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Tell me about yourself, asking your potential boss during the job interview that you've worked so long and hard to land. Is your mind emptying, as you're beaten stupid by how broad this question is? Or are you awash with so many possible answers that you know you're about to start mumbling about your birthplace and this time you peed your pants in first grade? We're hoping none of them will happen, because right now you're exploring how to answer these too common interview questions. There's really no right response to something so vague, but there are some good ways to go about making yourself look like the ideal candidate with your smart response. What's the real question? After doing so much homework to shape your smart questions for your interviewer, you might be a little angry that she's giving you such a cliché. But don't be so her. Interviewing job applicants is hard, too, and probably just one in a million tasks she has to complete that day. She's not trying to torture you here, but giving you the opportunity to say exactly what she needs to hear. What she's probably not asking for is the whole story of your life. Think of the context from which the interviewer asks the question, meaning you have to adjust your answer to the specific role you want, says A-J Aronstein, associate dean at Bernard College's Bernard Transition Office. Tell them what you've done so far that makes you right for the job and it should take no more than 45 seconds per minute. When you answer this question, you must have an 'elevator pitch' or an 'executive summary' ready to go, Cindy Ballard, chief human resources officer at talent agency and literature affiliate ICM, tells us. Here's my example: I'm a results-driven human resources manager with experience in multiple industries, including media, technology and retail. My knowledge of human resources was achieved by working in both specialist and general roles in human resources. My passion and expertise is building human resources from hesitation and providing a human resources experience to my clients that is strategic, meaningful and stimulating results for the company. The clues to what you need to say about yourself will be in the job listing, as well as in the About section of the company's website. An employer wants to know if you have the right qualities for the job and a personality that will change well with company culture. But it's not enough to say you're a good problem solver or a person with detail. You might want to think ahead to examples of things you've done in school or workplace that demonstrate these qualities. In preparation that happens in the past, you need to get to the point where you can tell fluids and fluently tell your story, says Aronstein. Once you have it in mind, you can write down some ball points to bring together in your interview, especially if you're the kind who develops temporary amnesia when you're nervous. Be sure who they and what you can offer what you're doing, don't do anything to accommodate this job interview. Instead of finding something both true and positive to share. People want to invest in people who are persuasive, and you can be persuasive in a million different ways, says Brasswell. I think people should really embrace it and understand their story and what makes them unique. No matter what interview you go through -- whether you're in high school or you're 30 years into the workforce -- if you can get it out, people want to invest in you. As excited as you get for the big job interview coming up, you're probably nervous too - and we all know it's hard to look and sound impressive when your heart beats and your brain goes into battle-or-flight mode. But don't be afraid, because simple preparation makes the world of difference. When you enter feeling safer, you may even find yourself enjoying the conversation. These are some of the most frequently asked questions and the interview will need to be prepared. They're also some of the most complicated to answer. Question 1 interview: Tell me about yourself. Interviewers usually lead with it, and even though it should be the easiest answer of all, sometimes it's the hardest. Your brain begins to browse through endless files of information, trying to choose some relevant facts. Is the interviewer looking for a simple, no-nonsense answer? Are they looking for something that would wow them? Do they really want to know about your passion for artisanelli cheeses, or do you need to save it for the second interview? How not to answer: Well, my Angram/Myers-Briggs type/star sign number is . . . I am the seventh of nine children . . . I grew up in Tulsa and go back there every now and then for the holidays... I'm a night owl. . . . It sounds like I'm stating the obvious, but you'd be surprised how many people draw a blank in an interview and start saying their autobiography. There's nothing wrong with providing personal information, but at this point in the game they have to connect to work in some way. (Of course, if the interviewer asks about your family or hobbies, it's different.) How to answer: Here's the deal - the hiring manager is trying to get a sense not only of who you are as a person, but how passionate you really are about that role. Keep it relevant and let your passion for your field pass. Ready to find your dream job? We'll show you how. Prepare for this question by thinking about how you got to where you are today -- what made you continue in this career and this job? Why is this job important to you? Consider building your answer a little like this: I've loved ___ for as long as I can remember. I really wanted to continue to develop my skills in this area, which I did by ____. This eventually led to opportunities to make ____, ____, and ____. Now I want to bring these experiences and knowledge to this company, so I can help as many people as I can. Obviously, that will change to fit your story. But as a rule, try to include details about your past experience in the field and connect it to why you're doing what you're doing now and where you want to go from here. Interview Question 2: Why did you quit your last job / Why do you want to leave your current job? This is another of the most common interview questions (and one of the most likely to fail candidates). The best practice here is to be honest, but not to go into all the gruesome details (unless asked for more information). If you left for an easily explained reason as your job was a seasonal position or your family had to move, great! If this was a more complicated situation, there are some to do and not. How not to answer: You won't believe how awful my last boss was. My coworker was petty and talked about me behind my back. I always had to work late and on the weekends, and I've had nothing to do with it. My manager yelled at me if I was only five minutes late for work. They really didn't know what they were doing as a society. I didn't get a chance to lead a meeting. Or a project. Or anything else. These could all be very real reasons why you left your job (or were asked to leave). I want you to be honest, but you also have to be careful with the tone and wording of your response. You never have to sound like you're complaining, howling, or about your former boss or colleagues, even if they made your life miserable. Even if you were fired, there's a better way to approach the subject. How to answer: The most important thing for the interviewer to know is that no matter what happened, you learned and grew from it and are actively working to improve the sequel. Try to frame the real reason why you left positive statements, and explain what you've learned and how you plan to use that information in the future. For example, if you