

# Interview Success Guide

(Brilliant answers to thirty most common interview questions)

Following the study from 2016 that reported on the job interviews in **ninety seven different companies in the United States**, we composed a list of **thirty most common interview questions**, trying to help the job seekers to prepare for their interviews.

We analyzed each question, and we looked at it from the **point of view of the interviewers, and the job seekers**.

Short hint explains **why the interviewers use the question, what they try to find out when asking it, and what you should focus on when answering**. Several sample answers follow the hint. The following questions made the list of thirty most common interview questions, including both screening and behavioral questions.

1. **Can you tell me something about yourself?**
2. **Why did you apply for this job?**
3. **Why did you leave your last job? / Why do you want to leave your present job?**
4. **Can you tell us something about your education?**
5. **Can you tell us something about your working experience?**
6. **Why should we hire you?**
7. **What are your strengths?**
8. **What are your weaknesses?**
9. **What are your goals?**
10. **What are your biggest achievements?**
11. **What characterize a good boss/colleague from your point of view?**
12. **What motivates you?**
13. **What are your salary expectations?**
14. **When are you able to start?**
15. **Do you have any questions?**
16. **Describe a situation when you were under pressure in work.**
17. **Describe a conflict you had with your colleague.**

- 18. Describe a situation when you went above and beyond with your service (for the customer, for the colleague).**
- 19. Describe a situation when you reached a goal and tell us how you achieved it.**
- 20. Describe a situation when you had to motivate someone in work (your colleague, your subordinate, or even your superior)**
- 21. Describe a time when you had to deal with an angry or upset client (customer).**
- 22. Describe a situation when you did not agree with an opinion (or decision) of your superior or supervisor, and knew that they were wrong.**
- 23. Describe a situation when you faced a particularly demanding problem or challenge in your personal life. How did that affect you in your job?**
- 24. Describe a time when you struggled with motivation in job (it was repetitive, you did not enjoy it anymore, there was no work to do, etc). How did you overcome the crisis of motivation?**
- 25. Describe a situation when you were unable to solve the problem on your own.**
- 26. Describe a time when you struggled to communicate something to your boss, colleague, or customer. How did you manage to get your message over?**
- 27. Describe a difficult decision you had to make in your professional career. How did making the decision affect you?**
- 28. Describe a time when you experienced a conflict of your personal and professional interests.**
- 29. Describe the biggest failure of your professional career.**
- 30. Describe a time when you struggled to build a relationship with someone important.**

Let's have a look at them, one by one!

## 1. Can you tell me something about yourself?

**Hint:** Often the very first question, it helps the HR managers to get a basic idea of your communication skills, motivation, and interests.

It is also an ice breaker, and a good answer should help you to feel more relaxed in an interview.

The interviewers do not ask about your education, experience, personal life, or anything else in particular—you can choose what you say to introduce yourself.

However, you should remember that **your choice reflects what matters to you the most**. In a job interview, it should be your education, working experience, and skills, simply **things that are relevant for the employer**.

You can mention one or two hobbies, or something from your personal life, just to show them that you are human, and have a life outside of work.

Considering that it is only the first question, **try to answer briefly**. Mention the most relevant things, speak with enthusiasm. If they want details, they will ask.

### Sample answers

I am Mario, 25 years old, and I have just finished my Masters in Economy. I enjoy team work, and I am looking for my first job, ideally in a big company. I want to learn, and meet like-minded people in work. In my free time I like to run, read, and meet with friends. I try to have positive outlook of life, and take everything that comes my way as an opportunity to become a better person.

I am Michaela, and I have worked as a secretary before my maternity leave. Now, returning to work, I am looking for office manager position, or a similar job. I try my best to combine the role of a mother and the role of an employee, which is not always easy, but I enjoy the process. If I have some free time, I like to cook, read, and basically enjoy the time with my daughter.

My name is Ron, and I am a programmer. I love designing new games and I look for a job that will allow me to design them. I am creative, and I also like to draw. I have a family, my children attend college, and in my free time, which is typically only on weekends, I enjoy gardening and wandering in the nature. Though in my fifties, I still believe I have something to offer for my employer, and I constantly work on improving my programming skills.

## 2. Why did you apply for this job?

**Hint:** Motivation of job applicants is one of the deciding factors in every interview. The HR managers try to understand your motives. Do you apply for a job just to earn money, or just because you have studied the same field? **Do you apply because you need a job, or because you desire to have this one?**

Your goal is to convince them that you desire to have the job, and that you have a good reason for choosing the offer they advertise.

Pre-interview research should help you to find a good reason. Think company culture, their vision and goals, the value they bring to their customers and business partners. Try to look for something that goes beyond your personal role in the company, something you can compliment.

You should speak not only about your own preferences, but also **about their company**, and **how you can help them to achieve their priorities**. Show them that it makes sense to hire you.

### Sample answers

I really like the job description and believe I can fit well here, and bring some value to your team of financial analysts. On the top of that, I have the right working experience for this role, and I would really enjoy working in an international environment.

Your store is just ten minute walk away from my apartment, and I shop here regularly. I like the way the employees approach customers, and I would be proud do be a member of this team. On the top of that, I like the vision of your company, the way this store is organized, and overall I have a good feeling about the place.

I am looking for my first job, and your offer stood out on the job board. Reading it, line after line, I felt that it was the perfect opportunity for me. On the top of that, few friends from college work here, and they have said only good things about the working environment.

### **3. Why did you leave your last job? (Why do you want to leave your present job?)**

**Hint:** Changing a job, or even a career, is not anything extraordinary. Nevertheless, employers want to understand why you plan to make a change, or why you were forced to make one.

