Articles & Advice

Answer Key Interview Questions Like a Pro
By Robin Ryan, Author of "60 Seconds and You're Hired"

"We would like you to come in for an interview" are the wonderful words every job hunter longs to hear. All that stands in the way of your new job is acing the interview and handling the questions like a pro. Long, babbling answers or monosyllabic replies aren't effective.

There are four key components to successfully answering interview questions:

- Advance preparation
- Giving short, concise, specific answers that never exceed 60 seconds
- Demonstrating ability to perform the job
- Exhibiting the ideal worker personality traits

Whenever possible, give a specific example of how you've operated in the past. Employers want assurance you'll be able to do the job. Keep in mind that the ideal worker is productive, gets results, and has a success-oriented, "can-do" attitude. Plus, he or she is eager to learn, flexible and adaptable. Match these characteristics with some key answers and you are surely going to be a standout among the competition.

Practice answers in advance. To get you started, here are the key questions you'll likely be asked with appropriate answers.

Tell me about yourself.

Forget your life story. Open the interview by using what I call your "60-Second Sell" -- a customized, memorized statement that summarizes and links together your five top selling points, skills, experience and strengths into a one-minute verbal business card.

Other potential inquiries that this answer is perfect for include:

- What are your strengths?
- What makes you think you are qualified for this job?
- What makes you think you will succeed in this position?
- Why do you want this job? Why should I hire you?
- Why did you leave your last job, or want to leave your current job?

Wanting more challenge or growth opportunities, relocation, layoffs, reorganization or downsizing are all acceptable reasons to depart. An effective answer might be, "The company went through a downsizing, that's why I'm available." Or, "My current employer is small and I've gone as far as I can with their organization. I'm looking for a challenge that will really use my abilities and strengths, allowing me to continue to grow and make a larger contribution."
What is your greatest weakness?

A little humor, such as "Don't ask me to repair the copier... ha-ha-ha," is definitely OK. Point out something that will have no negative impact on the hiring decision, and stress a needed skill. For example, if the position requires excellent computer skills using Office software, you might offer this response: "I have excellent computer user skills. I know Excel and Word inside and out, but I am pretty weak at actual programming and would need more training if you need customized programming..." The employer isn't asking for the candidate to program but this answer reinforces a major selling point -- computer usage skills.

I'm a little worried about your lack of...

If the employer is unaware of your experience, then it's easy to give an answer using a specific example demonstrating that skill. If they are concerned about a skill you do lack, but are eager to learn, try "I have excellent customer services skills, but you are right, I have not been a salesperson. I do know the key to success is the ability to build good client relationships, persistence, efficient time management and good follow-up skills, all of which I have. I have read numerous books on selling, and I intend to take seminars at my own expense to learn everything I can. I am a hard worker who lets rejection roll off my back. My goals include landing a sales job and then becoming one of the top sales people in my company. I've set a three year date to achieve this goal and I am determined to succeed."

You have a lot of experience. Why would you want this job?

Desperately needing any job isn't going to score points with the interviewer. The employer worries you won't stay, are burnt-out, looking for an easy paycheck, or worse, you'll go after the boss's job once you come on board. The best strategy is to not oversell your abilities. Stress why this job fits for you now, that you seek a job with less travel, or that you wish to utilize a specific skill such as training or design. Be careful not to say you want an easy, no-stress job, causing the employer seek a more eager worker.

Robin Ryan has appeared on the Dr. Phil Show, Oprah, NBC Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, CNN, CNBC and is considered America's top career coach. She is the best-selling author of: "60 Seconds & You're Hired!;" "Winning Resumés;" "Winning Cover Letters" and "What to Do with the Rest of Your Life." She's the creator of the highly acclaimed audio training program Interview Advantage and The DreamMaker. To purchase her books and audio training programs go to http://www.robinryan.com. Sign up here for Robin Ryan's eNewsletter.

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