

Tricky interview questions

Why do you want to work for us? And other tricky interview questions. So, you've turned up for your interview all enthusiastic, well-groomed and prepared – until, that is, they ask you one of those awkward 'tricky' interview questions. You know the sort: 'tell me what you do', 'why do you want to work for us', 'what do you know about XYZ', 'what can you bring to our company that the other candidates can't', 'where do you see yourself in five years', 'why are you leaving your company', 'what are your strengths and weaknesses' and so on (we shall discount those banal questions such as 'what kind of animal are you?'). All guaranteed to make you sweat!

So how do you answer these questions? Obviously, you need to be honest, open and enthusiastic with your answer, rather than contrite, contrived and automated (I am sure most interviewers have heard it all before!). But what will make you stand out and help the interviewer to make their decision in your favour?

The 'tell me what you do' question is one of the hardest since where do you start? You need to analyse the reason behind the question (is it just to get you talking, to start the conversation, or a great way to find out if your skills and experience match their needs?). In this situation many candidates freeze, become tongue tied and mumble their job title and a couple of sentences on what they do for their company and then stop and look at the interviewer for guidance on what to say next. Not a good start you may think.

You might also be asked 'open' questions which are designed to uncover your behavioural traits in the workplace and your personality type: these may include such questions as 'how do you deliver unpopular decisions to your team' or 'how do you handle difficult customers'. If you are not prepared these can be a nightmare to answer.

Whatever questions you are faced with, if you have done your research on the company and on the interviewer you should not get phased by any of these questions. You can check the interviewer's LinkedIn profile and any articles/news items they appear in across the web. Make sure you read the job profile thoroughly and take a good look at yourself since everyone has weaknesses and areas that they need more training in. A trawl of the internet will bring up many pages of example interview questions and how to answer them, although you should make sure it is your answer and not someone else's – imagine the embarrassment if the other candidate had read the same web page!

After you leave the meeting write down any questions that you found difficult and then practice your answer for next time.