They try to understand **if they can count with you in a long term**, and **what kind of an employee you are**—if you look for good or bad in your job, and in your colleagues, if you demand a lot from the people or not.

Regardless of your past experience, **you should focus on the good things**. Even if they fired you, try to speak nicely about your former colleagues and bosses. Nobody wants to hire an employee who will complain about everything.

Focus on the future, not on the past. Tell them clearly and honestly why you want to change your job, and why you chose them. But you should not say that you want to change a job to earn more money, even if true. Say rather that you look for another challenge, different working environment, a chance to learn something new, etc.

## Sample answers

I have had my job in a restaurant for four years. While I enjoyed the company of my colleagues, and believe that I helped the guests to feel welcome at the place, I felt like I needed a change. The duties were repetitive, and I felt I was not moving forward. That's why I left, and decided to apply for your offer, as I really see a potential for learning and growing professionally in this company.

They fired me, because I had a different opinion than the director of the company. Nothing wrong with that—we just had a different philosophy of leadership, and we imagined a different future for the business. Maybe he was right, maybe I was—only time will tell. But I wish them all the best and do not want to focus on the past. Now I am here, looking for a new challenge, and a chance to help your company prosper.

I am simply looking for something different. Though I have been with my present employer only for a few months, I understood it was a bad choice. I look for another place, simply for a better match. Considering your job description and things you do here, I believe this job will suit me better, and I can see the value I can bring to your team, which is something I can not see anymore with my current employer. That is why I plan to leave them.

## **4. Can you tell me something about your education?**

**Hint:** A diploma or a degree has never made a good employee of anyone. Nonetheless, HR managers often inquire about the education of job applicants, trying to **understand their attitude to learning**, and to education in general.

You should focus on the things you learned—**the practical skills and abilities that will help you in your job**, not on the names of degrees and institutions.

And if you have no education, or are just trying to obtain some degree, try to turn this to your advantage, saying that you preferred **the school of life** to traditional education.

## **Sample answers**

I have studied at ABC University. I acquired knowledge of statistics, project management and accounting. I was always seeking opportunities to put the lessons to practice, taking part in projects and competitions we had at school. I believe that my education and internship that followed prepared me perfectly for a job of a project manager.

I have attended the course for medical assistants with AMMA recently, since I always dreamed of having this job. I believe I learned how to take care of both administrative and clinical duties, and I really enjoyed my lessons. Apart from that I try to work on my computing skills, and I read a lot of books on psychology and communication, trying to further improve my knowledge in areas that are relevant for the field.

To be honest, I have always preferred the school of life to traditional education. I believe that one can learn the job only by doing it. I was always eager to listen to more experienced colleagues in work, trying to follow their example while mastering my working duties. And I also believe that once you can work with information, you can learn any subject of your choice without attending the University, or any other educational institution. Everything is in books or online.

## **5. Can you tell me something about your working experience?**

**Hint:** Employers can read about your experience on your resume. Still, they want to hear what matters to you, and they want to see your attitude to your previous jobs.

You should pick two or three roles that are most relevant for your current job application, and then you should speak about your working duties, achievements, and lessons you learned while having them.

If you had just one job in the past, and it was completely irrelevant to the one you try to get, say that the experience helped you to gain basic working habits, and simply prepared you for an employment in general.

And if this is your first job application, I suggest you to speak about your volunteering experience, or basically about anything else that will show the employer that you know what it means to work for someone.

### **Sample answers**

I have done a lot of things in my life. It helped me to gain a good understanding of business. From 2001 to 2004 I worked as a project manager for Siemens. We were working mostly on smaller energetic projects, water plants. I hope to use my knowledge and contacts from the industry in my new job. I learned to lead projects from scratch to success. From my other jobs I can mention my role of marketing manager in CDE, from 1998 to 2001, and my freelancing experience from 2005 to 2010. Would you like to hear more details about one of my roles?

I have worked only at Walmart so far. But I learned a lot there, how to approach the customers, how to work with other people. It is not such an easy job as it seems, since the workload is heavy most days. But I do not complain, just I hope to get a better job now, and learn something new again.

As you can see on my resume, this is my first job application. But I have done some volunteering for Red Cross before, and I worked a lot with my father when we were building the house. I believe I know what it means to have a job, and I am eager to finally start working somewhere, after many years of studying.

## **6. Why should we hire you?**

**Hint:** If someone hires you for a job, they will pay you a monthly salary, and they will also pay money to the government each month.

**Will you represent just a regular monthly expense, or will you become a great investment they made, an asset for their team?**

HR managers try to find out the answer.

You should focus on something unique, **a value you can bring to their team**. Ideally it should be something that distinguishes you from other competing job applicants. If you can not find it, however, you will do well listing your skills and abilities relevant for the job.

I suggest you not to say that you are the best candidate for the job. First of all, you can not tell that (since you have not met the other job applicants in person), and secondly, you should **try to show some humility in your interview**. Saying that you are the best would not create a right picture in the eyes of the hiring committee....

### **Sample answers**

I had the very same job with one of your competitors, and I can bring a new perspective to your team. We can talk about things they did better, and I believe my feedback and experience will help to improve your own results.

I have an ability to uncover needs and desires, and to sell people what they really need or want. This is my hobby, my passion. I study human psychology in my free time, to understand different types of personalities and how to approach them to maximize the chances of closing the deal. I can honestly say that in the last years I did my best to get ready for a job of a persona banker. And that's why you should hire me.

I am young, eager to learn, and motivated to work hard. I have the passion for numbers, and I would really enjoy having this job. Of course I haven't met the other applicants for the job, and they are likely also motivated and ready to work hard, but I believe I would be a good choice for this position.

