



# Interview Questions and Answers they are looking for

## Background and Skills

### **Tell me about yourself.**

This is your Introductory Positioning Statement. This is also an opportunity to build rapport and give the interviewer a frame of reference. Focus on what you know this employer needs, and select the most relevant material you have. Be sure this is concise (no more than two minutes). Another thing to note: tie this to your personal brand or to the value you bring and use present tense (I am, I do, etc.). Avoid giving just a chronology of the jobs you've held in past 10 years.

### **Why should we hire you?**

Emphasize your unique qualities and value proposition, and relate them to the position whenever possible. Be prepared to back them up with accomplishments and situations where you have utilized these skills. This is where your research comes into play (Google, company website, Glassdoor, and/or OneSource) so you can speak knowledgeably about the organization.

### **How would you describe your work style?**

Your research may have given you a sense of the work style the company believes in. Is the company highly collaborative, directive, or more authoritarian in its approach? If you don't know the company's style, keep your answer situational and refer to examples from your accomplishments that demonstrate your style. If your work style differs significantly from the organization's, it probably won't be a fit for you. Like many other questions, this one can be turned around: What kind of work styles are predominant in this organization?

### **What do you consider the single most important idea you contributed in your most recent position?**

Be prepared with one to three specific accomplishments. Identify any transferable skills and pick the accomplishment that best matches the challenges you expect to face in the new role. Read the job description for clues as to what they are looking for, e.g., innovative ideas, improved processes, or bottom-line results.

### **Give me an example of a difficult decision you've made in the last 2 years and how did you come to that decision?**

Think about any accomplishments that may have been challenging to get to, and draft your story using SOAR. This is an opportunity to showcase your conflict management and problem-solving skills. In selecting material, pick the items most relevant to the needs of the employer who asked the question.

## **What was the last project you headed up, and what was its outcome?**

Prepare to give detail on the last project you led. While you may not have been responsible for the whole project, you may have held led certain aspects of it. If you've never led a project, modify the question by substituting "headed up" or "contributed to." Use the SOAR framework to enhance your response.

When describing the Situation, talk about why the project was started and why it was important to the organization. When describing the Obstacle, share what challenges you faced in terms of timelines, resources, and budget. As you move into describing the Actions you took on the project, be sure to give specifics on three to five actions (both independently and as part of the team). Conclude with the Results of your actions and how they impacted the obstacles and the overall situation. Try to use an example that is relevant to the role you are interviewing for.

## **Goals and Objectives**

### **What is your ideal job?**

To prepare for this question, think about what makes you happy and unhappy in the workplace. Emphasize the positives and de-emphasize the negatives; however, a clear understanding of these will help you answer the question. Example: If you're a results-oriented person you may need a fast-paced, action-oriented role and organization. Handling details may be your strength, so a position where you can use this skill may be important to you and the employer. Again, pick the items most relevant to the needs of the employer and the position. Be prepared to talk about examples of the type of work that makes up your ideal job using the SOAR framework.

### **Where would you like to be in your career 3 years from now?**

The interviewer is usually looking to see if your aspirations fit the culture of the organization. This question can also be a way of gauging your level of ambition. If possible, suggest career paths that you know are realistic and reasonable for the organization. You can also turn this question around, asking your interviewer: what kind of career growth is possible? What is the typical career path for someone who has the skills and strengths we've discussed?

### **Tell me about how you set your career goals in your last job and what was the outcome?**

Your career goals can be very personal and/or may be influenced by the organization you're working in. If your career goals were set for you by your former company or leadership, communicate that and answer specifically why that excited you, and why your former leader saw you in that career progression. If you set personal career goals, communicate those goals and the motivation behind the drive to accomplish them. Be sure and keep your examples relevant to the role you're interviewing for. For example, if you're interviewing for a business analyst, share goals and aspirations that demonstrate this is your chosen career path. Never disclose a career goal that does NOT align with the organization or role.

**Describe the work environment that would allow you to thrive in your next opportunity.**

The major reason for this question is for you easily convey your motivators. Companies are looking for individuals who are aware of how and where they do their best work. Through this awareness, they are able to make the best employment decision for themselves and the company. Their fear here is that you will accept the position at hand only as a stopgap measure, and will leave as soon as you find something better.

**Describe a career goal you didn't meet. What happened and how did you handle it?**

Clearly identify the goal. Emphasize the steps you took to create success, the obstacles that you had to overcome, and how you attempted to achieve the intended goal. Emphasize what you learned and how your behavior is different as a result of the experience.

**What has been your most significant career achievement?**

Be prepared to define success for yourself and then respond with details. Try to choose achievements that relate to the organization's needs and values. Think about why this is your most significant career achievement. Your response to this single question can help or hinder your candidacy for a role. Professionally trained interviewers have been known to take 10 to 15 minutes around this question by repeatedly asking "why" to your responses.

