

POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Entire books have been written that focus solely on interviewing and interviewing questions. The purpose here is not to write a book, but to prepare you for some questions that you may have to field.

Obviously, every interview for every position in every company should be different; however, there are some general questions that may be asked at each level based on that level of experience and responsibility. Most of those questions probably will be self-explanatory. After some questions, I will explain the motivation behind the question.

Review STEP 9, “Impassioned Interviewing,” to see how these different methods of interviewing within the different interviewing formats may be used. Remember the value in telling stories to illustrate your experience and points.

These potential questions are separated by level of experience. Remember, most people conduct interviews without having been trained; therefore, even an executive may be asked a question that targets more junior-level experience because the interviewer may just be going down a list of questions that was handed to her by human resources or a friend. Many questions are developed based on the challenges the candidate will face in a new position.

Some of the questions listed here were taken from actual interviews I have conducted. You can see that I have worked with a wide variety of people.

Use these questions to begin your interview preparation. It is not an exhaustive list but should get you thinking in the proper frame of mind.

For your convenience, the questions have been divided into the following groups:

1. Executive Level
2. Professional and Sales Level
3. Positions that require Driving/Business Travel
4. Technical
5. Marketing
6. Sales
7. Project Manager
8. Accounting/Audit
9. Construction
10. Human Resources

Executive Level Questions

Based on my experience as a recruiter, just when you say, “They will never ask me a question like that. I’m too senior,” some interviewer will ask you that question or one like it. Be prepared.

Describe your rise from the staff level to the executive level. What elements do you feel made the difference in your rise to executive level?

Where was luck made?

How do you prepare yourself prior to starting as the leader of a new company?

Do you feel that working in one industry your entire career is more important than successfully working in several industries? Why/why not?

In your current/last position, what do you feel was the most important impact that you made? Why?

What was the most important impact that you made for the investors? What challenges did you have to overcome? As the result of that experience, what did you learn?

Given your understanding of this position and the skills required to be successful, how do you feel your experience may differentiate you from other potential candidates?

Using 20/20 hindsight, describe an executive decision that you would have changed had you known then what you know now. (*Ask what level of detail they are looking for. Then tell the story at that level of depth.*)

A leader in a startup has a different role than a leader in a large, mature company or a leader in a corporate restructuring/turnaround. Compare and contrast the different roles these leaders have. Which roles have you filled? Of those roles, which do you prefer? Why?

If you are the leader of a pre-IPO startup, when do you decide to go on the road show to attract new funding? What elements do you feel need to be in place prior to your road show? Who accompanies you on this road show and what are their roles? What is your primary role?

Describe your corporate crisis management experience.

If you are the incoming president/CEO/CFO of a distressed company, what does your first day look like? First week? First month?

What reports do you want to see first? Why?

How often do you communicate with your board the first week and month? When are you confident that you can communicate less often?

Based on your experience and looking forward to the next five years, what situations do you feel would be ideal for you? Why?

There is a lot of talk today about improved productivity among your employees. How do you measure employee engagement? Based on your experience, describe how you improved employee engagement in your last position.

Which industries do you feel can be more profitable in these economic times? Based on your research on our company, what do you feel may be the low-hanging fruit that you will examine first? *(Those questions may be asked in any economic time.)*

What are the sales and marketing roles of the executives in a company this size?

When do you decide to make changes in the sales and marketing leadership roles within your company? Have you changed direction in the past? Were you happy with the result? What did you learn?

When you begin to lead a new company, what legal reports do you want to see first? Have you ever been surprised to find legal problems in a new company? Describe that experience. What did you learn from that experience?

What do you feel is the role of continuous improvement in our industry? Do you feel this company will benefit by instituting a formal continuous improvement program? What pushback do you expect from the current staff?

What do you feel are your best leadership skills? Why? Of those skills, which do you feel will serve you best in this position?

What skills will you need to improve while in this position? What process will you use to improve those skills?