## **7. What are your strengths?**

**Hint:** Professional interviewers should be able to identify your strengths—that's what they get their salary for, after all. But the interviews are sometimes led by people who aren't

skilled in HR. Sometimes, they will actually have no idea about interviewing people (think owners of small business, as an example).

One way or another, **your answer should correspond with your interview presence.** If you struggled to formulate your thoughts in an interview, and said that you had great communication skills, while narrating your strengths, interviewers would not believe your answer (and they would start doubting your other interview answers).

You should pick relevant strengths. If possible, you should elaborate on your answer, saying how you demonstrated your strength in your professional career. And if you can not come up with anything better, speak about strengths that are relevant for every single job—such as responsibility, loyalty to the employer, or taking setbacks as lessons and opportunities to grow.

### **Sample answers**

I love to talk to people, and I believe I do understand them well—what they need and desire. This helped me in my volunteering experience in a nursing home, and I hope to use this strength in my social work career.

Responsibility is my greatest strength. I consider my job the first priority, and it has never happened to me that I came late to work, or that I did not finalize my tasks in time.

I would say my experience is my greatest strength. I have been working in this field for years, and I have tackled many challenges. There is hardly anything that would surprise me in job. Therefore I can work quickly, independently, and know what to do to achieve the best results for my employer.

## 8. What are your weaknesses?

**Hint:** I will repeat myself. Professional interviewers should uncover your weaknesses, after talking to you for five minutes, or even for less.

But anyone can lead an interview with you, and good interviewers often use this question as well, trying to **see what you think of yourself**. Can you admit having a weakness? Are you humble?

Those who believe to have no weaknesses can hardly move forward in their life, **since they do not see areas for improvement**. You should not leave such an impression in your job interview.

Everyone has some weaknesses. But it is **your attitude** that matters for the interviewers. Admit your weaknesses, and tell them how you try to improve on them. That's the answer they seek in a great job candidate.

Obviously, you should pick a weakness **that won't ruin your chances of getting a job**. If you said your accounting skills were below par, they would hardly hire you for a position of a cost accountant. But if you said you struggled with management skills, they would not consider your weakness a show stopper. Accountants do not manage people, so they do not need to have great management skills.

### Sample answers

I am not very patient. That's obviously bad. But I am working on it, trying to control myself, staying tolerant to my colleagues. It's not easy, but I have definitely made some improvements in the recent years.

Sometimes I struggle to focus on my duties. However, I practice every day, trying to eliminate useless thoughts, and my concentration has improved over the years. I still continue working on it though, trying to eliminate distractions in work.

I trust people too much. It is nice to live with this attitude to life, but it caused me some troubles in the past. Getting older, however, I am learning how to recognize the people I can trust from those who try to take advantage of my trust.

I struggle with computers. But I attend evening lessons, and I practice a lot at home, trying to improve on them, learning to work with the most common office software.

## **9. What are your goals?**

**Hint:** Every responsible person has some goals. When recruiters ask you about your goals and dreams, first of all they want to **hear that you have some goals and dreams.**

Secondly, your goals should somehow relate to their business, or at least they should not interfere with them.

For example, if you dream about running your own business, or about traveling the world, you should not say that in your job interview. Companies do not want to hire people who will leave them after a year of employment, to pursue their traveling or entrepreneur dreams.

If you have no professional goals, speak about your personal life. You can say you hope to have a family one day, or, if you already have the family, you can say your goal is to live a long and balanced life with your loved ones, enjoying the present moment.

### **Sample answers**

I would like to have a managerial role in five years time. However, I understand that I need to learn a lot before it can happen, and I believe that this position in your company is a perfect starting point for my career.

I do not dream much about the future. If I have a teaching job, and if I do it well and get a good feedback from my students, it will make me happy in life. That's likely my only goal—to be happy, and to do my best in both professional and personal life.

I plan to start a family in a few years time, and to become a good mother. When you look around, what's going on in the world right now, it is definitely not an easy goal to accomplish. But I hope to become a mother one day, and to have a good steady job, one I will enjoy doing.

## 10. What are your biggest achievements?

**Hint:** Employers try to find out if you have just “gone to the job”, or if you actually **tried to achieve something** with your work.

If possible, speak about your **achievements from the perspective of an employer** (helping them to find new customers, helping them to improve their reputation, building good atmosphere on the workplace, etc), not about from your own perspective (getting promoted, earning a degree or certification, etc).

If you have no other option, however, you can talk about personal promotion, employee of the month award, or other recognition of your good work.

If you apply for your first job, you can speak about achievements from personal life. For example, a chain smoker who managed to quit smoking recently shows their strong determination and will, narrating how they managed to quit smoking.

### Sample answers

When I worked as a Sales Manager at ABC Inc., my sales volume grew by twenty percent or more each year. No other sales representative achieved similar results, and nobody helped their business as much as I did.

I have become a better person over the years. I learned to listen to the others, and to see the good things in people, which is something I had struggled to do early in my life. I consider this my biggest achievement, since it made my life better, and I hope people enjoy my company more now.

I have done only manual labor so far, and it is hard to speak about big achievements in work. But I tried to be nice to my colleagues in retail, and I believe that I helped to improve the overall atmosphere in the store, and the retailer benefited from that.

## **11. What characterizes a good boss (colleague) from your point of view?**

**Hint:** You won't work alone. Employees interact with each other, and the interviewers try to find out if you can fit into the team on the workplace.

You should not mention something personal in your answer, for example saying that you prefer young collective, or that you work better under a boss who are older than you. Such an answer could easily backfire—if a boss was a young man, they would not hire you.

The best thing to do is mentioning something **neutral** and **emphasize that you can get along anyone**.

