



Next Job Now

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

A promotional banner for Next Job Now. It features the company logo on the left and the text 'Next Job Now' on the right. The main text reads 'FREE interview coaching videos' in large white letters. Below this, a smaller line of text says 'Click here to see live videos online right now. Don't miss the "Knife Throwing" job interview video.' At the bottom left, it provides the phone number '1300 112 114' and the website 'www.nextjobnow.com.au'. The background of the banner is a collage of military-related images, including soldiers, a tank, and a helicopter.

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Sample questions and answers

The sample questions and answers on the following pages are by no means exhaustive. They do, however, cover many of the key topics that are likely to crop up in interviews go into some depth on the rationale behind each question being asked.

The suggested answers to common interview questions cover themes that employers will generally expect to hear about from successful people. Use these themes to script answers in a way that suits your personal interview style.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Question: **Tell me about yourself.**

Rationale: **We'd like you to get the ball rolling today.**

Answer: Most candidates use this very rare opportunity to talk about minor administrative details in their life. For example, they say "I'm 35, married with 2 kids and grew up in a small town by the sea..." etc.

Stand out during the interview by using this opportunity to further your agenda. Talk about qualities the employer wants in the role and hit on themes you know will be of value. For example:

"Bob, over the years I've been privileged to work with some great companies and some very talented people. My 15 years of financial services experience has presented challenges that allowed me to develop strong leadership, banking and project management skills. As far as my strengths go, I'm a balanced entrepreneur who is great with people and loves selling the vision. Now I'm looking for a new challenge to make the most of these skills and strengths."

Question: **Why do you want to leave ABC?**

Rationale: **Are you running away from anything?**

Answer: Focus on themes that suggest you like it where you are, but you need that 'something' more. Perhaps you need scope to build bigger things, or you want to add a new skill/industry to your career portfolio, or you just want scope to be more creative.

Question: **What's it like at ABC Company?**



Rationale: Can you do the job?

Answer: Give an answer those talks about opportunities to make key contributions and work with talented people. Talk about major projects and other key activities. Don't oversell here, or the interviewer will wonder why you want to leave.

Question: How would you describe your management style?

Rationale: Will others be able to get along with you?

Answer: The 'firm, fair and friendly' routine is best. Employers want to know that you will be approachable and likeable, but that you will demand results when the chips are down. Make sure to mention the importance of involving team members in management processes, since shared ownership of decisions promotes success.

Question: Describe the worst boss you have ever worked for.

Rationale: Will you get on with our bosses?

Answer: Give answers that suggest you have never worked for a boss who was truly bad or had no redeeming qualities. It's okay to share that you did once work for a boss who had some unlawful or socially unacceptable practice (e.g. Was sexist or condoned dangerous initiation practices).

Question: Describe the best boss you ever worked for

Rationale: Do you learn from and respect your bosses?

Answer: Suggest that you have worked for several exceptional bosses (if that is the case). Explain why particular bosses were notable and give examples of what you learned from them (skills that will be valuable to the interviewer of course).

Question: What have you enjoyed most in previous jobs?

Rationale: Will you enjoy the kind of work being offered?

Answer: Be honest...you want to know if the daily duties of the new position are enjoyable. Talk about work tasks you've enjoyed doing in the past that will likely be expected in the new role (which means you must always ask for a job description before the interview). Good answers include talking



about enjoying accountability, working with people and learning from them.

Question: **What remuneration do you expect should you be successful?**

Rationale: **Are you money motivated?**

Answer: Unless you are going for a sales role, it's best not to come across as money motivated. Don't discuss money unless and until it's absolutely necessary – after they really want you.

If asked about money, explain that your decision to apply for the position is not motivated by money - it's about finding the right challenge (challenge, opportunity and lifestyle are also elements of any good remuneration package). Finish with the comment that "of course, any move would need to make sense for me financially".

If you have to talk money, explain that you'd really have to find out more about the job responsibilities before you could attach a price tag. Then ask, "can you tell me the range you have in mind for the position." If that fails, it's got to the point where you need to give a dollar range.

Question: **What did your supervisor criticise in your last evaluation?**

Rationale: **Can you handle criticism?**

Answer: Offer a few common weaknesses that have no real impact on performance. Make sure to add that you worked hard to overcome the issue and have put it behind you. Finish by saying that you are always trying to improve yourself and that you are always thankful for advice that helps you do so.

"My supervisor said I was doing well and that I should look to the future by broadening my influencing skills upward and across to position myself for a future promotion."