When you are interviewing new members for your team, what do you feel is more important — skill or fit? Why?

How highly do you value human resources in your company? Does your human resource leader meet with your board?

What contribution to the company do you expect from your human resource leadership? Why? Does your current human resource department make that contribution? Why/why not?

What will former executive team members say about their experience working with you? Why?

In what areas do you feel they may suggest you need additional coaching? Why?

What do you feel is the hallmark of your success so far? Why? (*Great time for a story!*)

Obviously, these are general questions that may be asked. You will hear more specific questions based on the needs of the company. The purpose of this list of questions is to help you think about the interview ahead of time.

Professional and Sales Level Questions

Tell me about your experience. (*This question may also be posed as, “Tell me about your experience.” This is a great time to use your “Here I Am!” speech that you created in Chapter 2.*)

What was your last salary? What are you seeking? (*Essentially, both are the same question — trying to determine where you fit within their salary ranges. Remember your salary negotiation script in Chapter 10? This is an appropriate time to use it.*)

What training have you received from your current employer?

What training have you done on your own? (*Looking to see if you are passionate about what you do.*)

What professional association(s) do you belong to? Does your company pay the dues or do you pay them? (*If you only will belong to an association if your employer pays the dues, how serious are you about your profession?*)

Why are you interested in changing jobs at this time?

What do you like about your current position?

What annoys you at your current company? (*Be careful with your response to this question.*)

Have you ever had a confrontation with a co-worker? Describe the situation. What were your actions? How was the situation resolved?

Typically, at what level of management do you interact?

How do you establish/maintain strong working relationships with company management?

How do you establish/maintain strong working relationships with your peers?

What do you find most helpful in a manager? Least helpful? *(The interviewer should know the style of management of the hiring manager. If your work style and your new manager's work style clash, it will be a poor match for both of you. Be honest.)*

Describe your idea of the best next job for you. *(Be honest. If you say what you feel the manager wants to hear, you may get a job you hate. It's better to know prior to an offer.)*

How does that fit within your long-term goals? *(Actually, they're trying to see if you set goals. Have you thought out where you want your career to head?)*

At what age did you begin to earn money for doing work? *(This could be babysitting or grass cutting.) Why? (Work ethic is established early. They are trying to determine your work ethic.)*

In your annual reviews, in what areas do you typically "Exceed Expectations"? Why?

In what areas do you typically fall short of expectations or only meet expectations? Why?

**For positions that require driving
(such as sales, consulting, construction or for-hire drivers)**

Do you have a valid driver's license with a clean driving record?

Have you ever had your driver's license suspended or revoked? Describe the situation. When was your license reinstated? *(It's best to respond honestly to this question. It's too easy to check during a background investigation. Many insurance companies will not allow employees to drive for business who have poor driving records.)*

Have you ever been convicted of a DUI?

For positions that require travel (consulting, sales, marketing, driving long distances, etc.)

Have you ever traveled more than 50 percent of the time?

Is there anything that would prevent you from traveling overnight more than 50 percent of the time?

What do you like about business travel?

What percentage of overnight travel is acceptable to you?

Technical types of questions (Obviously, a good manager will test your specific technical skills more strenuously!)

Describe your (data network/JD Edwards Development/Oracle applications/desktop support/web coordinator, software engineering, network engineering, etc.) experience.

What process do you use to troubleshoot technical problems? (*Looking for a step-by-step analysis.*)

What has been your biggest technical challenge? Describe the situation. What were your actions? What were the results? Why was this challenge different than other technical challenges?

What steps do you take to work with an internal client who is upset with the technology or the time to get a new system debugged?

What do you feel are your top five technical strengths with (specific technology)?

What technical skills do you feel you need to improve? How do you plan to improve those skills?

What training has your current employer given you?

Have you ever had to work with users spread out in different states?

How did you support the remote internal clients?

Describe your process to develop credibility with your users when you begin working in a new position or area.