### **Sample answers**

Ideal boss doesn't exist, and it doesn't even matter to me. I want to focus on my job, and my duties, and I try to avoid any conflicts with other employees. Everyone is different, and I respect the individuality of each person. But I do not try to think much about my colleagues, what they should do better, how they should act. I simply prefer to focus on my own duties, and on my good attitude to other people. That is the only thing I can control.

I can get along with everyone, and I do not have special preferences. The most important thing is to see that my colleagues try their best in work, day in day out. But whether they are old or young, whether they like dancing or watching football doesn't make any difference to me.

## 12. What motivates you in work?

**Hint:** Interviewers try to find out **whether you work only for money, or are driven by a passion that comes from within you**, that magical driving force that helps us to deliver our best in job.

Your motivation is actually tested during the entire interview, and you should demonstrate it **with the enthusiasm** for the job offer, for yourself, and for the world in general.

Answering this particular question, however, you should speak openly about your motivation, something that drives you.

It can be a desire to help people (great choice for a nurse, a social worker, a teacher), and it can be a **desire to support your own family, simply a goal to live well**.

One way or another, try to stay honest and show them that you have many reasons to work hard.

### Sample answers

Meaningful purpose of this job motivates me. I would be proud to teach young children, as I believe I can become a good role model for them. And I do not want to be a bad role model, so you can be sure I'd try my best in each class.

I love to work with people. I am very social, and I enjoy talking to strangers. I believe that the nature of this job is motivating enough, at least for me it works that way.

I have a family, and I love them. I try my best to support them, and this job would help me greatly. While it is not the most fascinating job one can have, it is definitely fine for me. Even if it gets boring sometimes in work, I always try my best. It's not for my own sake...

### 13. What are your salary expectations?

**Hint:** If they start talking about salary, it is mostly a good sign. **It means that they consider hiring you** (unless they just blindly follow an interview template, and ask every job candidate exactly the same question).

Anyway, you should say that **salary is not a deciding factor for you**. But if they insist on hearing a number, you should say something to backup your expectations (average salary statistics, the sum of money you earned in your last job, etc.)

#### Sample answers

I like the job description, I like your bank, and I would be proud to have this job. But as far as my knowledge goes, average salary for a teller in your institution starts at \$29,000. I would accept that number for the start.

This is my first job application, and I am motivated to learn. I understand it is an entry level position, so the salary offer won't be great. At the same time, however, the possibilities of promotion are almost endless, so I would accept your standard salary offer for entry level jobs. I am sure that once I prove myself worthy of promotion or a raise, you won't hesitate offering it to me.

I've been earning \$70,000 in my present job, and I would prefer not earning less , considering it goes about the same position. However, I am open to negotiation and would love to hear your thoughts.

## 14. When are you able to start?

**Hint:** Most HR managers prefer to see their new hires on board as soon as possible. If you can start immediately, say it and stress that you are not waiting for any other interviews to finish, or phone calls to come...

And if you can not start immediately (bearing in mind notice period requirements, or other reasons), say clearly why you can not start, and try to turn this answer to your advantage. You can show right attitude to work, saying that it would be irresponsible to leave your current employer without helping your replacement to understand their job.

### Sample Answers

I am eager to start as soon as possible. I have applied also for two other job offers, but this one is my first choice, so if you need me tomorrow, I can be here in the morning.

I could possibly start tomorrow, but I want to finish the project I currently work on with my employer. It would be unprofessional and irresponsible if I just left them. I will need two or three weeks at least to finish it, and then I can start here. But I am ready to sign the contract even today, and you can be sure that I won't change my mind about working here.

## 15. Do you have any questions?

**Hint:** You will get a chance to ask some questions in your interview. It is good to ask one or two questions at least, as it shows that you still want the job, after everything that has been said and done in your interview.

But you should not ask about something that was **already discussed in an interview**, or about something that was explained on their job description. Focus on their working

environment, next steps of recruitment process, company culture, their goals and plans, their product portfolio, etc.

### **Sample Answers**

What are the next steps of recruitment process? Is there anything else I can do to improve my chances of getting this job?

I really like your product ABC. Can you tell me more about the plans you have with the product, and the innovations you plan in the future?

Do you set any goals for sales managers, such as monthly sales volume?

It is nice here, and people look happy in work. Do you organize any teambuilding events for your employees, or how do you keep such a good atmosphere on the workplace?

## **16. Describe a situation when you were under pressure in work.**

**Hint:** Interviewers want to hear how you reacted to the pressure, if you managed to prioritize your tasks, and how did the pressure you felt affected you in your daily job.

You will most likely face stressful situations and deadlines in your new job, so they want to see if you are ready to face these challenges.

**Ensure them that you understand the job description, and that you count with experiencing pressure.** Try to show them, on a situation from the past, that you are used to experiencing pressure and do not panic, that you know how to prioritize your work.

If it is your first application, **tell them what you would do in a stressful situation.**

### **Sample answers**

I experienced a constant pressure in my last job in sales, as we had to reach sales targets each month, and the managers were very strict about that.

It was especially stressful when you had just ten days left, and you knew you were still missing fifty or sixty percent of the target sales volume.

But I tried to keep a pragmatic approach, doing the job as good as I could. I did not let the pressure to get the better of me, because it would result in pushing too much, or in lying to the customers, just to close some deals. I think the pressure belongs to the workplace, and one has to count with that in their job.

Sometimes I do feel stressed at work, because I take my job seriously. I want to do my best, and I feel that every person walking down the school corridor is important. But I believe it is difficult for the teachers or the students to notice anything, and I try to never show it in front of them. Nevertheless, when I felt that the pressure could influence the rationality of my decisions, I rather did not make any decisions on a given day, and waited for a better moment.