Question: **Tell me about a time you were under a great deal of pressure.**

Rationale: **How effectively do you work under pressure?**

Answer: Discuss occasions when you handled complex, dangerous or contentious matters. Highlight a logical approach to the solution and ensure you focus on timely decision-making. Reinforce the fact that you stayed calm and paused to consider all information available within time limits. Offer that you multi-tasked effectively and managed at the right



level (not too much and not too little).

Question: **What are your strengths?**

Rationale: **Will you fit in here and will you add value?**

Answer: Be prepared to discuss lots of strengths. Rattle them off at the beginning and then hone in on a few. Remember though, the more strengths you have, the more weaknesses you also need to present. Select strengths that will add value to the employer and try to phrase them in an unusual way, eg:

- Balanced entrepreneur
- Good with people
- Innovative communicator

You might like to mention 3 key strengths and then tell a brief story about how they added value in your old job, e.g.:

“Tom, three of my strongest skills are communication, people management and problem solving. If I may tell you about one of my responsibilities that required all three skills”:

“At Sales Company, I assumed the responsibility of streamlining casual labour management (worth \$2.3m pa). I had to liaise with many parties who had differing interests and solve a myriad of problems associated with the old system of labour provision. I overcame the problems by creating a labour management database and fostering a strong relationship between the Company, casual staff and the labour provider. At the end of the day, we saved \$400,000 and absenteeism was substantially decreased”.

Question: **What are your weaknesses?**

Rationale: **Do you have any unacceptable weaknesses?**

Answer: Any candidate worth their salt is open about having lots of weaknesses, but quick to add that they have many more strengths to offset them, and also to add that they have worked hard and overcome weaknesses. You may wish to discuss non-critical weaknesses eg:

“I am very energetic and expect a great deal of my people. However, I have learned that motivation is an individual matter, and I am regarded as a demanding but very fair boss.”



OR

"Maybe sometimes I hang onto low performers just a little too long, training them and trying to turn them around...when perhaps I should cut them loose just a little bit sooner."

OR

"I have high standards and won't settle for the status quo."

Question: **What will your referees say your strengths and weaknesses are?**

Rationale: **Are you being honest about your strengths and weaknesses?**

Answer: Any doubt you have about whether your referee will back up your assertions as to your performance will be obvious to the interviewer, so be sure to answer in a confident manner with pausing for too long. Simply say "I'm confident my references will be along the same lines as we've discussed today."

It is impossible to know exactly what a referee will say, so don't try to guess or it may seem staged. Stick with a general acknowledgement that you're confident your referee's will back up what's been discussed.

Question: **What is your greatest achievement?**

Rationale: **Are you a high performer and a self-starter?**

Answer: You need to show that colleagues respect your professionalism and that you can get along with them at a work level and social level to some extent, e.g.:

"My colleagues would say that I am a team player and that they don't know where I find the time to do the things that I do in a day. My close colleagues would say that I am always willing to make personal sacrifices to help them."

Question: **What would your colleagues say of you?**

Rationale: **Do you walk over others to get what you want?**

Answer: You need to show that colleagues respect your professionalism and that you can get along with them at a work level and social level to some extent, e.g.:



“My colleagues would say that I am a team player and that they don’t know where I find the time to do the things that I do in a day. My close colleagues would say that I am always willing to make personal sacrifices to help them.”

Question: **Can we check your references?**

Rationale: **Do you have anything to hide?**

Answer: It’s almost certain that the employer will check references. The more dubiously you answer this question, the more certain you can be that they will. There is only one answer to this question – an emphatic “of course”.

One variation on this question is to ask “what would Mr. X (your superior/ peer/subordinate) say about you if we contacted him?” This is known as the Threat of Record Check (TORC). Interviewers who use TORC does not always follow up references extensively.

Question: **What makes you stand out amongst your peers?**

Rationale: **Why should I hire you instead of another candidate?**

Answer: Good people know their own value and are able to communicate it modestly. Frankly, if you can’t point out your uniqueness and value as a corporate asset then you don’t deserve the job. This is the single most important question of the interview, and if the interviewer doesn’t ask it, you still need to get the message across, e.g.:

“I have a record of assuming responsibilities beyond those expected of my position, and of getting the job done well.”

