

Step 15:

Answering Questions

An interview is a conversation and you want to speak between 60 to 70% of the time. Your goal is to demonstrate your ability to solve their challenge, and that your personality traits will fit into their organization's culture. To do that, you need to listen, make sure you understand what they are asking, and address their questions rather than using them as a jumping off point to brag off topic.

Along the way, if they tell you something about themselves, the job, or the company, takes notes. It shows that you are engaged and taking the opportunity seriously.

Most Common Questions to Expect

So... tell me about yourself?

If they ask you to tell them about yourself, they don't want your life story, and they don't want to know about your hobbies or your pets. They want you to provide a broad and concise overview of your professional experience before they start to get into specifics.

Your answer should be about one minute and it should summarize where you are in your career based on an extended version of your WIFM Commercial Script.

I got into accounting because it allows me to draw on my strong attention to detail and my love for precision. My first job in high school was in my parents' shop. Their accounting system was a shoe box of receipts, but I found I really loved solving the puzzle and making the pieces fit. I studied accounting in school where I got a 4.0, which allowed me to secure an internship at International Widgets, a large multinational. That led to a position as an accounting clerk where my boss, Jill, the head of Accounts Receivable nicknamed me The Laser because of how quickly I was able to spot any errors. For instance, I found \$338,000 that had been improperly allocated, which saved the company \$5,397 in fees. Three years later, I still get a thrill every time my accounts balance, and my accounts always balance, so I really love what I do. I'm especially excited about your opportunity because it sounds like you really need somebody with great attention to detail like me.

Once you have your answer, practice saying it until it sounds natural and you can quickly respond in a fluid way. Don't try to wing it!

Activity Alert!

Practice Your Answers





What is your greatest weakness?

If they ask you about your biggest weakness, they aren't checking to see if you can list a weakness that is really a strength like "I'm a perfectionist." They want to understand how self-aware you are and that you actively take steps to self-correct problems. For instance:

I have a tendency to get too focused on the task I'm working on to the exclusion of other tasks I need to accomplish. I find that by using a combination of To Do lists and effective prioritizing I'm able to get everything done and be very productive.

Why should I hire you?

The answer is two-fold; making a contribution worth paying for and proving you would love working for them. Remember your goal is to position yourself as a solution worth paying for. Go back and recite the key job match. Make your response quantifiable and be tangible. The second half of your answer should be to confirm culture fit. They want to hire someone that likes them, would enjoy doing the job, and has something in common with their culture. Tell them why you would LOVE working for them and doing the job! Compliments go a long way.

While at my last employer, I was able to save them over \$20,000 a year by implementing an inventory checklist. I feel confident that by bringing these types of ideas and enthusiasm to your company, I will be able to add to the success of your organization. Additionally, I have been very impressed with your strong team leadership and high expectations, and I would enjoy the opportunity to work hard for someone like you.

Why did you leave your last job?

Questionable departures and gaps in employment can lead to negative misconceptions by some employers and recruiters. Whatever the reasons, be confident and optimistic as you answer. Perfect a 30-second elevator speech highlighting your positive outlook and productivity in between. Don't apologize, and don't dwell. Be careful not to leave your answer at "I was not being challenged" or "I am looking for more challenging work" as it could mean you will leave your next job too quickly. Instead, be sure to bring it back around to why you're a great fit for the current job you're interviewing for.

Explain the gap with a smile and change the subject immediately back to the interview by asking a question. The specific question is not the point, but rather, asking a question redirects the focus of the interviewer. For example:

Termination:
There were some differences of opinion between me and my boss and I was let go. I accept responsibility for my part in not resolving them and I learned a lot from that experience. I still respect my past employer and I am ready to move on to an opportunity where I can help _____. What is your first focus for the position you have?

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Why did you leave your last job? (continued)

Resignation:

I knew that I was ready for a change, but I didn't want to take my focus off the job if I were going to keep working there. So I did what I believe was the right thing and left the job, to allow them to get someone who was in it for the long haul and to allow myself some time to ponder my next steps. What are some of the departments best team attributes?

Gap between jobs:

Well, my time away from traditional work has brought even more value to future positions for me as you can see. I understand this position needs someone to hit the ground running. What is the most immediate challenge I would be able to focus on and solve in the first few months?

What salary are you seeking?

Employers ask for salary information to decide how much they need to offer to get you to accept the job offer. By providing salary information to a potential employer upfront, you could limit your ability to negotiate a salary offer in line with your current contribution level. The ideal approach to the salary question is to avoid it. But you have to do it in a way that will not upset the hiring manager. At the same time, if you handle it correctly, an employer trying to recruit you will not want to press the issue.

I've done some homework and have a general market range in mind for this position but I understand that you may have other internal factors to consider. What can you tell me about the compensation you are offering for this position?

If they push for a figure

If the employer asks again, please note that delaying could be viewed as playing games or far above their approachable salary range.

From the research that I have done it appears that a position as you have described it would typically pay in the range of \$60-70,000 in this geographic area. Is that the range you had in mind?

If you have been sent to the interview by an AppleOne Hiring Advisor

AppleOne has asked me to allow them to address any questions related to salary. I can tell you that they know my range and what I am looking for, and I know that they would not have arranged this interview if there were any concerns about that.