I do not have any experience with feeling pressure in work, because this is my first job application. But I understand it belongs to the workplace, as the workload is heavy, and we have to meet deadlines, as our customers need the goods to continue their production. I count with experiencing pressure, and I believe to be ready to face that without getting affected physically or emotionally.

## **17. Describe a conflict you had with your colleague**

**Hint:** Conflicts belong to every workplace, and we can not entirely avoid them. Interviewers try to understand your attitude to conflict, if you always **blame the other person, or if you can admit your mistake.**

They also try to assess if you **solve the conflicts constructively**, or destructively, cutting your connections with the conflict party.

And they consider if you prefer a proactive approach, trying to **find the compromise** and **solve the conflict on your own**, or if you always call the manager (or supervisor) to take care of the situation.

You should show them that you try to avoid conflicts, **staying honest and friendly to your colleagues**. When it happened, however (and it has for sure happened in your life at least once), show them that you looked for a constructive solution, and that you tried your best to ensure that the conflict would not affect your work, or the work of your colleagues, once the waters settled again.

### **Sample answers**

One of my former colleagues did not like me. She was arguing with me all time, for no real reasons. I was a bit upset, because I had no problem with her, and I did not want to have conflicts with my colleagues, or show bad emotions on the workplace. I invited her for a coffee one day, and I apologized for my behavior, though there wasn't much I should apologize for. But our relationship got better, and she stopped arguing with me all time. I believe that sometimes we have to humiliate ourselves, admitting the mistakes, even if we did not really make any mistakes. Sometimes it is the only way to solve a conflict with another person.

The biggest conflict I had in my last job was with a colleague from the same working group. They had a different opinion on the methodology of our work, and they blamed me for the results we had achieved, the results that had not matched the expectations of the management. I tried to stay calm and explain them that we agreed on the methodology together, and I also admitted that they might be right, and we might try a different approach next time, with the same target group. I did not go into an argument with them, and I did not take their accusations personally. Conflicts belong to every workplace, and I count with experiencing them here as well.

It's my first job application, but I understand that people may argue with me, from both logical and illogical reasons. But I would do my best to build friendly relationships on the workplace, and I hope to help to minimize the number of conflicts we experience with the colleagues.

**18. Describe a situation when you went above and beyond with your service (for the customer, for the colleague).**

**Hint:** Are you an average employee who just takes care of their duties? Or are you an **exceptional one, who strives to go above and beyond for their colleagues and customers?** Companies try to hire people who do not mind going above and beyond with their service, to help their employer to stand out from the competition.

**Your tone of voice is important when answering this question.** You should speak with enthusiasm about the situation when you did something extraordinary for the customer, or for your colleague. Try to stress that you understand the importance of excellent customer service, and show them that delivering such a service makes you proud of your job.

**Sample answers**

I consider it a duty to always try my best for each customer. For example, in my last job in retail, I called a friend—an expert in the area of electronics, when I needed an advice for a customer who asked a specific question about a computer we were selling, a question I could not answer. The customer really appreciated the phone call I made for them, and they eventually purchased the computer. Such moments make me proud of my work.

I have never gone above and beyond with customer service, because this is my first job application. However, I understand that the market is extremely competitive, and unless we deliver exceptional customer service, the clients will go and do business with one of our main competitors. I hope to learn, in your training program, how to satisfy the customers, and I also hope to come up with my own ideas on how to go above and beyond with my service.

## **19. Describe a situation when you reached a goal and tell us how you achieved it.**

**Hint:** Goals help us to feel motivated. It is easier to prepare a “to-do list”, and to understand the importance of each task on our list, if we have goals that we try to achieve in work.

Interviewers try to understand if you set goals for yourself (each responsible employee has some goals). What is more, your answer to the second part of the question (how you achieved the goal) **helps them to understand your methodology of work**, and your attitude to work.

You should clearly define the goal you set, **how it related to the goals of your employer**, and the steps you took to achieve the goal. You can also say what it meant for you, and how did achieving the goal help your employer. Such an answer will present you as someone who cares for their employer, and does not think about their personal gain only.

### **Sample answers**

I felt I was not working quickly enough in my last factory job. I worked in quality assurance, and I set a goal to increase the number of final checks by twenty percent. I consulted my colleagues, and I observed their way of working, trying to learn how to perform the check in a more efficient way, while ensuring I still met the quality standards.

I applied what I learned, and I also tried to shorten the breaks. Eventually I managed to reach my goal, which was good for me, for the employer, and also for our clients, as we could ship the goods much faster.

I set a goal to improve the conversion rate on the website of the client. I really liked their product, and believed in the value it brought to the customers. Doing a lot of split testing, changing landing pages, and optimizing advertising campaigns, we actually managed to increase their ROI by 100%. Client was happy, my manager was happy—the client prolonged the contract with us, and I was also happy, with a good job I had done.

This is my first job application, but I had a big goal this year, and that was to graduate from the University. I focused my energy on the target, and I tried to minimize the number of

distractions each day. I eventually graduated with good marks, and I believe that I also learned a lot of practical things in the process, which should help me in my professional career.

**20. Describe a situation when you had to motivate someone in work (your colleague, your subordinate, or even your superior).**

**Hint:** Everyone lacks motivation sometimes. Great employees can not only find an inner motivation, but **they can also help the others, their colleagues, to find the motivation** and to see that it makes sense to work hard and to try their best every day.

The HR managers try to understand your attitude—if you, out of your free will, try to help your colleagues with their motivation. Your answer also helps them to understand if you have some **leadership skills**, and if you can find some creative ways of motivating people (offering a raise, or an extra compensation, is not creative).