Question: **Where do you see yourself in 5 years?**

Rationale: **Are you suitably ambitious but not overly so?**

Answer: An employer wants to know that you’ll try hard, so they want to hear that you will strive to do your best and see where it takes you. Keep answers general and angle toward suggesting that in 5 years you’d hope to “be in a role with broadened responsibilities”. You might also say “perhaps you could tell me about opportunities that may be opened to me.”



Question: How many hours a week do you work to get the job done?

Rationale: Will you leave early or can we work you to death?

Answer: It's important that the employer knows you will work until the job is done (within reason). At the same time, you want them to know that you lead a balanced life and that family is an important consideration, eg:

"Tom, hours worked aren't a great concern for me. When there's a need, I'll work until I've done what needs to be done. At the same time, I'm a family person and I believe that the best results at work are achieved when there is balance in your life."

Question: What kind of mentoring and training style do you have?

Rationale: Will you be a dictator or an inspirational leader?

Answer: Modern business places a lot of emphasis on growing its own leaders within the company. Growing leaders requires good coaching and mentoring skills. Thus, the interviewer will want to know that you believe in motivating others rather than directing them, and that you view training as a lifelong process.

Tell the interviewer that different situations require different leadership styles and you always try to choose what's best for any given circumstances. You should add that it's okay for staff to make mistakes, as long as they learn from them.

Question: How much direction and feedback do you need to excel?

Rationale: Will you need to be micro-managed?

Answer: You may suggest that you need to know the underlying objective of the task so that you can tailor your efforts appropriately, adding that you don't require interim feedback, though it is always welcome.

Question: Describe a situation where you managed a problem subordinate

Rationale: How do you deal with under-achievers and problematic staff?

Answer: Businesses don't want to carry any dead wood, but they don't want to demoralise staff by unnecessarily sacking personnel either. When faced with this question, explain that you would consult with the staff member to ascertain the real cause of the problem.



You might suggest that a development plan would be required and that performance be measured regularly. If objectives were not met, the staff member may have strengths that could be used elsewhere. If not, the staff member would need to be moved on if reasonable efforts at coaching and training failed.

Question: **How do you manage high-achievers?**

Rationale: **Will talented staff want to work for you and can you manage them?**

Answer: The interviewer will want to know that you can retain and develop talented staff. High-achievers can be difficult to manage and can cause turmoil as they drive the pace of change.

Explain to the interviewer that it's important to let talented staff have enough room to innovate and build, but that it's also important for them to work as part of a team and that team buy-in is an essential ingredient of success. This can be achieved by rewarding achievement and simultaneously encouraging teamwork.

Question: **What are your motivators and demotivators?**

Rationale: **What will it take to make you do the job?**

Answer: The interviewer wants to know what turns you on and what turns you off in a work sense. Be honest with your answers, otherwise you may end up with a job you hate.

You may be motivated by responsibility and entrepreneurial opportunity, or bureaucracy and untimely decisions may demotivate you. Whatever the case, your motivators should be present in the new job and the demotivators should be absent.

Question: **Are you a 'detail' person or a 'big picture' person? OR**

Rationale: **Are you a 'thinker' or a 'doer'.**

Answer: Balance is the key when answering this question. There are times when you must be a thinker and times when you must get your hands dirty. Don't fall for the age-old trap of choosing between these attributes. You must possess both.

Think back to our sample Value Proposition and you'll recall we talked about how to position yourself nicely around this theme. e.g.:



“Many companies I’ve talked to over the years look for strategic or operational thinkers. I’ve worked hard to develop all-round skills, and I’m a believer that you have to be more than just one or the other – you have to think on both levels at the same time...and you have to know when to get your hands dirty and lead by example.”

Question: **Are you more comfortable working with tangible, short-term issues or uncertain, long-term issues? Why?**

Rationale: **Can you live with ambiguity and uncertainty?**

Answer: The more senior the role, the more important it is that you can work with ambiguity. Tell the employer that it’s natural to prefer certainty whenever possible, but that you are equally comfortable operating in uncertain environments and that it’s a natural part of business. Add that you cope with uncertainty by making the best decision available on the information at the time. 90% now is better than 100% too late.

Question: **How do you stay abreast of what’s happening in the market and what competitors are doing?**

Rationale: **Do you maintain a good situational awareness?**

Answer: Present themes that suggest you stay abreast of market opportunities and competition by reading newspapers, watching the news, subscribing to industry journals and approaching competitors to keep in touch with what they are doing. You could also mention that you liaise with peers in other companies and regularly ask customers what is happening in the competitor space.

