

# **How to answer the 3 hardest job interview questions**

Let's face it: there's no such thing as an easy job interview. You're trying to make a good impression and find out more about the company and the job, and you only have a small window of time to do it.

Being nervous, of course, is perfectly normal. People *are* judging you. They also have the power to put you on the spot. What do you do, for example, if you get a strange question like this? "If you were in a hot air balloon with several other people and it developed a puncture and was sinking and going to crash and somebody had to be chunked out to lighten it, how would you convince everybody it shouldn't be you?"

This was an actual job interview question someone shared on Quora, and it's truly difficult to answer. Thankfully, these kinds of novelty questions are rare. The real questions to worry about are those that are seemingly easy to answer. Simple and borderline mundane, the way you answer these questions can make or break the entire interview.

## **Here's how to answer the 3 hardest job interview questions.**

### **1. Tell me about yourself.**

Technically, this one isn't a question, but it's still a pit full of quicksand, waiting to suck you down. Honestly, this one should be considered cheating, since it requires almost nothing of the hiring manager, and gives you very little to go on as a candidate. Is the interviewer looking for your entire history in 60 seconds or less? A sense of who you are as a person? An idea of how you'd solve the company's problems and spur the organization to even greater heights of success?

In short, yes to everything. Sounds complicated? It's not really, as long as you have your elevator pitch honed and ready to go. And yes, you need an elevator pitch. Remember that a job interview is more than an opportunity to scope out a new company; it's your chance to sell yourself. "A formula I really like to use is called the Present-Past-Future formula," says Kathryn Minshew at *The Muse*. "So, first you start with the present—where you are right now. Then, segue into the past—a little bit about the experiences you've had and the skills you gained at the previous position. Finally, finish with the future—why you are really excited for this particular opportunity."

### **2. What are your salary requirements?**

It might be in your best interests to avoid answering this question, but sometimes, you're going to have to come up with a number, either for your salary requirements or your salary history. Salary history is obviously easier, because you can just be honest (don't lie – liars get caught and wind up embarrassed and unemployed). But it's also tougher to deal with from a salary negotiation perspective, because it potentially boxes you in. For this reason, whether you're asked to give your salary history or your salary requirements, your approach should be the same: come to the table with information on what this position should pay, based on the job requirements, your experience and education, and the location. PayScale's Salary Survey can help you set a range that's appropriate to the role. Then, if the hiring manager tries to peg your offer to your job history, not the job title in question, take inspiration from this sample script in PayScale's *Salary Negotiation Guide*, "This position is not exactly the same as my last job. So let's discuss what my responsibilities would be here and then determine a fair salary for this job."

### **3. Why did you leave your last job?**

If you were let go at your last job, this is maybe the toughest question to face during a job interview.

It's easier, of course, if you were laid off. Just give a brief mention of the restructuring, and refrain from badmouthing your former employer (no matter what the situation).

If you were fired, though, coming up with an answer is a bit harder. The goal is to respond in a way that's honest and reflects well on you (by showing that you're self-aware and have learned something from the experience, for example), while still moving the conversation forward.

Alison Doyle at About.com's *Job Searching* site gives several good examples of scripts that might work, including: "After thinking about why I left, I realize I should have done some things differently. That job was a learning experience and I think I'm wiser now. I'd like the chance to prove that to you."

Your answer will vary, depending on your experience and situation. The most important thing is to be prepared with an answer that explains what happened while casting you in a positive light.

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