

Job interviews: Answer 10 tricky questions

THE formula for success in job interviews is not written in stone, especially when it comes to tricky questions. For instance if you are being interviewed for a sales position, a potential employer may ask you, "What would you do if a clients hinted at kickbacks?"

How would you respond? Will you appear shocked or deliver your answer with poise? Here are some suggestions on how to answer 10 such questions. Being prepared will give an edge, and not to mention, boost your confidence.

1. Tell us about a difficult relationship in your personal life you have had to cope with?

Don't go into too many details about what happened, when and where. Don't condemn the other person or defend yourself. Talk about what you had learnt from the experience.

2. Your boss-to-be is short-tempered, impatient and abrasive. Can you work with someone, of such a temperament?

Working with a short-tempered and very abrasive boss is not easy. Stating that you can effectively work under each and every person, in any and every situation will make you seem over-confident, and unrealistic. Do you get upset if you're shouted or screamed at? Does it leave you de-motivated or disillusioned for long? If your answer to the latter question is in the negative, let the panel know that unpleasant experiences don't weigh you down for too long.

3. Since you are in sales, some clients may hint at getting kick-backs. How will you handle such situations, since as a policy we don't offer bribes?

When asked awkward questions like this, it helps if you plead ignorance. It may be also a test to check your views on bribes. They may ask if you have bribed anyone or what you would do, if you witnessed a government employee accepting a bribe. Tell them your personal experiences or views. Companies always respect individuals who are truthful and who possess a clear (not rigid) opinion on most matters.

4. Why have you fared averagely in Academics?

Many interviewers pay importance to what you have scored in your board examinations. If you had fared averagely and are asked to explain the reason, there's not much you can do. It would help if you honestly admit that you have only yourself to blame (if that is really the case) and in future you will be clear about your priorities and work hard to achieve your goals.

5. Our industry requires a lot of social interaction with clients - over drinks and at parties. Are you comfortable with smoking and drinking?

Smoking isn't cool. And many corporate head-honchos are teetotalers. It may be okay to say that you are uncomfortable around smokers and don't enjoy social drinking. And do you really need to explain why you would not like to smoke or drink? No, it's a personal choice.

If you're applying for a job in an advertising or marketing consulting firm you may be asked if you're okay with working on a tobacco or liquor account. If you feel you can never perform your job well, if the job involves promoting these products, then mention that you want to work on brands, which you are passionate about, and since you are convinced that tobacco or alcohol is injurious to health you may not be the best person to work on an account that involves actively promoting related brands.

6. Since you are a lady, and most of our clients are males, it is highly likely that some clients will try to be over-friendly. How will you handle such situations?

Will you be upset by such behaviour? If you're confident that you can deal with such clients, only then tell the interviewers how you think you can be professional, yet not interact with clients who you're uncomfortable with. Honesty is the best policy.

7. Tell us about your weaknesses?

What do you say besides the stereotyped 'good' weaknesses – impatience, over-enthusiasm? All of us have weaknesses, but do we need to mention all? And do you weaknesses surface all the time, or on occasions? For instance, while talking about your own traits such as a short temper or abrasiveness you can indicate that you display such traits or behaviour at some times only.

If your weakness is lack of time management, you could say that you are working on it and hope to overcome it over a period of time. Think about this and answer accordingly.

8. You will be replacing a person who we are letting go of. In the few weeks that you spend with him, you have to learn as much about his job so that you can continue doing his work effectively. Do you feel you are okay with this arrangement?

Not an easy situation to be in. While you can try your best to learn as much as you can, what will you do in case your predecessor does not cooperate and tell you all that you need to know? You could point out that you may need your organisation's support, cooperation and intervention, if need be, in such a circumstance.

9. What if we hired you for one job profile and then change it within weeks?

Your response will depend on your future plans. If you're interested in a sales job, because you want to pursue a career in marketing, then you'd obviously not want to work in finance or accounts. However, if you're unsure which area interests you, and would like to learn about the different functions in an organisation, this might be a good opportunity to explore. You should preferably talk about why you prefer some roles or jobs. At the same time try to avoid talking about why you don't like particular roles.

10. What salary do you expect? What if we told you we cannot pay you for the first three months?

State that since it is the start of your career, learning and experience are more important than salary. If you're still asked to quote a specific amount give them a general indication on what you would like to earn. Don't over-quote. If a company states that for whatever reason they won't pay a salary for the first few months, make sure they are not one of those outfits, which exploit those who need work experience. If the organisation offers a good learning environment, tell them you're joining the organisation for the valuable experience and you're confident you'll soon receive a salary commensurate with your performance.

Cardinal rules

1. Arrive preferably 15 minutes early, so you can relax, freshen up
2. Gauge the company dress code, dress appropriately
3. No unclean hair, sweaty visage or dirty hands with pen marks
4. Keep two copies of your r sum , handy
5. Carry a notepad and pen
6. Be poised, confident, but not too relaxed or over-confident.
7. If you're unsure about an answer and need time to think, request the interviewer if you can take a minute to think and respond
8. Be patient, be courteous
9. Never interrupt even if the interviewer is stating a wrong fact. Let him complete the sentence and then respond. Words like 'please' and 'thank you' also go a long way
10. If there are two or more interviewers, make eye contact with all