Question: **What do you know about our company**

Rationale: **Are we just another job opportunity to you?**

Answer: No employer wants to feel they are just another job opportunity. Make them feel special by identifying something you like about the company and be prepared to discuss it.

Don’t reel of lots of useless facts and details about the employer. Simply mention one or two significant points and talk about them in some depth to show you’ve done the research. Focus on the intangibles like values, culture, innovation, customer service etc.



This question can also pop up under the guise of “Who else have you applied to?”, in which case you might respond that you have researched a quite a few companies and applied to a handful that you believe offer opportunities that match your skills and provide a good working culture. Be prepared to name a few competitors worthy of note.

Question: **Is there anything else you want to tell us?**

Rationale: **Go ahead and have your say on anything we missed.**

Answer: This is probably the most valuable question you can ever be asked, because it opens the door for you to talk about any subject of your choosing. Don't squander it by rambling on about a myriad of different topics. Just pick one powerful theme and communicate a single message in a compelling way.

Since this question, is normally asked at the end of an interview, I recommend you use it as an opportunity to communicate your Value Proposition if you haven't already. It is also a good time to ask for the job.

Question: **Why have you changed jobs so often?**

Rationale: **Will you quit on us too?**

Answer: If you have changed jobs frequently then you'll need to alleviate the employer's fear factor by having a good excuse handy, such as:

- I was looking for something more entrepreneurial with a larger company backed by the resources to grow.
- My learning curve had flattened out.
- We relocated due to health reasons involving my spouse.
- It was only ever intended and agreed as an interim appointment.

You could also add that stability is very important for your next challenge and you'd like to spend a few years in the one role, possibly under contract if that would provide the company a greater sense of comfort around tenure.

Question: **Give an example of when you influenced others at work to take ownership of an idea.**

Rationale: **Can you win support for ideas?**



Answer: Employers will want you to talk about topics such as introducing ideas to the team, presenting information to sell the sizzle, building networks, using benefits to persuade an audience and influencing strategies.

Question: **Tell me about a time you took the initiative at work?**

Rationale: **Do you take the initiative?**

Answer: You'll need to convince the interviewer that you are a doer, not just a thinker. This means telling stories about times when you were proactive and generated ideas for improvement.

Themes to cover include seeing opportunities where others did not, pursuing self-improvement and solving problems when no one specifically asked you to do so.

Question: **Tell me about your biggest failure.**

Rationale: **Will you be open about failure and do you learn from mistakes?**

Answer: For the informed candidate, this question is far from being a trap...it is a wonderful opportunity. Many candidates respond by relating a tale of woe about something they did poorly and focusing on the downside that followed.

The savvy candidate realises that the employer is actually asking if they are a self-starter who takes the initiative. With initiative comes the risk of failure. People who take balanced risks occasionally fail, but more often than not they succeed. That's the kind of entrepreneurial spirit employers often look for.

Respond to this question by telling a very short story about a minor failure and then turn it into a story about how you took the initiative.

Question: **Tell me about a time a peer strongly disagreed with you. How did you handle it? What was the result?**

Rationale: **Are you a team player?**

Answer: Team players are people who build on the ideas of others. They put group goals ahead of individual goals, work in a cooperative manner and openly support team priorities. Most importantly, they assist other team members in getting where they need to go. Weave these elements of



teamwork into an anecdote about your background.

Question: Walk me through a big work problem you faced and solved recently.

Rationale: Can you solve problems effectively?

Answer: Effective problem resolution involves breaking problems down into solvable chunks, gathering relevant information, analysing issues, considering alternatives, evaluation pros and cons, making decisions, winning resources and informing others.

Question: What happens to people who are not successful under your leadership?

Rationale: How do you develop and coach staff?

Answer: A good coach removes barriers to performance, asks questions rather than tells, has honest conversations, provides opportunities, observes, shows by example, follows due process for under-performance and provides timely feedback.

Question: Tell me about a time you changed your stance on a work issue.

Rationale: How flexible are you?

Answer: Flexibility involves thinking on your feet, applying rules flexibly in changing circumstances, adapting your own strategies to include the ideas of others and adjusting to new responsibilities quickly.

Question: Tell me about a time you won your team's commitment for change?

Rationale: Can you inspire your team?

Answer: Leaders who are effective at winning team buy-in are people who listen, demonstrate empathy, ask for commitment, share thoughts and feelings, set the bar high and sell the vision on why it need to be reached. Most importantly, they are frequent and honest communicators.