

# Interview Preparation



There are three steps to good interview preparation. One is to develop your C.A.R. stories as described below. Step two involves practice. Have a friend or family member ask you a sample of the questions listed below. Even better, have someone videotape your answers to make sure you sound confident and appear relaxed. Finally, before you leave for the interview, familiarize yourself with our list of do's and don'ts. It's easy to forget the most obvious when we are under stress!

## C.A.R. Stories

You will be better prepared for your interview if you develop mini-stories about your accomplishments. This will help you answer interviewer questions by providing examples and make it easier to remember your accomplishments under stressful situations. Begin by describing an accomplishment and the skills that were used in that situation. See if you can break it down into a 5 or 6 sentence "story" describing the challenge, action, and result.

### C. **Challenge** or problem that you encountered.

- What needed to be done?
- Where did you start?
- Describe your specific assignments, responsibilities or duties.
- Describe the situation, project, or task.
- Emphasize the non-routine challenging problems.
- How and why did the situation arise?
- Did you notice or discover it yourself?
- Did you suggest or initiate the action?

### A. **Action** that you took to resolve the problem or situation.

- What did you do?
- How did you proceed?
- Describe your goals, plans, and procedures.
- Emphasize your creative and innovative approach.
- Describe what you actually did and how you did it.
- Emphasize what others did under your supervision.
- Describe the difficulties that you encountered and overcame.

### R. **Result** that was achieved for you or the company. Be specific and use measurable examples whenever possible.

- How well did you do it?
- What did you accomplish?
- State how well you carried out your responsibilities.
- Describe your contributions and achievements.
- Quantify your results and specify them in concrete language.
- Describe how completely your plans were realized.
- Emphasize who (Company? Department? Boss? Other?) benefited.
- Exactly how did they benefit and how much did they benefit?

## Interview Questions

Many of the questions asked by employers are designed to determine “chemistry” or “fit”. You can demonstrate these to an employer by answering with examples and behaviors through your C.A.R. stories, as described above. You also need to be prepared to answer specific technical questions about your areas of expertise. The information below will help you understand the different types of questions you may be asked.

## Positive/Negative and Neutral Questions

Listen carefully to whether a question will prompt an automatic positive or negative response. Turn the negative and neutral questions into positive example. Give specific, positive examples describing your experiences and attributes. Remember: Challenge, Action, Result.

### Positive Questions

- What are your strengths?
- Why should we hire you?
- What can you contribute?
- What are your most significant accomplishments?
- Why do you think you are qualified for this position?
- Why have you been successful?
- Tell me about the things you enjoy.
- Describe the ideal position to you.
- Tell me about the situation in which you felt very effective on the job.
- In what type of business environment do you function best?

### Negative Questions

- What are your weaknesses?
- Tell me about a work situation where you felt ineffective.
- What didn't you like about your last position (boss) (company)?
- What is the biggest mistake you have made in your career?
- Tell me how you have handled a difficult peer (boss) (subordinate).
- What limitations have you had identified in yourself as a manager?
- What criticisms have supervisors had about your work style?
- What type of business environment makes it most difficult for you to function?
- Why did you leave your last position?  
(Be brief, consistent, and stick to a pre-determined, positive reason for leaving statement.)

### Neutral Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What will references (*former bosses*) (*former colleagues*) say about you?  
(*Stress the positive; do not volunteer the negative; use their actual words where possible.*)
- How do you communicate with (*bosses*) (*peers*) (*subordinates*)?
- How did you spend time on your last job?
- How do you handle pressure?

What are your salary requirements and expectations?  
*(Give range, not a specific figure. Leave room to negotiate after the position is offered. Make clear that salary is not all that is important.)*

What is your management style? *(Avoid buzzwords; give examples.)*

What qualities do you look for in people you hire?

Why are you interested in this position?

What is important for me to know about you?

What is the key thing you have learned in your management career?

How do you set priorities?

How do you and your family feel about relocation?

What do you want to be doing in five years?  
*(Remember, you have to get this position and do it well before you move up.)*

## Questions You Ask

An interview is the time to learn more about the company's philosophy, different aspects of the job for which you are applying, and what the company requires of its employees. These questions are as important as the ones asked of you.

### Company:

What is its mission? Vision?

What future plans does the company have?

What are the challenges the company is facing?

What is the culture like? What gets rewarded? What are the values?

How would you describe the culture or business environment of this *(department (organization))*?

### Job:

Is this a new/existing/revised job? If so, why was it created?

Within the areas of responsibility, what are the two or three most significant things you would want me to accomplish?

Where does this position fit within the company's structure?

What level is this position?

Can you give me more detail about the position's responsibilities?

Who does this position interact with?

What results are expected?

What is the percentage of time spent on different activities?

Is there opportunity for growth and advancement? If so, what other career opportunities might be open to me here?

What are the goals for the department/job?

What are the major challenges in this position (for this organization)?

### Supervisor/Manager:

How would your employees characterize your management style?

What are your pet peeves?

Do you have special concerns about this job? Your department? The company?

Where would you like this *(department) (organization)* to be in five years?

Tell me a little about your background.  
How would you describe your (*the boss'*) management style (*communication with subordinates*)?  
How will my performance be evaluated?

### Co-workers:

Why are you going to the outside to fill this position?  
How will co-workers feel about an outsider?  
How do co-workers work together?  
Are there particular attributes you seek from members of you management team?

## Questions NOT to Ask

Never ask personal questions of your interviewer. Examples might include how long they have been with the company, how they got their job, or what they think of the firm. These questions are important to you, however, the first interview is not the time to get the answers. This information will be supplied when the time is right. For example, don't ask about company retirement plans, vacations, bonuses, and holidays until you have received or are in the process of negotiating an offer.

## Questions You NEVER Ask

Never ask the interviewers opinion of a former employee. And, never discuss politics or religion, unless the position is of a political or religious nature or it involves race relations.

## Dress for Success

- Look professional
- Wear clean, proper-fitting clothes
- Style hair neatly
- Clean and polish shoes
- Wear a watch
- Limit jewelry

## What to Bring

- Extra copies of your resume
- A nice pen and note pad
- Prepared questions that you would like answered
- References
- A positive attitude

# Interview Tips

First impressions are very important. A review of the following simple do's and don'ts may be helpful. They are all obvious, but do not underestimate their importance.

- DO get clear directions to the exact location.
  - DO smile frequently.
  - DO answer questions honestly and without hesitation.
  - DO be confident.
  - DO talk in terms of the employer and what you can do for them.
  - DO be sincere.
  - DO be free from breath and body odors.
  - DO be about 10 minutes early for the interview.
  - DO maintain good eye contact.
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- *DON'T* carry a large handbag or heavy briefcase.
  - *DON'T* take a seat unless offered one.
  - *DON'T* wear clothes that are soiled and baggy.
  - *DON'T* fidget/chew gum.
  - *DON'T* contradict yourself.
  - *DON'T* wear a flashy tie or clashing colors.
  - *DON'T* falsify information.
  - *DON'T* get too friendly. Keep it formal and relaxed.