Within your area of expertise, where do you experience the most stress? How do you handle that stress?

Currently, what percentage of your time is spent doing new development vs. maintenance of older systems?

If you are an applications developer, do you prefer SDLC methodology (Waterfall) or Agile methodology (Lean) for software development? Why?

Marketing Questions

Why do you enjoy marketing?

How do you feel sales and marketing feed off each other?

Do you feel it is helpful for a marketing professional to have sales experience? Do you have sales experience? Discuss your experience.

Discuss your brand-development experience.

Discuss your brand-development experience at the channel level.

Have you traveled to clients to learn how to help them make their sales goals with your product (pull-through selling)?

How do you bring value to your company's clients?

Describe your approach to potential clients.

Describe how you developed a marketing-support program.

Have you been a key contributor in the design and implementation of merchandising centers? Discuss one successful implementation.

Discuss your experience in the fulfillment center for the merchandising centers.

What are the key elements in a channel marketing program?

What tasks would you rather other people do in marketing?

Describe the skills and attributes of the perfect vice president of marketing to lead you.

What was your most successful marketing program? Why?

What marketing program do you feel made the largest positive sales gains? Why?

What marketing creative failed? Why? What did you learn? (Even Ford learned through the Edsel failure)

How do you track the success of marketing efforts?

Sales Questions

What was your total compensation? What was your base? What was your commission or bonus? *(Sales professionals are the one group where I feel compensation should be shared. In my 36 years of recruitment experience, a sales professional typically earns what they believe they can earn. Most sales professionals earn roughly the same amount year after year, adjusted for inflation, unless there has been some life/work-changing event.)*

What percentage of goal/quota/target have you made for each of the last four years?

What really turns you on about the sales profession?

What would you rather have someone else handle for you?

How has automation changed your tracking of sales metrics?

Discuss a recent difficult sale that you closed. Why was it unusual? How did you finally close the sale? Is the client currently happy?

How do you normally source for new clients? Describe a recent effort. What was successful? What sourcing effort would you have preferred to be more productive?

While you are conducting needs analysis for a potential client, when are you convinced your solution is the best available?

What do you feel was your best sale? Why?

Describe some of the closes that you have successfully used. Which close has consistently been the most successful?

How do you keep your sales techniques fresh?

What practices do you use to maintain a positive mental attitude?

Describe how you set your goals. For you, what elements are included in a goal?

When do you plan for the week ahead?

How do you plan your day? Week? Month?

How do you define pull-through sales?

Explain the difference between one-step and two-step distribution.

Have you had success in the conceptual sales world? Describe your success. How does conceptual sales differ from product sales?

How do you bring value to your clients?

Describe a creative way you have approached potential clients.

How do you track the success of your efforts in the early months of new business development?

Describe how you were creative in accommodating a difficult client.

What frustrates you? How do you show your frustration?

Project Manager Questions

What do you feel are your strongest project-management skills? How would previous managers describe your project-management skills?

How will your current manager describe your organizational skills?

Many times, to get our jobs done, we are dependent upon others to do their jobs. Give me an example of a time when one of your peers did not have the same priorities as you and was not doing their part. How did you handle that situation? What was the result?

What tool(s) do you use to track project progress?

How do you assign priorities when you are responsible for several projects?

Describe your most difficult project-management assignment. What did you learn from that experience? Have you dealt with a similar experience since?

How do you measure the success of a project? *(They are looking for on-time and/or under-budget project that meets requirements.)*

Accounting/Audit Questions

What area of accounting is your strength?

Why do you enjoy the accounting profession? (*Looking for impacts that can be made.*)

Discuss your experience with managerial accounting analysis and reporting.

How strong are your spreadsheet skills? Can you set up a spreadsheet and massage data?

Tell me your experience with standard costs/general ledger/accounts receivable or payable/payroll.

Have you been responsible for manufacturing cost analysis?

Have you been responsible for providing insight for areas of underperformance?

