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the big question

IT IS ALWAYS disheartening to interview a candidate without any apparent interview preparation and only a vague idea of what they want to say.

Long pauses, lots of “umms and ahhs”, as well as hazy and unstructured responses are not a recipe for success!

Imagine that you are speaking on a conference panel and will be responding to audience questions regarding your topic of expertise. Would you prepare in advance? Of course you would! Well, an employment interview is no different.

While prospective employers will have differing interview styles, you should always be prepared to answer fundamental questions regarding your previous employment and educational achievements. It always surprises me when candidates can't remember their own history and need to refer to a copy of their resume for the correct information!

Beyond the obvious, other questions will be posed that will probe further into your background and some will attempt to also explore your behavioural traits and motivation. So let's look at some questions that you might expect in an employment interview?

Tell me about yourself?

Many interviewers will start with this question to assess your communication skills and personality style so prepare to talk for a couple of minutes. Include a summary of your education and career history to date and also try to relate your industry skills and desired career path to the job on offer.

Why are you looking to leave your current role?

This is not an opportunity to vent your frustrations about your boss, company, team mates or position! If you have had a bad experience it is fine to briefly say what the problem was, but be objective and never bad mouth former employers or team members. Be positive in the interview! No one wants to hire a negative person. If you have been in a role for some time and are looking for a change, consider mentioning that you are looking for more responsibilities, challenge or career growth.

Why do you want to work for us?

Your answer to this question should demonstrate that you have thoroughly researched the organisation, including the company's

history, the clients they service, the volume/type of events they deliver, etc. This is also an opportunity to re-emphasise your suitability and interest for the available position.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

A potential employer wants to know whether you have considered the future and what motivates and interests you. While you can never be certain where you will be in five years' time, they want to see some evidence that you have a plan or vision for your future career. Also they will be interested in your views on where you think this particular role could lead and what that means in relation to your individual career goals.

Tell me about a difficult situation you have faced and how you dealt with it?

The purpose of this question is twofold. Firstly, it can pinpoint what you consider is difficult, and secondly will address how you handled the issue. Think back on your career history and have one or two examples which you can discuss. Avoid being negative in your re-telling of the story. Select a situation that was not caused by you and one whose outcome placed you in a good light.

How have you coped when your work has been criticised?

We all respond differently to criticism and an interviewer may ask this question to assess whether you take advice/criticism as a personal attack or as a tool to improve performance. It can be a tricky question because it can mean bringing up a situation where you have performed poorly, however, I would suggest finding a concrete example and outlining the steps you have taken to avoid repeating the same mistake.

Of course, we have only touched the surface as there are many other questions that you might encounter in an interview.

Remember that the employer wants you to be the perfect candidate and they will give you every opportunity to prove this to them.