

Top Ten Tough Interview Questions for Experienced Workers

Regardless of your age, interviewing for a job is often challenging. Even mid-career and older workers who have had considerable experience interviewing employees, describe their own encounters as an applicant as “stressful and tedious”. But if you have prepared and practiced responding to possible tough questions, the interview process can be easier and more effective.

Here are the top ten tough interview questions that experienced workers often encounter - with several appropriate responses to each.

1. Tell me about yourself.

Lots of interview preparation is the best solution here. Know as much as you can about the job and the employer. Focus your responses on the match between your experience and what the employer needs. Resist the temptation to talk about experiences or traits unrelated to the specific job you're applying for.

2. How old are you?

Interviewers are not allowed to ask you this question. If the interviewer asks this question and does not hire you, he/she needs to prove that you were not selected because you lacked the qualifications and not because of your age.

If you really want this position and feel that the interviewer has no discriminatory intentions, do not react negatively to this question. You might say in a positive tone, “I have good experience that I believe will benefit this company.” Then, stress your skills and how you can get the job done. Mention your past success in working with people of all ages.

3. You appear to be overqualified for this position. Won't you get bored?

Explain why you want this job. Show why you want to work for this company. You can de-emphasize the length of your experience, or the higher level of your previous job. Stress the specific skills you have for this job. You can also prepare a brief sentence to explain why you want this level of responsibility now.

Possible answers: “You are an excellent company. You deserve excellence in employees.” “Experience is at a great premium today.” “There is a greater return on your money if I hit the ground running. Less training time.”

4. Will you be comfortable working for someone younger?

Some employers may be concerned that mid-life and older workers will be reluctant to accept younger people as managers and bosses. Age should not be a determining factor in leadership; both younger and older people are capable of leading and managing.

One response that can be very effective for dispelling this concern is: “When I get to the point where I can't learn from someone younger or older than I will stop working.” Realize that your age and life experience are benefits, not handicaps. Emphasize that you will be a responsible, mature and dedicated employee with a fully developed set of skills.

5. You haven't worked for a long time. Are you sure you can handle this job?

If you have gaps in your employment due to family responsibilities, an effective response might be, “I was out of the job market for a period of time raising my family. I gained valuable experience. The budgeting, organizing and planning I did as a homemaker are skills I can use on the job.”

Additionally, if you have gained experience through volunteer activities, this would be an appropriate time to highlight such exposure. Memorize one phrase or short sentence to explain your situation. Then emphasize the experience you've gained.

6. How is your health?

If employers ask this question, they probably want to know if you can perform the essential functions of the job.

If you have an obvious physical disability that might affect your ability to do the particular job, you may wish to indicate how you manage the disability for top job performance. You can discuss any job accommodation that you will need. Examples are a filter on your computer screen for an eye disability or a special tool for an arthritis condition.

7. We don't have many employees here who are your age. Would that bother you?

Although law bars employers from considering a candidate's age in making any employment decision, it is possible you will be asked age-related questions in an interview, perhaps out of the interviewer's ignorance or perhaps to test your response.

Say something like, "I think workplace benefits when people of all ages contribute." Emphasize that you are still eager to learn and to improve, and it doesn't matter who helps you. The age of the people you work with is irrelevant. Be sure that you know your rights.

8. This company is on the fast track. Do you think that you can keep up?

"I have stayed on top of the industry and am computer literate." Consider hitting this question head-on by stating politely that you have not noticed any slowdown or stagnancy in attitude or energy. Again reinforce skills, classes/courses and upgrades you have had. You may need to mention this several times to overcome their doubt.

It's also a good idea to present an up-to-date appearance. Eyeglasses, clothes, or a haircut may need refreshing. Describe your technology skills. Express your willingness to learn and to take on new projects.

9. Have you done this work before? I don't see this job on your resume.

This can be a good place in the interview to ask which skills are most important for the job. Then, link your experiences to those skills, even if you've never done exactly this job before. Give specific examples of what you have done. Show how your past successes relate to this job. Don't apologize for having been unemployed, retired, a homemaker, or a volunteer. Speak positively about your experience. Use eye contact.

"I have accessed your website and have read all about your company." Then, draw some analogy to a previous area of expertise, and relate it to their company.

10. What are your salary requirements?

Try to postpone responding to this question until a job offer has been made. If asked, provide a salary range that you have found during your job research; by talking to people who work in the same field, reviewing industry journals and Internet sites.

If you don't have the range and the interviewer asks this question, ask the interviewer, "What salary range are you working with?" Chances are 50/50 that the interviewer will tell you. If he or she continues to press for an answer, say something like, "Although I am not sure what you are offering for this particular job, people who do this sort of job generally make between \$___ and \$___."

Myth: You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Reality: Studies show negligible loss of cognitive function of people under 70. While older workers take longer to absorb completely new material, their better study attitudes and accumulated experience lower training costs. The fastest growing group of Internet users is people over 50.