## **Education, Training, and Professional Development**

**What are you looking for in terms of career development?**

This question provides insight into how forward thinking and committed you are to your profession. Further, it reveals how informed and strategic you are in managing your career. Be prepared to share the best career option you're pursuing. For example, do you aspire to grow in your role/profession (enrichment), make a lateral move (lateral), or move up (vertical)? Researching the company can help with this one. If the company is fast-growing, they may be looking for candidates who want to grow with the organization. If the company is slow-growing, then longevity in each position may be valued.

**How do you stay on top of trends and developments in your field?**

This is an opportunity for you to showcase how you stay relevant and effective with changing business climates. Share how you stay on top of trends and developments in field. Include researching current topics, reading blogs, following thought leaders on social media, attending continuing education webinars and seminars, attending industry conferences and webinars, and watching TedTalks on YouTube.

Also discuss how you build networking relationships through forums, social media, and being active in your industry associations. Consuming new information is helpful, what may be most valuable is building on it through participation.

**If I were to ask a former colleague to recommend additional training or professional development for you, what would he or she suggest?**

The interviewer is looking for how you were perceived by your co-workers and what development needs were apparent. A safe way to answer is to note possible development areas you are interested in that relate to the position. Choose one or two areas you'd like to learn more about or develop deeper expertise in that aligns with the employer's needs. This conveys value and benefit to the future employer and avoids raising any concerns about your capability to handle this role.

**What was the most enjoyable or valuable course you've taken, or business-related book you've read in the last two years? Why?**

Identify a course or book related to the skills needed in the position. Be sure it's recent. The interviewer is trying to see if you are staying current on development and trends in the industry. Be prepared to talk about how you have used this knowledge.

**Tell me about a time when you used your education or training to solve a problem.**

Relate specifically to an education/training that would benefit you in the position you are applying for. Be prepared to include details by applying SOAR.

**Give me an example of something that was difficult for you to learn, and how you handled it.**

Emphasize how you have taken the challenge of learning something difficult and the steps you used to achieve the knowledge. The interviewer is looking for how you analyzed the situation, developed a plan, and the resources you used to achieve the learning. This is more about problem solving and resource utilization than the acquisition of knowledge.

## **Strength, Weakness and Potential Problems**

**What are your strengths?**

This is an opportunity to match your skills and accomplishments to the requirements of the job.

To elevate the credibility of your answer, communicate in a second voice, e.g., "I have been told my strengths are ..." or "Others describe my strengths as ..."

Demonstrate the strength by adding a SOAR story, e.g., "My prior managers would say that project management is a key strength. Last year I consistently had 17 projects going at one time with zero missed deadlines."

**What feedback do you consistently receive from peers, colleagues, or managers?**

This helps measure your team effectiveness and your relationships with the people you work with. Think about what would be relevant to the person interviewing you; most often they want to know if you will be a good fit within the existing team. Share answers that would help them see you working effectively in their organization.

Describe relevant themes from many sources, including performance reviews.

**Describe a time when you had a dispute with a supervisor/colleague and how it was resolved.**

This is an opportunity to showcase your conflict resolution skills. Beware of criticizing anyone.

**Give me an example of a time when your biggest weakness at work kept you from reaching an important objective.**

The question of weakness is common. Avoid the trap of saying you don't have any weaknesses. Instead, substitute the word weakness with areas of opportunity. In the workplace, it's relevant to focus on areas in which you'd like to improve or where you'd like to gain greater expertise and knowledge. Share an area you targeted for development and explain what you did to address it. If you have successfully applied this new knowledge, use the SOAR framework to share an example.

**Individuals vary in their ability to use power to influence others, or to exercise a strong point of view. Give me a specific example of a time when you used power and it backfired.**

Interviewers are likely looking for examples of how you recovered from a mistake. Did you own it? What impact did it have on relationships, your ability to influence others, and business results?

Come across as someone with leadership ability, and someone who is confident in sharing their point of view, but humble enough to admit when it didn't work. Use an example that is relevant to the current position and shows how you used your learning to be even more influential with the team.

**Tell me about one of the toughest teams/groups you've worked with. What made it difficult and how did you handle the situation?**

Use this to communicate your power and influence on a team. Don't focus on the team's behavior other than through a brief explanation to frame the rest of your answer. Focus on the actions you took to engage the team and get the work done. Finish by talking about the results, and how the team is better because of your influence. Stay away from answers like, "I told the boss," or "I just did it myself," as those answers imply that you don't take the initiative to work with the team to resolve issues.

## Salary and Sensitive Issues

**What was your salary in your last job and what are you looking for in your next job?**

Use one of the following approaches:

Defer by letting the interviewer know that you need more information about the position and their expectations of you in the role before you can reply. For example, "While money is important to me, I first need to know more about this role to understand its scope and expectations."