left because of a bad work environment, you could say something like: I work best in a company culture where everyone is supportive and honest, and unfortunately I realized that there are bigger problems within the company that we won't hide with my values. But I'm grateful for the experience and have learned that a healthy society culture is a crucial part of the job search for me. If you were liberating, you could say something like: I was excited to try a new kind of work and thought I'd be right for it because of my skills in ___ and my past experience of ____. But once I started the job, I found that I misunderstood the job requirements and there should have been more communication at the forefront about the level of skill needed for this particular job. My manager and I have agreed that I'm not in good shape, but in the meantime, I've been working on my communication skills and honed my craft in other areas by doing ____. Regardless of the situation, remember to enter with an attitude of humility and pores. And never lie about your experiences -- for the hiring manager, the truth is One phone call away. Interview Question 3: What is your greatest weakness/strength? Now comes the awkward part where you might feel like you're either throwing yourself under the bus or shouting your praise from the rooftops. With the right attitude and the wording, you don't have to do any of those things. Just like asking why you left your job, it's best to be honest and show how you work on overcoming the weakness (but there's no need to unload emotional baggage). For strengths, be humble but know the value of your skills. How not to answer: I don't really have any weaknesses. I was better at research than anyone else in my last company. I get mad when people don't do things right the first time. I have time management issues and I always seem to fall behind. I'm a perfectionist. How to answer: When talking about strengths, try not to give generic answers. Everyone will say they work hard and want to do a good job. Instead, find the personal qualities and skills earned from experience that set them apart and make you a valuable asset to the company. Remember the job description for this answer, and try to emphasize the strengths you really have that match what they're looking for. Instead of simply naming the force, consider giving an example of when you used it in action or a person who pointed to that power in you. For example, you could say something like: my former leader told me he didn't know what the team would do without my communication skills and my ability to solve problems in difficult situations. In fact, even though I wasn't in a leadership role, he asked me to lead some projects for him. That's how modest and confident you look! When you talk about weaknesses, show that you are aware of yourself enough to know where your problem areas are. So explain how you deal with that weakness and how you work to get better. For example: I'm not good with details. I think about action, which is why sometimes I ignore small but important things. I challenge myself to ask more specific questions and make sure I have all the information before storming a project I'm excited about. Question 4 interview: What salary do you expect to earn? Talking about a paycheck is never really comfortable. No one wants to sell themselves in short supply, but sometimes people are also afraid to name a number that seems so high as to chuckle at an interviewer. Some companies may require you to give an exact number or at least an expectation of the salary range, so be prepared with a few numbers just in case. However, if not, you don't need to name a number. This can automatically limit you to the number you quoted, when the company may be willing to pay more. Is your research on job search sites like Indeed or Glassdoor to find out what market value is for this position. And then, when asked the question, say something like my expectation is that I'll be paid Market value. Question 5 interview: Of all the candidates, why do you think you should get the job? When it comes to this common interview question, you need to be prepared to justify why you are very suitable for the company and not just registering strengths. It can be intimidating to think about all the other people applying for this position and how you may or may not measure them. Instead of focusing on comparison, focus on what you bring to the table and what kind of value it will create for the company. How not to answer: Um... I have a lot of experience. I'm punctual. I'm a fast learner. I know I'll do a better job than anyone. You don't want to repeat the list of strengths you told the interviewer earlier, nor do you want to say something that all the other candidates will say—even if it's true. There could be over 1,000 people applying for this job who are as precise as you. What makes you different? How to answer: Your strengths can certainly be part of your answer, but they shouldn't be your whole answer. Think of all the roadblocks you'd be looking for if you were the hiring manager. Does this person fit the culture of society? Do they have a competitive level of experience? Do they care about our mission? Do they go above and beyond in their work? Then find a way to briefly touch all those spots. Your answer should sum up your passion for society, how your unique combination of skills and strengths will bring value, how your past jobs have shaped you to it, and any great achievements you've had in your field that will distinguish you from other candidates. Include other significant details that benefit you from being personally invested in this role. It's time for you to be bold! Remember, it's important to include specific examples to back up what you say. The interviewer doesn't just want to hear information about you. They want to know why that information makes you the best person for the job. Questions you'll never ask in an interview The interviewer won't be the only one asking questions in your interview! Any good hiring manager will ask you if you have any questions, and you should be willing to ask how many. There are some questions, though, that sending the wrong message to your interviewer could seriously hurt your chances of moving forward in the hiring process. Here are some examples: How much sick/vacation time would I get? If I get all my hours in, can my schedule be flexible? Are you checking your employees' social media accounts? What's the policy if I come late? So, what's this company doing, exactly? How soon can I get promoted from this project? How often do you give pay raises to your employees? Did you drug-check all your employees? How many warnings do you give before you fire someone? I hope I don't have to explain why these aren't good questions. Just use common sense, and don't ask questions about salary. Or anything that makes you sound like a fugitive, and you'll be just fine! Appropriate questions to ask the interviewer: What types of people are doing well here? How will my performance be measured, and how many times can I expect feedback on my work? Do all team members work remotely? (Depending on the role, you may want to wait until the second or third interview to ask that.) How is the company culture and you can give me some examples of how it plays out in a typical work week? Does this company offer employees the opportunity to do additional training or professional development? Questions like these show that you are eager to learn and excited about the opportunity. If you need more tips on the three-action hiring process, check out my Get Hired digital route. This is an online video course packed with 11 lessons to give you the tools and strategy you need to get attention and bring your dream job closer. Work.