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Answering conventional, exasperating interview questions

Whether you have to manage conventional or unconventional questions during an interview, never underestimate the importance of preparation. Do your homework. The more knowledge you have about the skills employers are looking for, as well as insight regarding the position and the company, the more confident you'll be during your interaction with the interviewer.

While there is no way of predicting exactly what you will be asked, in addition to the four conventional questions I'll guide you through here, make sure you research, review and prepare for the multitude of questions that are typical and expected for the job opportunities you are seeking.

1. Why should we hire you? This is the bottom line in any interview. With this question, it's the time to be passionate; the time to sell yourself; and the time to talk about why this job, why this company, why you. Every question you answer during an interview should contribute to helping the hiring manager grasp why you're the ideal fit for the position. So, know the aspects of the job posting/description for which you're interviewing from beginning to end, as well as all you can discover about the company. In responding, focus on your knowledge, skills, abilities, experience and accomplishments that will bring value to the position and to the

team, along with why and how you can be part of helping the company achieve its organizational goals.

2. Where do you see yourself in five years? When hiring managers ask you this question, they basically want to know how the job for which you are interviewing fits into your long-term career goals, how realistic your career expectations are, how committed you are going to be and whether you will be quitting in a year or two. When preparing for this interview question, think about where the particular position could possibly take you. Sure, it's difficult to know where the future will lead you, but hopefully, based on your performance, experience, growth and development, you will contribute significantly to the company through progressive responsibility and accomplishments.

3. What do you consider your biggest weakness? This question is probably one of the most dreaded. The interviewer is looking primarily for how you perceive and evaluate yourself. First of all, avoid repeating the term "weakness." Instead, use terminology such as "area of development." Consider mentioning only those areas in which you are improving or have turned around. For example, I have a client who was promoted last year to a position that required her on occasion to make presentations to a diverse group of community stakeholders. Needless to say, public speaking was not one

of her strengths. We discussed the possibility of her joining the local Toastmasters International organization, which she did, and she is now progressing very well conducting presentations. This is a positive example of turning around an "area of development." What would be one for you?

4. Why are you leaving your current job (or why did you leave your job)? The key with this question is to be honest and provide your response in a positive context. If you're leaving a current job, talk about the positives you've gained, and then focus on why you think you are a great fit for this new position as well as for the company. Another option you can discuss is you feel it's time to seek out a new opportunity and expand your skills and experience to further your career while also contributing value to the company. If you were laid off due to a reduction in force, talk about the fact you are not dwelling on the past and are ready to apply your knowledge and experience to the new position. On the other hand, if you were fired, do not trash the boss or the company. Discuss that you recognize and understand the issues regarding the termination and are ready to improve and move forward in a positive direction. Make your response short and simple.

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