Try to show them that you care, that you try to uplift your colleagues, and that you understand that **unless the entire team performs well in work, the results won't be good.**

You should speak about the situation when you helped the colleagues to find the motivation within them, which is always much better than the motivation that comes from outside.

**Sample Answers**

I was managing a small team, but I did not choose the team members—the CTO has assigned them. I quickly understood that one man lacked motivation, and that he was holding the entire team back. I talked to him personally, trying to understand the problem, asking a lot of question.

Eventually I understood that he was not satisfied with his position in a team, and expected something more. I explained him that he could get promoted, but firstly he had to show that he deserved the promotion, and that he could not achieve his own goals unless he helped us to

achieve the goals of the company. I tried to show him the connection, and I did everything in a friendly manner. The talk helped, and he became a valuable member of the team.

In my previous job of a teacher, I always tried to connect the subject of a lesson with the future. I found practical applications in real life, and I listed the jobs where the students would use the knowledge. I simply tried to help them to see the lesson as something practical. Most times it helped them to find the inner motivation to study, and to pay attention to the lessons.

This is my first job application, so I have no experience with motivating my colleagues. But I like to play sports, especially football, and I discovered that positive encouragement works for my teammates. I always praise them for a good shot, a good pass, or good defense. It helps them to continue trying, and to stay focused in the match, even if we are behind in the scores. I understand that motivation is crucial for every employee, and I will do my best to help my colleagues feeling respected and useful in their job.

## **21. Describe a time when you had to deal with an angry or upset client (customer).**

**Hint:** Overwhelmed with their personal problems, people are often aggressive, angry, sad, or irate when they do their shopping, eat in a restaurant, talk to a sales rep on the phone.

Interviewers try to understand **if you count with the behavior**, if you know that the client is always right (even when they are wrong), and if the bad behavior does affect you somehow in job.

Tell them that you try to stay calm and relaxed, that you keep your focus and goal on your mind, and that any inappropriate behavior won't distract you in work (or at least you hope so).

**Try to show some empathy for the people, and some understanding for a golden rule in business—that the customer is always right.**

## Sample answers

I prepare for each meeting in advance to be sure I did my best to not upset the client. I try to be friendly, and I listen and ask a lot of questions before suggesting anything to them. However, once I was doing sensitive questionnaire with a group of divorced women. They got angry at one point. What I did was that I stayed calm, and told them that they could refuse to answer any question, and I stressed once again that the questionnaire was anonymous. I also apologized for any inappropriate questions they found in the document. It helped, and we finished the work.

In my previous job at AT&T, I was always confronted with irate customers. People were not satisfied with their invoices. I always calmly explained them, in a simple language, why the numbers differed from their expectations. I spoke in a friendly voice, and I even showed sympathy if I felt it was right. It worked well in most cases, as the clients calmed down, understanding I was just an employee doing their job. And if it didn't work well, I simply got over it and focused on another call.

This is my first job application, so I do not have such an experience. But I understand that some people face problems in their personal life, or have other reasons for being upset, or aggressive. Such a behavior belongs to every retail store, I count with that, and I think I will manage to handle it. The key is to always try your best to help the customer, but if it doesn't work, we should not take their bad words personally.

## **22. Describe a situation when you did not agree with the opinion of your superior or supervisor, and knew that they were wrong. How did you handle the situation?**

**Hint:** Employees should respect the line of hierarchy in the company. At the same time, however, **they should try to help their employer to achieve good results.** If something can be done better, an employee should not hesitate to suggest an area for improvement.

You should show the interviewers that you respect your superiors, but at the same time you **provide them with valuable feedback.**

### **Sample answers**

It has never happened to me before, but I understand that the supervisor is likely more experienced. It is their obligation to say what we should do. If I did not agree with their opinion, I would briefly explain my point of view, but if they insisted on their way of doing things, I would simply follow the order. After all, I can also make a wrong judgment, and their suggestion may prove correct.

The director of logistics wanted to reorganize the stock, as they believed it would result in a shorter expedition times. I didn't agree, and explained them why I thought it wouldn't work the way they thought it would. I talked to them privately, in their office, because I didn't want to challenge their authority in front of the stockers.

At the end they didn't agree, and ordered us to reorganize the stock, and I followed their order and instructed the stockers to do the job. The reorganization didn't result in a better expedition time, but I did not mind, and I did not mention it another time. I gave them my opinion, I tried to help, but the final decision was their responsibility. That's something I have always respected.

### **23. Describe a situation when you faced a particularly demanding problem or challenge in your personal life. How did that affect you in your job?**

**Hint:** It is **not possible to completely separate out personal and professional life.** The interviewers realize that many people face adversity, and they want to hear that you try to **minimize the impact the adversity has on your work.**

If you do not feel like narrating the personal problems in detail, you can just vaguely say that it had something to do with your health issues, marriage problem, or with any other challenge you experienced in personal life.

## Sample answers

I try to have positive outlook on life. Both good and bad things happen for a reason, and we often learn the most important lessons when we face adversity.

When my son got seriously sick, at first I could not focus on my job. I eventually turned things up side down, and took refuge in work, trying to occupy my mind with the working duties, working from home as well.

It wasn't a good idea, since I eventually felt exhausted physically and emotionally. Though I lost my job, I learned a lot about myself, and this period of life has made me stronger as a person. My son is all right now, and I am searching a new job....

I struggled with bills last year. I actually faced a possibility of losing the house. It was stressful, but I understood that it was crucial to keep my job, since without getting paid each month I would for sure end up on the street.

I worked hard, probably harder than ever, to keep the job. We can say that the problems I faced actually had a positive impact on my work performance.

