than death in some people’s eyes. However you just have to agree that you are comfortable with it and that you have done presentations before. If they have asked the question then you know they are keen for all employees to have this skill. The underlying thought here is that they are looking for leaders, people who are confident in standing up in front of a group who can command an audience. This question betrays the type of person the interviewer is really looking for.

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**Q.** Do you prefer the regular framework with established processes and procedures of an organisation or are you more adept at the ‘get on with it as best you can?’

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**A.** As with a lot of questions there is no right answer here. It is safe to go down the lines with this answer

“Every organisation needs a contextual framework of processes and procedures which everyone can recognise and understand. It allows for a consistent approach. Although generally speaking these should not be over-ruled there are occasions where a flexible, dynamic and more liberal approach is required in order to achieve targets. A mixture of the two is probably healthy for any organisation and is the way I have worked in my previous roles.”

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**Q.** What was your salary in your last job?

**A.** Don't be tempted to lie they will find out if need be. Ideally the salary will be 10-20% lower than the role you are going for?

If it is lower than this range then you need to add in the benefits of overtime, car, health insurance etc. and refer to the salary as the package. If the salary is too low then the interviewer will feel this indicates you are over playing your experience and position.

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**Q.** What salary are you looking for?

**A.** Crucially don't be tempted to dive in with a figure. Firstly you do not have a job offer. If you say a number that is too low you cannot change your mind later. If it is too high you may just blow

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your chances there and then.

Golden rule is wait to you have a concrete offer, let the employer offer a salary first then negotiate upwards.

Your answer should sidestep the issue.....

‘Well I have an idea but I would rather wait until I had a concrete job offer. Also the whole benefits package will be important not just the salary in isolation.’

If the employer persists bat the question back.....'What would you expect I was worth within your organisation?

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**Q.** What particular skills are you looking to gain from this role?

**A.** This will depend on the type of job. If the job is a manual job or skilled profession then you will be looking for practical experience. If the job is more office based or sales related then the emphasis will be different. Understand what the job description is telling you about the job because there is no point saying you want to learn ‘x’ if it is not possible in this role.

You could use this as an opportunity to dig deeper into the roles and responsibilities that you need to undertake. The interviewer will of course be delighted that you are interested and it gives you time to form an answer. Failing that you can fall back on the old favourites of enhancing your existing personal skill set. You

should have these listed as part of your personal summary statement.

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**Q.** Why have you had so many short term assignments in the past?

**A.** Of course the implication is you either become bored easily staying in one place for too long or get fired! You need to reduce to the risk to the employer of hiring you by ensuring you give a valid reason.

‘The reason I have had so many temporary roles is that I wanted to experience different working practices for different organisations. I believe that the next career move that I make is vitally important to my long term future and I want to make the correct decision. Your organisation fits my profile of what I am looking for in an organisation and the possibilities for career advancement.

I also need to add that I can provide good references from each of these companies even though I was there for a relatively short period of time’

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**Q.** What was your typical day like in your last job?

**A.** Another open question with an easy chance to shine....It was

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always busy, lots of pressure and close deadlines and targets to meet. Often meant long hours and commitment to work endlessly until the job was done etc. Plenty of scope for signing your own praises. It is worth adding that your line manager always recognised the contribution you made and you received bonuses / awards for your efforts.

Anything where you can paint a picture of an enthusiastic, hard-working, dedicated, talented, team player will do your application no harm.

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**Q.** How does this role compare to your current role?

**A.** You don't necessarily know what the current role involves, but you can explain your current role listing the activities, responsibility and the targets that you tried to achieve. Additional information about the departmental structure may help. Importantly you then need to ask the interviewer if this is similar to the role on offer. At this point you might have to start thinking on your feet!

If the 2 roles are not completely similar then get the interviewer to explain the differences. This buys you some valuable thinking time!

If there are differences then you need to address these. Without this the interviewer may think there are some gaps in your experience. Do not move the conversation on until all the potential

differences in the roles have been addressed in a satisfactory way. If you have not done something then show how you have in the past done a similar role. Although no 2 roles will never be identical the generic characteristics of a role should be closely matched. You need to leave no doubt that you can 'do the job well'.

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**Q.** Do you feel your career stagnated in your last job? This is a tricky, negative question which needs to be avoided. Do not start our answer with the word 'No'. You need to be consistent with all the questions as to why you are thinking of moving jobs. This is just another way of phrasing the same question.

**A.** The position was a very rewarding one which allowed me the freedom, responsibility and challenges which were suitable at the time. However if I stay at the same employer I may find the opportunities for advancement in terms of challenges, salary and career may be limited. Also it may be restrictive in the amount of new experience I may gain from staying in the same role.