Have you provided sales pricing support for products or services?

Do you have an annual continuous improvement process for standards, inventory and reporting?

Do you have experience with reclaim valuation?

Are you comfortable working and interacting with senior management?

Give an example of a time when you had to convey negative news to senior management. How did you handle negative news to minimize defensiveness and arrive at the best way to remediate?

Describe your group's audit process.

In your current company, how long was your average audit in terms of days/weeks/months?

What percentage of your time is spent in compliance audits, financial audits, operational audits and systems audits?

What audit engagement taught you a valuable lesson? What was the challenge? What was your response? What was the result? What did you learn?

Construction Questions

Have you worked on any infrastructure or commercial or industrial construction sites? What were your responsibilities?

Do you have current safety certifications? Which certifications are current?

What reporting responsibility did you have on a construction site?

Have you ever worked on a wind farm or other renewable-energy construction site? If so, discuss your experience.

What situation best describes your problem-solving skills on a construction site? How was it received by management and other contractors?

How do you initiate and manage change on a construction site?

When you spot work habits that are unsafe, how do you handle the situation?

Describe a situation that was getting out of hand on a construction site. How did you handle it?

How do you convince the person who manages you that you have a better way of doing something? Describe a situation when you used that solution.

What do you feel are your construction management strengths?

What situation best demonstrates your leadership skills on a construction site?

What was the most unusual construction situation that you faced? How did you handle it?

How do you prepare yourself prior to starting on a new construction site? Have you performed safety audits and, as a result, developed new safety programs or policies?

What do you feel you need to learn to be more credible with subcontractors on the construction site? How do you plan to improve those skills?

Human Resource Questions

Describe your experience working in a human resource department.

Typically, what was your most difficult task in human resources? Why?

Describe what you feel are the elements of a human resource business partner. What experience do you need to be a successful business partner? What are you doing to improve those skills?

What training has your company given you to improve your human resource skills?

What human resource training have you sought and paid for on your own?

Do you belong to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)? Does your company pay for your membership? (*Trying to gauge your passion for your profession.*)

What is your process to entertain new ideas to improve human resource processes?

Tell me about a challenging employee issue that you had to handle. Discuss what was the challenge? What was your response? What was the result? What did you learn?

Discuss a manager who was difficult regarding an issue. What was the challenge? What was your response? What was the result? What did you learn?

Describe the worst employee-relations issue that you had to handle. What was the result? Do you feel you handled it in the best possible way? What did you learn?

Discuss your human resource strategy development process for this year. What areas needed process improvement?

Discuss a time when you needed to sell senior managers on a new, more expensive (initially) program to improve the business.

Professionally, what would you do a different way if you were given an opportunity to do so? Why?

Discuss a benefits program you introduced that was praised by the employees and saved your company money?

How do you measure employee engagement? How have you improved employee engagement at your current employer?

What element do you feel was most effective in increasing employee engagement?

How did you measure the increase in employee engagement? Who suggested those metrics?

What is your experience in talent acquisition/recruitment? Discuss a situation in which you attracted an impact performer and saved your employer money in the process? *(There are many differing metrics being used here, including integrity.)*

What was your most creative way to source and hire an important employee? How did you decide to employ that process?

In detail, describe the different processes involved in the successful recruitment process.

What applicant tracking/HRIS have you used? Which system do you feel is the best?

Have you successfully sourced candidates through the corporate applicant-tracking system? What do you like about your system? What do you dislike?

What recruitment marketing suggestions have you made for your corporate web site?

Discuss how you best utilize the talents of a third-party recruiter. What do you feel are the challenges of working with a third-party recruiter?

When did you last develop a Recruiting Strategy for the year? Did you complete the year on or over budget? Why?

When we do our reference check, how will the managers that you support describe their experience working with you? Why do you feel we will get that response?

What is your level of compensation analysis experience? Describe the projects that you have completed in this area.

In our reference check, how will your manager describe your strengths and areas of required improvement?