## **24. Describe a time when you struggled with motivation in job (it was repetitive, you did not enjoy your duties, there was no work to do, etc). How did you overcome the crisis of motivation?**

**Hint:** Interviewers try to understand your attitude. Do you mind if the work is repetitive? Do you get bored easily? **Do you proactively look for something to do, or do you always wait for an order?**

Many jobs are repetitive, and the employees carry out the same tasks day after day, month after month. If you apply for such a job, **you should say that you actually prefer routine**, and that you do not find repetitive jobs boring.

Alternatively you can say that you were always busy, that you never felt like there wasn't anything to do in your job. You should adjust your answer to this question to your job

application. Regardless of the job you try to get, however, **you should try to convince them that you do not lose your motivation quickly, and often.**

### **Sample answers**

I have worked as a cashier before, which is an extremely repetitive job. Though I sometimes found my day boring, I do not think that the customers noticed that. I knew how to act, what was expected from me in the job, and I understood why I woke up every morning. Most jobs are repetitive, but I believe that people who know why they work, who have some goals, don't struggle with their motivation often.

We had so much work to do in my last job. I often stayed in the office for ten hours, and I sometimes even worked on Saturdays. That was actually one of the reasons why I left them, because I was looking for a better life-work balance. Honestly, I have never felt bored in my job, as there was always something to do.

This is my first job application, so I am yet to experience the crisis of motivation. I will always try to have some goals to find motivation and to work hard, even if the job is boring, or if I do not feel like working on a given day.

But I applied for this job because I really like the job description. It resonates with my values, and I believe that I will find it motivating for a long time.

## **25. Describe a situation when you were unable to solve the problem on your own.**

**Hint:** Interviewers try to understand a few things. **Are you humble enough, to ask for a helping hand when you need one?** Are you a team player?

People do rarely achieve anything spectacular on their own—every great product or business is a team effort.

**Show them that you understand the importance of teamwork**, that you are always ready to offer a helping hand, and that you find it natural to ask for one, should you struggle with something in job.

If you can, speak about the problem that you eventually solved with the help of your colleagues. You can also say that the situation helped you to understand how to deal with the problem, and that the next time you managed to solve it without asking for help.

### **Sample answers**

I was new in the HR, and they asked me to hire people for the sales department. I did my research, and I tried to prepare a template for the interview, but I eventually couldn't decide about the questions. So I asked my colleagues to help me, I invited them to participate in the interviews, and I asked about their opinion on the way I led the meetings. They gave me great advice, and we eventually hired three new sales representatives.

I have actually never tried to solve the problems without consulting my colleagues. We were a close team of four designers, and we worked on the campaigns together. If the client asked me to change something on the design, or if they didn't like the ideas, I always called my colleagues to a meeting, and thought together how to address the request of a client. I am a team player, and I do not like to decide on my own, because in design and marketing it is always important to have more opinions on the campaign.

I have never had a job before, but I had a lot of problems with mathematics, while studying at the University. I asked my classmates for help, and they gave me tutoring classes. Each person has their strengths and weaknesses, and we should help each other. I plan to stick to this approach in my job.

**26. Describe a time when you struggled to communicate something to your boss, colleague, or customer. How did you manage to get your message over?**

**Hint:** Interviewers try to find out if you know how to talk to people from other departments of the company, those who do not understand your professional jargon. They try to see **if you can explain difficult things in a simple way**, in the language your customer will understand.

Try to mention that you are always patient when explaining things to other people, that you **use pictures, charts and practical examples to make things easier for them.**

And if you struggled to get the message over because you knew that the recipient would not like your words, you should say that you **tried to say it in a most polite way, one that would not touch them personally.**

**Sample answers**

When I started my last job of an accountant in a small company, I asked the boss to provide all invoices, budgets and financial statements. Studying the documents, I found several ways of cost reduction. Other people from the company just had to modify certain transactions they were doing on a regular basis.

Other staff members had no knowledge of accounting or taxes, and they didn't understand what I was talking about.

In order to get my message over I prepared charts and case studies. I used simple words in the meetings, no jargon. I showed them how much we could save on taxes, if they did some purchases in a different time, or changed the way they invoiced the clients. I demonstrated everything on practical examples. Finally they understood my idea, they liked it, and we implemented it straight away.

There was a sensitive issue to discuss with my team members, because we had to redesign the project from scratch. It meant that the work we had done for three months counted for nothing.

They were not happy to hear the news, but I tried to come up with the goods, and praised everyone for the work and things we learned in the process of then first design. Staying positive and showing them the lessons we learned, and how the experience made us stronger as a team, helped me to get the message over.

This is my first job application, so I have never experienced similar situation. But I understand it is crucial to get the message over. The clients have to understand the benefits our technical solution offers them, in terms of final result of their business.

I plan to use comparisons, practical examples, and pictures while talking to the clients, to ensure they would understand my message. Personalization is a key, in my opinion, and I will always adjust my message to the knowledge and type of the customer.

## **27. Describe a difficult decision you had to make in your professional career. How did making this decision affect you?**

**Hint:** This is a common question in all levels of managerial interviews. The most difficult decisions (in work) **are typically related to the people we manage**. To dismiss a colleague, or to relocate someone we like, is not an easy thing to do for anyone.

The interviewers try to understand if your emotions and your personal preferences interfere with your decisions in work.

Try to show them that you **consider the goals of the company as your first priority**, and that you make decisions accordingly.

If this is your first job application, you can speak about a difficult decision from the college. The key is to show them that you can decide on your own, and that you always make a decision that is better for the company in a long run.

### **Sample answers**

I recall a time when we had to dismiss a colleague. I knew them well, they had two young children, and the family struggled with money. But they made a mistake that we could not

tolerate. I didn't feel good about dismissing them, and we had a long talk together with other manager, and I suggested some options. Eventually I had to dismiss them anyway, because I understood it was the best thing we could do for the company.