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**Q.** Why do you want to leave your current job?

**A.** Negative connotation and expectancy that you will say something negative about ex-employer or ex-employee. Resist the temptation and keep the answer upbeat concentrating on the advantages of what the new job would offer. You could mention

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the increased salary but do not dwell on it. Emphasise the other advantages first.

I enjoy my previous job and as I have demonstrated make a solid contribution which is appreciated. However I am looking for more experience, a greater challenge / increased responsibility / more dynamic organisation that this role offers.

Make sure you have a list of reasons for joining this company. You need to reply using one or a combination of the following five replies:

**Challenge:** You need a new career challenge

**Travelling:** The commute to work was taking too long or I was constantly being asked to travel with work

**Career:** I had reached the likely top and there was no room for advancement until someone else above me left.

**Money:** You feel you were not being paid what you were worth (this can be a dangerous reason as it makes you look greedy and selfish even if you are not)

**Security:** The organisation was unstable and my role may have been at risk

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**Q.** How did you deal with difficult employees?

**A.** A common question which relies on you having some concrete answers pre-prepared for the interview. There isn't much point in saying that you didn't have any. Maybe you didn't but it then

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shows you have no experience in this area. So you need to recall a situation where there was conflict, however trivial.

Firstly keep it upbeat. 'Fortunately I didn't have many difficulties we have a great team spirit.'

"On this one occasion I remember there were 2 employees who just didn't get along on the team. I interviewed them both separately to get to the bottom of the issues. Eventually the reason turned out to be personal. I offered one person the opportunity to be transferred to a different department. HR were kept informed all the way. In the end I mediated between them and they both agreed not to let it interfere with their working relationship. 'Always finish with a successful resolution to the problem.

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**Q.** In what way does your previous role prepare you for taking greater levels of responsibility?

**A.** Ideally you want to show a scenario where you have been in the position of assuming the greater responsibility. For example you may have deputised for your boss while they were away. Comment on how things went well and how your boss commented on this. 3rd party endorsements are always good. In this way you are assimilating your position with what might happen and you have already had a taste of the expected level of responsibility.

Complete your summing up by saying you enjoyed the

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responsibility although it was challenging.

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**Q.** What did you not like about your last employer?

**A.** OK, so the interviewer has asked you to say something negative about your employer. You need to turn this round so that it makes it sound like the negative is in fact a positive!

I used to get a bit annoyed when I noticed inefficiencies in the processing workflows and controls. A number of times I made suggestions as to improvements that could be made which would have saved money but the ideas were effectively ignored.

**A.** I always tried my upmost to make sure that all customers were treated fairly and honestly but I noticed a malaise creeping in which meant that some staff didn't always try their best to meet the exacting standards required. I feel this reflected badly on everyone.

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**Q.** What did you think of your last supervisor?

**A.** More of a personal question but again emphasise the positives. How your supervisor delegated responsibility to you. Recognised your achievements and encouraged you. Add in examples of how your supervisor noticed these successes to reinforce the image of someone who achieved success.

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**Q.** What do you dislike about your current supervisor?

**A.** The interviewer is probing for signs of antipathy. Don't fall for the bait. Remember no criticising of other people. Keep it upbeat with some positive example of trust and responsibility.

“I am fortunate, my supervisor and me have a great working relationship. He trusts me fully to deputise when they are away. We have a great one to one relationship which allows me to air my views freely. One of the things I will miss in a new role is the level of trust that currently exists between us.

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**Q.** Would you have liked to have your supervisor's job?

**A.** “Yes, I am fortunate that I have a great supervisor where we work well together. He has let me deputise for him a number of times and I enjoyed the challenge and increased responsibility that came with it.”

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**Q.** What cost savings did you make in your last role?

**A.** This is a vague question with a number of different approaches. Was your role to make costs savings? If it wasn't

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then say so. But you need to make this clear. You cannot however just leave the answer there, it sounds a bit abrupt. Take the chance to shine!

Say you did make cost savings through inefficiencies that you noticed in some of the working practices/processes. Although it wasn't part of your job you took it upon yourself to drive these through and it was recognised by my supervisor or senior manager that this saved time and money (be specific). You do of course need to back this up with examples.

**A.** If your role was to make cost savings then state them explicitly. If they exceeded the targeted savings then state this too. Explain how you made the costs savings and over what period of time these happened. The employer wants to know what is in it for them. By demonstrating these very tangible achievements you are in a much stronger position. Again, you need to have rehearsed this answer and know exactly what to say. If you are not asked this question you need to weave the answer into some part of the interview as it is a great selling point.