Inquire to turn the question back to the interviewer. You could say something like, “What is the range you’ve budgeted?”

Reveal your preferred salary range only after doing research that informs you of the market rate and range for this role. You can reply by telling them your most recent salary if it reflects the salary desired or indicate range you desire based on the findings of your research. For example, “My research uncovered the market rate for this position would be \$90–100K; if an offer was extended in that range, I’m sure we could come to an agreement.”

### **You are overqualified for this position. Why would you be interested?**

Think about the motivation behind this question. Most often, interviewers think you’ll take this job and leave as soon as you find something more suitable for you, or they may think you’re too expensive for the role’s salary range. Ask the interviewer a direct, concise question to reveal their concern about hiring you. For example, you may say, “What, specifically, is it about my background that makes you say that?” Then you need to provide credible reassurance.

It’s also possible that they have a misunderstanding of your past compensation or responsibilities. If so, get them back on track. The key here is to show that you’re a great match for the job and how you can hit the ground running and make an impact right away. If you are truly overqualified for the job, explain what motivated you to apply, so they can hear the excitement you have for the job regardless of the added skills you might have.

### **Why did you leave your last employer?**

This is an opportunity to use your exit statement. This question is usually asked to determine whether you have some problems or flaws that led to your leaving your last position. You need to reassure your interviewer that there are no such problems. Your confidence and tone are nearly as important as your words. This is a predictable question so your answer should be well thought out and thoroughly rehearsed. If your departure was performance or personality related, you need to rehearse your response and make sure your references will support your explanation.

### **Tell me about a time when your work was criticized.**

Present an answer that shows you understand that everyone’s work is criticized from time to time. Explain that you view criticism as a form of feedback that you use it as an opportunity to improve. Use the SOAR format to demonstrate this to the interviewer.

### **Tell me about a time when you had to give someone difficult feedback. What was the outcome?**

This is an opportunity to talk about how you deal with conflict and move things forward with your team. Demonstrate how you prepared for the conversation rather than avoided it, and how you were able to use feedback techniques that engaged the team member rather than angered them. Finish with the result of the feedback session to ensure you answered the question asked.

## **What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?**

Again, this is an opportunity to showcase how you are able to recover from mistakes. Use the SOAR format to briefly frame the story, then move quickly to the actions you took, and finally the results of the learning. Acknowledge that everyone makes mistakes and it's the lessons that make you better. You can prepare this answer ahead of time so choose a scenario that is relevant for the position.

## **Supervisory/Managerial**

### **How would you describe your management style?**

It is a predictable question, and people seeking management roles should be prepared to answer it. As with most questions, a carefully thought out, honest answer is the best approach. Research the company culture. If your management or leadership style differs significantly from the organization's, it's probably not a fit. Like many other questions, this one can be turned around: What kind of leadership and management styles are most prevalent in this organization? What is top management's style?

### **How would your former colleagues describe your management style?**

This is another chance to showcase your leadership style. Don't say, "I don't know what they would say," or "I would hope they'd say ...". Be confident in your answer and use terms that convince the interviewer that you've actually been described that way, such as, "They've said I am ..." or "They frequently tell me I'm ...". Do some research ahead of time and ask others how they experience you as a leader. Confirm with them how you perceive your leadership style so you're not saying one thing in an interview and then showing up the first day as someone else.

### **Tell me about a time that someone on your team was underperforming. How did you handle it and what was the outcome?**

Building a high-performing team is critical in leadership roles. This question tests your ability to respond when someone isn't meeting expectations. You can have several answers to this question as there may be several reasons why someone might be underperforming. Explain each situation with confidence, even if you chose to transfer or move someone out of the organization. Focus on the process you used, including your thought process, and always finish with the result of your action.

### **Give me an example of what you have done to establish credibility quickly with a new team.**

It's important that a leader earn credibility with their team quickly as they enter a new organization. Describe a situation in the past when you were successful in doing this. Offer your strategy for building credibility when you get this job, so they can visualize you onboarding quickly at their organization.

**What are you doing to ensure that you continue to grow and develop as a leader?**

When asked these questions, most often, the interviewer is looking for someone who can continually develop in the role and grow the business. Showcase how you are a lifelong learner, curious about how to continually grow personally and how you can continuously grow the business. Don't focus on the specific learning but rather the mindset you have around continuous improvement and growth. Demonstrate this with a story about how you have continually developed in your career in the past.

**Tell me about a time when you had to build support for a difficult project or idea, and how you did it.**

Often times you'll need to get projects pushed through people who do not have a direct reporting relationship to you. The interviewer is usually looking for how strong your influencing skills are. Choose a relevant example for the job, use the SOAR format when describing the situation, the actions you took, and showcase the results.