Leaving my last job was difficult. I had nice colleagues, and the employer paid me well. But I didn't see I could learn anything more in the company. On the top of that, the direction they took in software development did not quite match with the direction I wanted to pursue in my career. So I had to say goodbye to a convenient job, and a nice team of people. Here I am, however, applying in your company, because I really like the job description, and I believe that your work suits perfectly my skills and the direction I want to take in professional career.

This is my first job application, but I have already made some decisions that had an important impact on my career. I had to study at a law faculty for one year to understand that I didn't want to become a lawyer. I eventually decided to quit and apply for social work, even though my parents and friends did not agree with my decision. But I understood that each of us has to find their happiness in life, and I decided to follow my calling. It is better to sacrifice one year than to spend all your life doing a job which you do not really enjoy.

## **28. Describe a time when you experienced a conflict of your personal and professional interests.**

**Hint:** The life is complicated. Many people spend all their time working, either at their desks, or in their minds. They do not know how to relax.

Interviewers want to see that you **can separate your work from the life you have outside of the office.**

If you can not recall anything particularly dramatic, you can talk about **the very basic issues we face in life:** Your child was sick, and you had to stay with them, though you knew there was a lot of work in the office; you had a chance to get a great job in Washington, but you had a new girlfriend in LA, and she didn't want to move to Washington, etc.

## Sample answers

I enjoyed my former job in Lincoln Square, but I had to travel one and half hour to get to the office. The traffic in the city was terrible. Leaving the house early, and returning late, my wife started to argue with me—and she had a good reason for that. I considered leaving the job, but I felt responsibility to my employer, and I enjoyed the job. I tried to arrange a home office, to work from home for at least two days each week.

The plan didn't work though, and that's why I am here, applying for a job in your company. Your offices are just ten minutes away from my house, so we should not face a similar problem.

I do not have such an experience. I always try to have a healthy life-work balance, and I try to plan my career accordingly. When I am at work, I focus on my job only. And when I am at home, I do not think about my work at all. This allows me to be a good employee, and a good mother at the same time.

## **29. Describe the biggest failure of your professional career.**

**Hint:** Interviewers want to see your attitude to failures, and to the mistakes you made. Did you learn anything from the failures? **Did they break you down, or did they make you stronger?**

You **do not necessarily have to talk about something big**. If you are young, perhaps you have experienced only small failures and mistakes in your life. Pick the biggest one from the small, and narrate the situation in your interview. Remember, your attitude matters, not the particular failure you talk about.

Show the interviewers that you are aware of your mistakes, and that you try to learn from each failure.

## Sample answers

My biggest failure was that I had to give up my job in sales, after having it for only two months. We had a nice team, and I liked the working environment, but for some reasons I just couldn't sell their service. I could not convince myself to see the value for the customer. Probably I didn't try hard enough. It was not nice from me to benefit from the training program, and leave the company soon after I completed the training. But I learned an important lesson, and from now on I would not apply for a sales job unless I knew and understood the product we would be selling.

I do not think that I have failed in my career. I have been following a career plan which I set after graduating from school. The job I try to get with you is the next step on my plan. But I have definitely made some mistakes, which didn't help my past employer. For example I made a wrong analysis, choosing an inappropriate model for time row analysis, which resulted in a loss of money for my employer. But I believe that the small failures belong to life of every single person, and without them we would not be able to learn, and to progress in our career.

This is my first job application, but I have already experienced some failures. For example, I didn't get to the college of my choice. I tried hard, prepared for the entrance exams and the interview for three months, but I still failed to make cut. I was sad for a few days, but then I simply accepted that other applicants were better, and they deserved the place in the study program. I moved on and here I am, applying for a job with you.

### **30. Describe a time when you struggled to build a relationship with someone important.**

**Hint:** Relationships matter. Interviewers try to see if you can build a good connection with your boss, your colleagues, the clients, or the stakeholders in general.

They also try to understand **whether you take the initiative and try to strengthen the relationships**, without waiting for the other person to make the first step.

**You should speak about the situation with a good outcome** and you should stress that you tried to build the relationship, that you took the initiative.

If this is your first job application, you can speak about building relationship with your teacher, thesis editor, or other person who played an important role in your education.

### **Sample answers**

I found it difficult to build relationship with my colleagues from the shift in my last job in retail. They had a different outlook on life and work. But I understood that unless we cooperated and respected each other, we would not do a good job, and would have a hard time together.

I eventually tried to look for things that we had in common, and avoided the topics that separated us. It took some time but our relationship improved.

I struggled to build a relationship with the people in the logistic department, the people I should manage. They considered me a white collar, a different breed, and they put a mental barrier between me and them.

I tried to break the barrier. I organized team building events, I changed my clothes in work, and I even helped to move some material when the workload was heavy, and the material movers needed a helping hand. It helped me to get closer to their hearts, as they started to respect me on a personal level. Since then it was easier to communicate with them, and they also worked harder.

## Final Word

To succeed in a job interview is not easy. But if you prepare for **both screening and behavioral questions**, it should help you to **get rid of stress, and feel more confident** in your interviews. And your confidence will reflect in the way you answer the questions, and in the way the HR managers see your job application.

Every interview is a chance to learn, to improve your presence, and of course—to **finally get a job of your dreams**. Try to analyze your past interviews, identify the mistakes you have made, and improve on them for the next time.

If you do so, and if you give great answers to their questions, you will get a job you want to have...

I wish you good luck!



*Sincerely,*

*Matthew Chulaw,*

*Your Personal Interview Coach,*