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**Q.** What cost saving do you think you could bring to this role?

**A.** This is a tricky question to answer as you have no familiarity with the role. However it is a great opportunity to discuss some of the cost savings you made in your previous role and let the interviewer make the obvious leap of faith. It is also worth adding in any savings in time which effectively is a cost saving.

'I cannot comment on this role because I would need to take a detailed look at the particular process and procedures in place. However in my previous role I was able to save considerable time and money. Here you need to give quantified examples. Use the STAR method of Situation, Task, Action taken and Results. Here is an example.....

'I noticed the vehicles we used in the sales force were costing us an awful lot of money in maintenance costs and were off the road for longer than I thought was reasonable. I spent some time investigating and discovered that one small garage had the contract for the whole vehicle fleet. They clearly could not cope with the work and I believe were over charging.

I took it upon myself to get several tenders for the work. The result is I have introduced a system where we do not use just one garage but several. This keeps the suppliers competitive and the vehicles are turned round much quicker, in fact a 20% reduction in times taken to maintain a vehicle. There has also been a cost saving of 15% in the actual maintenance costs.'

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**Q.** When have you faced a difficult problem and how did you provide a successful resolution to it?

**A.** To answer this you need to have a pre-prepared answer which fits the STAR model. Situation, Task, Action, Result. Demonstrate that you noticed the problem before it became a huge issue and

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pro-actively dealt with it. For example.

Situation: I had a difficult employee who appeared not to want to work on my team.

Task: Confronted employer to find out what the problem was

Action: One to one meeting to find out problem, which was they did not like a work colleague (for whatever reason).

Result: Moved individual to a different team / different desk. I pro-actively resolved their differences.

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**Q.** Without naming names who has been the most difficult employee to work with and what have you learned from it?

**A.** Try to stay upbeat to a very negative question. Employ the 3rd party viewpoint role where the conflict was happening elsewhere. 'I have been fortunate with the colleagues I have worked with and who I have supervised. I have never had any serious falling out with any of them I seem to be able to work well with most people. I have seen situations where there has been conflict and serious disagreement with other colleagues. As a 3rd party outsider it does appear that patience, respect and the understanding of other peoples opinions and values is important to good relations.'

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**Q.** Show examples of how you engaged and worked well in the team environment.

**A.** A blatant opportunity to shine and offer solid examples of how

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you worked well in a team environment. These should be prepared examples as team working is one of the key characteristics that an employee should demonstrate at an interview.

“It was/is a great team atmosphere at organisation x. We all get along well and regularly have team meetings to share ideas and improve the way we work. Here are some examples...”

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**Q.** When was the last time someone criticised your work? This is a similar question but this time the assumption is you're your work is criticised so you have flaws. Don't fall for this obvious trap.

**A.** “I am not aware of any occasions where my work has been criticised. There have been occasions in team meetings where my IDEAS have been criticised or rejected. It is all part of the learning process and coming to the correct decision. I don't take it personally as we always get a positive end result.

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**Q.** (To woman) Are you planning on having children?

**A.** Illegal question. Treat it as such and don't answer it except with a bland rebuttal.

“My career is important to me and I will be committed to this role if I am offered it. Having children is not something I am currently

contemplating.”

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**Q.** What age / religion / sexual orientation are you?

**A.** Illegal question again!.....does this interviewer want to face a lawsuit?

You do not have to answer this, however most people would be comfortable answering these questions. If you choose to answer them be honest and be proud of who you are.

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**Q.** What do you understand by the term customer service?

**A.** Whenever you are in a role where you are dealing with customers the way you handle this relationship is going to be an important selling point in the interview. Customer service is two fold. Firstly respect the customer for who they are. Secondly make sure they go away satisfied that they have had any issues resolved. This question will inevitably lead on to further questions around your involvement with the customers.

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**Q.** Give me an example of a situation where you had to deal with a difficult customer.

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**A.** You should have a whole heap of these types of answers if you have been working in this type of environment. The key thing is to give an example where you solved the problem of the customer to everybody's satisfaction and they went away happy.

For example

"We had a customer who came in the other week saying that his new computer was not working correctly and he was furious at having to come back to the shop to complain. I apologised for the inconvenience and sat him down at a similar machine and replicated his problem.

It turns out he had not read the instructions correctly and was a little embarrassed to say the least. However I tried not to make him feel awkward. I ran through the complete set up and highlighted some areas where he may face difficulties which aren't necessarily clear in the instructions. I gave him my direct phone number in case he had any further difficulties when he got home. He went home completely satisfied and apologised"

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**Q.** Give me an example of where a dissatisfied customer complained and it was your fault.

