

9 Common Interview Questions and Tips to Respond

As much as some of these questions seem cliché or outdated, you would be surprised how often they are still used!

Here are 9 of the most common interview questions in 2018/19 and our best tips for responding.

1. Tell us about yourself

This is not the time to launch into your passion for breeding cocker spaniels, (unless you are applying for a role that requires skills in breeding cocker spaniels!).

Rather, this is where you tell them about your working career history, your aspirations and what has led you to apply for this role.

2. What interests you about this role?

Please don't say the pay or the fact you live close by.

Do say something like: the opportunity to learn further skills or the alignment with your current skills match and how you believe you can contribute to the business or your passion for the industry or how you want to work in a role that makes a positive difference etc.

3. What can you tell us about the company?

Before any interview, make sure you research the company beforehand, spending time on their website and Facebook pages! Apart from getting to know whether the company is a good fit for you, when they ask you this question you can then confidently talk about the services, mention some achievements, talk about their mission and values.

4. Why should we hire you?

Here is where people can get a bit tongue-tied. It's hard to talk about how great you are, well, for most people it is. You can answer this without sounding like a total 'git'. Show passion, they want to see that you really want the role. Mention your skills and how quickly you will be able to contribute. If you have a learning curve in the role to get through first (eg traineeship or apprenticeship or it is a new role for you), talk about your willingness to learn, your passion and bring up examples of loyalty and dependability.

5. Describe a difficult challenge in the workplace and how you overcame this.

The best method for answering this question is the STAR method (Situation, Task, Action, Result).

The STAR method uses behavioural interviewing techniques and requires you to answer in a particular way that starts with a situation and ends with your successful result. For example, say you were asked how you overcame a challenge in the workplace, (or a similar question):

- 'As Assistant Manager, I was made aware of regular customer feedback that they were not happy with the waiting times at the front counter'. That is the Situation.
- 'It was clear something had to be done to reduce waiting times'. This is the Task.
- 'I did a data study on our busy times and increased staff assistance in these times. As well, we put interesting facts signage up and had some best-selling merchandise near the counter to capture their interest while waiting'. The Action.
- 'In a period of just three months, this increased our repeat customer visits by 50% as well as increased sales profits by 15% due to increased impulse sales on merchandise near the counters'. The Result.

6. What is your greatest strength?

This is a great opportunity to sell yourself again so make sure you relate this to the role. For example, if the role requires data entry, mention your attention to detail and accuracy. If it requires dependability, mention your reliability, for instance, in the whole three years in my past employ, I had a 100% shift attendance record. If it is a customer service role, mention your ability to remain calm under pressure.

7. What is your greatest weakness?

Whatever you say, it is never going to sound great but don't worry, the question is an onion question (ie many layers) and is really asked to see how you react under pressure and how well you know yourself, your shortcomings and how you are working to improve these. An example of this is 'I can sometimes come across as blunt and short in my answers to people, especially when I am busy or nervous. This can be misinterpreted as unfriendly but over the years I have been working on my behaviour and I have greatly improved by pausing before response and actively listening". They want to see that you are someone who is always improving upon yourself.

8. What has been your greatest accomplishment?

Keep to an effort/result answer here as well. The STAR method could be used in your approach. Make sure it is your greatest accomplishment, so something that made a major positive contribution. For instance, you could have led a project team to integrate change in your workplace human resourcing systems and that has reduced staff turnover by 30%. Or a marketing management role you once had implemented a strategy that increased revenue by 25%. It can be something you contributed to the community like volunteering or fundraising, or you trained for six months before entering and completing a major marathon. Here they want to know a little bit about you and what you consider success to look like.

9. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Whatever you do, don't say that you want to be CEO or be in the hiring manager's shoes in five years. Do however, outline your career goals and the growth you can see occurring by being with the company in five years' time. For example, in five years' time, I can see myself as a knowledgeable and valuable, core team member with your company, making major contributions to your company growth.

Get your head around these questions and you will be prepared for anything at your next interview!