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## How To Handle Tricky Interview Questions

Posted by: [Logan Kugler](#) On: 04/30/2008 11:48:26 In: [Information Technology](#)

*Make sure you're not caught off guard the next time a hiring manager throws you a curve ball.*

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Acing a job interview takes ambition and ultimately confidence.

Say your big interview is coming up in a couple of days. You've done all your homework and recited your pre-prepared answers a dozen times. But what happens when the interviewer ambushes you with a question you didn't expect? Do you stumble because your confidence falters? Obviously, your reaction can be the difference between a cushy new paycheck every week and a trip to dead-ends-ville.

To make sure you're not caught off guard the next time you walk into a job interview, we spoke with Dawn Quesnel, professional career coach, former executive recruiter at two of Boston's premier agencies, and the founder of Career Life Balance. Here's her professional advice on six common tricky interview questions.

### Q: What are your weaknesses?

A: The purpose of this question is to see how you handle stress. Don't skirt around; be brief, direct, and to the point. Share a weakness you are currently working to improve, but don't respond with a cliché such as "I'm a perfectionist," or "I'm a hard worker." It's a balance of being real and showing you're authentic without shooting yourself in the foot. A good example is: If you're a high energy person you might say, "Sometimes I can get really excited about a project and forget that sometimes everyone isn't as inspired about it as I am and can overwhelm people with my enthusiasm."

### Q: What would your friends tell me about you?

A: Be sure to give a positive answer that communicates qualities such as confident, fun, loyal, and hardworking. The answer should describe your personality beyond your professional image. The employer is trying to get to know you as a person here. A good example is: "My friends would probably tell you about my energy and enthusiasm that I display confidence in everything I do."

### Q: Tell me about a time you failed in your career.

A: This question also comes in the form of "What was the biggest mistake you've ever made, and what did you learn from it?" Respond with a number of your greatest learning experiences. Maybe give an example of how you might have mis-managed a project and what you learned from that experience. The idea is to display that you are able to adapt and overcome relevant job-related challenges. The "failure" you discuss should be serious enough to be credible, but not something that would cast doubt on your competency.

### Q: Explaining "job hopping" on your résumé.

A: If you've had a fairly high number of job changes in the last several years, be prepared to talk about them. Be candid, but explain that your job hopping was never a result of poor performance - that you grew professionally as a result of each job change. A good example:

"I was very happy at XYZ Company but my boss left, the company changed directions, and then my boss who left called me and offered me a position that took my career to the next level."

Your goal is to convince the interviewer that you're interested in his company for the long haul.

### Q: Tell me about a time when you've had to deal with unfair or harsh criticism from a supervisor or peer.

A: This is a bait question to see if you will start spewing venom about your former boss or coworkers. It's okay to talk constructively about past problems

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with colleagues, but be careful not to display any heated emotion. If you do, you're showing the interviewer that you probably don't handle conflict well. That's a career killer.

**Q: What are your salary requirements?**

**A:** Shoot for a no-answer here, which is basically what sounds like an answer but doesn't specifically respond to the question. You want the interviewer or hiring manager to give you a number instead of you giving them one.

Additionally, before they provide an offer, you need to convince them that you're worth top dollar for the position. Talk about the opportunity and how you are excited by the challenge of the role and that you want to design a win-win. A good example:

"In my research, I've seen anywhere from \$60K to \$80K for similar positions. Given my experience and perfect fit for this position I'm confident you will present me with a fair offer."

**Bonus Tip:**

Remember, some of the most interesting questions during a job interview are frequently those asked by the candidate. That's because your questions show how interested you really are in the company and the position, and how much you know about the opportunity and have thought about the challenges.

Here's just a few questions you should be asking in your next job interview to start your thinking:

- "What are the three accomplishments I will need to have 'checked off' at the three, six, and twelve months stages after starting this role?"
- "How do these support the department, division, and corporate strategic objectives?"
- "What resources are already allocated to accomplish these?"
- "How many people were promoted internally last year, what was the criteria for those promotions, and what influence did you have on the situation?"

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