**A.** Negative question. You need to avoid dwelling on anything negative but in this instance you cannot avoid the inevitable that everyone who deals with customers will make mistakes and need to apologise. Try to keep the example in the 3rd party context eg. someone else made the mistake but you had to sort it out. For

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example: “Recently had a customer come in to complain that we had over charged him for an item. It turns out the bar code reader was issuing the wrong price. I apologised on behalf of the store and of course refunded him the money. In such circumstances I like to go that bit further and gave the customer a money-off voucher for the next time he visited. He went away happy and I have seen him in the store on numerous occasions since”.

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**Q.** What has been your greatest achievement to date?

**A.** This can be harder than it sounds, because unless it really was a great achievement it may come across as being a bit weak. A pre-rehearsed answer is important. However you will have prepared these as examples to demonstrate particular aspects of your work for example when you saved costs, increased sales, reduced headcount without affecting turnover, introduced a leaner process resulting in increased time to market.

The examples need to follow the STAR formula.

S - Situation

T - Task

A – Action

R – Results

S – Costs were running way over budget

T – To reduce costs and still bring the project in on time

A – RE-planned whole project and re-allocated resources

R – Project came in on time and on budget.

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S – New software introduced and no one was trained in it  
T – To train everyone in short period of time  
A – Worked longer hours to train myself. Became super-user and organised training program for all departmental staff with me doing the training  
R – All staff trained and no down time in system processing while moving to utilising new software.

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**Q.** What is your greatest weakness?

**A.** This is such a popular question and can be asked in a number of different ways. Don't say you haven't any as this will be deemed arrogant. However keep the answer away from specific weaknesses that have not already been discussed or offer a weakness that all the candidates are likely to have.

“I do find that with the ever changing technological environment I would like to have a better understanding of this area. I am addressing this by studying 'x', attending course 'y' and subscribing to publication 'z'.....

**A.** I like everything to be perfect when sometimes that level of detail is unnecessary. I use my own time to work late to do this so that the company doesn't suffer.

**A.** It has been known for me to leave unpleasant tasks closer to the deadline than is necessary. I am making a conscious effort to

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deal with unpleasant tasks as soon as they arise. However I have noticed that the additional thinking time has allowed me to make a more informed judgement.

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**Q.** How do you deal with stress?

**A.** “Actually it doesn’t really affect me very much. I enjoy the dynamic atmosphere of the workplace. However there are often stressful situations which I need to deal with and of course they create pressure on time and resources. Firstly I try to avoid stressful situations by making sure I plan my work effectively. I have a detailed plan of activities and resources which enable me to plan my work very well avoiding and constraints or bottlenecks.(demonstrate you are calm in such situations and deal with the stresses methodically and effectively)

On the occasions where stressful situations arise I always try to have a controlled response.

I take this 5 step approach....

- a) What is the problem
- b) What do I need to do
- c) What are my options
- d) What are the consequences of my options
- e) Take action and resolve the problem

For example I recently had an irate customer who had been let down by a colleague. They were a major client. They were out of

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the office and I was tasked with dealing with them. I firstly apologised because their order was late. I then assured them that I would take responsibility for the problem and do everything to ensure the issue was resolved immediately. This calmed them down a lot! Further discussions on what they were missing quickly allowed me to realise that their order could be supplied from existing stock in the warehouse. There was no need for a special order and the customer got their stock the same day..I followed up with the customer the following day to make sure they were completely happy with the outcome. They were and my line manager praised me for the calm way I dealt with the situation. Additionally to relieve any tension I go to the gym on a regular basis which helps keep me in good shape.

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**Q.** How would you deal with tension between two other colleagues in you team?

**A.** If it was affecting the team as a whole I would quietly mention what I was observing to my supervisor. They are in the proper position and level of authority to deal with it.

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**Q.** How do you deal with rejection?

**A.** This is a tricky one. Again the interviewer is probing for weaknesses. It is a fairly open ended unspecific question which allows you to easily trap yourself. Keep the answer generic where

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an idea was rejected and not you or your work. Demonstrate how you receive rejection quite often but that it is all part of the role you have.

“During team meetings we are always banding ideas about and inevitably some of my ideas are discussed and rejected. It is all part of the learning process and coming to the correct decision. I don't take it personally as we always get a positive end result.

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**Q.** What do you expect your starting salary to be?

**A.** This is a difficult question and salary questions should not necessarily be aired at interviews but only after you have received a job offer. However it is a sign that you are being considered seriously.

You may not be completely in the picture as to all the facts and the roles and responsibilities of the job. How many people report to you, are you on callout, how many hours you are expected to work. A good tactic is to ask back what the interviewer has in mind. Then if they say something just agree that this is the correct ball park figure.

If you are put on the spot it is important to give a range for example \$50-\$55,000. This leaves room for negotiation on both sides.

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**Q.** Why are your grades on the low side?

**A.** Turn the negative into a positive. If there is an obvious weakness make sure you have a good explanation which can demonstrate a positive trait.

“Yes, my grades are perhaps lower than other candidates, but I had to fund my own education by working 40 hours a week for 3 years’. So given the circumstances personally I am proud of the grades I achieved.

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**Q.** How do you think your degree will help you in this job?

**A.** If the degree is strictly relevant then no problem. Detail the educational aspects of your degree and how you believe they assimilate. Don't forget you are unlikely to know precisely what role you will be playing in the job so keep the answer high level. If your degree is in an unrelated subject you need to base your answer on the broader advantages of a good education. Talk about how you maybe had to work to get through college the sacrifices you made and the determination to achieve your degree. If it was a particularly outstanding grade then highlight this.

An interview is just as much about your personality as your skills and experience. Clearly the interviewer has accepted the degree is in a non-relevant area but is looking for your attributes as a

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person to shine.

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**Q.** I see you have a degree do you feel over qualified and do you think you will fit in?

**A.** The implication is that you will become bored and leave quickly when you see something better. Take it as a complement.

“I applied for this position because I believe it will be a great opportunity for me to gain good experience and I see myself making a strong contribution to the organisation. The fact that I appear to be over qualified will mean I can bring a high level of knowledge and aptitude to apply to the job. I wont get bored and be looking for a better position. I see this role as a good fit for my skills and ambitions.

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**Q.** Do you believe the managerial role you held in the air force will transfer well to the civilian world?

**A.** The interviewer is looking to see if you can transfer seamlessly and adapt to the new environment. The fact that you have an interview means they think you should be able to.

List your skills and attributes and closely match these to those required in the job description. The list will include communication, planning, budgeting, team building. The most

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important part is giving examples using the Situation, Task, Action, Results formula and relate these results to how they would be similar to the issues you would have in a civilian organisation. Just because you have come from a different environment does not necessarily mean that you are at a disadvantage. Some skills that team building and management may be more honed than if you purely worked in civilian organisations. Point this out.

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**Q.** What is your ideal assignment?

**A.** “There are a number of possibilities but I always relish a challenge so one where I could stretch myself and my abilities to their full extent.”

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**Q.** Have you ever been fired?

**A.** Safest just to deny this. It is a very pointed question which requires a firm rebuttal. Rarely does anyone ever get fired. They may be asked to leave in which case you do.

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**Q.** Have you ever resigned from a position?

**A.** You are unlikely to be asked this question. If you are make sure it was for a very good reason and you can explain how it came about. You do not want to give the impression that you do

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such things lightly.

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**Q.** Why have you had so many different roles?

**A.** It can be difficult to convince someone that you have not got itchy feet or you just don't fit in. You need to split your answer down so that you cover each job and offer an explanation for each one and why you moved. This is where suitable preparation comes in. If your career path has had many roles you will almost certainly be asked this question.

You obviously had genuine reasons for leaving each job. If these do not sound very professional or indicate poor traits of commitment then you need to be careful about what you say.

There are a number of reasons you could use they broadly relate to the replies in the previous question. The important thing is to close your answer by convincing the interviewer that this role is not just another stepping stone to somewhere better.

'I want to settle down and start a family'

'This organisation will suit my needs for advancement and career progression'

'This is the role I have been striving to achieve'

Whatever you say make it sound natural and believable!

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**Q.** Why are you not earning more given your age and experience?

This is either a compliment or alternatively questioning whether you really have the stated skills and ability you say you have.

**A.** To date money has not always been the most important aspect of my job. I really enjoy what I do because I am constantly challenged and enjoy the sense of achievement. Part of the reason for applying for this role is to address the money issue as I agree with you that I am worth a lot more. It is only recently that I have become aware of my actual worth in the marketplace. (You could then try to twist the question back to the interviewer) What do you think I should be earning given my skills and experience?

The interviewer is hardly likely to blurt out a figure but they must think you are worth more than you are currently being paid.

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**Q.** What are the outstanding qualities that you can bring to this job?

**A.** This is where your 3-4 sentence personal statement summary comes to your rescue. It should also be used as your personal profile on your resume.

You can recite this and in addition try to pick an example which can demonstrate your personal skills and how they would be adapted to your role. For example in a customer facing

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organisation. 'I have often needed to deal with difficult or upset customers who have been let down. My patience and understanding in dealing with such matters has been commented on by my supervisor as exemplary.'

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