

# Interview Tips & Tricks



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# Defining Key Concepts

A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. Sometimes interviewers who have read a management textbook or two may want to know whether you have the same level of insight into models and concepts as they do.

## How would you define team work?

In asking this question, the interviewers want to know whether you can put the needs of the team ahead of your own needs.

*I would define team work as the ability for a group of individuals working together to accomplish more than they could accomplish individually. In practical terms, this means that individuals must be willing to put the needs of the team above their own needs at times.*

Two common variations on this question are: *What makes for good team work?* and *How would you define co-operation?*



Be ready to give an example of a time you demonstrated good teamworking skills, as the interviewers can easily follow up this question by asking: *And can you tell us about a time when you demonstrated your teamworking skills?*



# *How have you changed in the last ten years?*

Employers want to hire people who open themselves to new experiences and adapt to change. Answer this question by giving a concrete example of how you have changed.



*I had a quick temper when I was younger. But as the years have gone by and I've moved into management, I've learnt to control my irritation and now I can take a much more dispassionate view of problems. By staying calm, I can think more clearly and weigh up the different options for handling the situation. I'm amazed by my previous anger levels, as I now realise that shouting and screaming are pointless when the most important thing is to sort the issue out.*



Focus on the positive ways in which you have changed rather than the negative!



Interviewers can easily ask about any time frame. So be ready to tailor your response should the interviewers ask you how you have changed over – for example – five, a dozen, or twenty years.

# Give me an example of how you have developed yourself

When outlining ways that you've developed yourself, make sure to indicate that you were aware of a development need and then took steps to meet that need. For example, simply talking about courses that your manager insisted you go on doesn't show your own personal enthusiasm for professional development!



✓ *In my last performance evaluation, my manager suggested that I needed to become more familiar with the basics of employment law to add more value to the line managers that I support. So I researched appropriate courses and how much they cost. I made a proposal to my manager and he signed off for me to attend a two-day workshop on the topic back in November. Since then, I've become much more comfortable discussing with line managers the rules and potential problems associated with hiring and firing decisions.*

✓ *I've worked quite hard on developing my sales skills. I've always had good customer skills, but until recently had never had to sell to customers. When I first started working in my current job, I didn't really understand that we would have sales targets to reach and I struggled to achieve them. So I watched some of the good sales assistants and tried to pick up on some of the techniques and phrases they used. Over the last year or so, I have been working hard at improving my sales skills and I've been meeting my targets for the last three months.*



Don't forget to talk in the first person when describing what happened. Use phrases such as *I did . . .* or *I decided to . . .* rather than *My manager told me to . . .*



Mention a development need that arose in your last appraisal. Alternatively, think about the skill areas where you used to be – but are no longer – weak.

# *You have a gap in your CV – what did you do in that time?*

Answer this question by focusing on the positive ways in which you spent your time. Perhaps you took time out to travel, do a course, or pick up a new skill. Maybe you were nursing a sick family member back to health. Or you may have been spending a lot of time researching a new career and looking for a new job.

✓ *When I was made redundant, I saw it as an opportunity to take some time out. I took three months off to travel through South America. And then I spent another two months renovating the old house that we bought but have never had the time to do up. Having taken this career break, I'm now completely refreshed and ready to return to full-time employment.*

✓ *Unfortunately my partner became ill. The doctor said that my partner would need full time care. And because I wasn't willing to consider a care home, I decided to provide the care myself. My last employer wasn't willing to hold my position open indefinitely so I had to quit. Thankfully, my partner is now on the mend so I can think about returning to work and frankly I'm looking forward to it.*



Whatever you plan to say, convince the employers that you weren't merely sitting around watching daytime telly!



## *Why did you choose to go to the university you went to?*

The candidates who give the best answers to this question are likely to mention that they did careful and thorough research on the reputation of the particular department and the subsequent employability of graduates leaving that course. A lot of graduates also talk about the importance of having good facilities and physical resources such as libraries and laboratories.

*Having done biology, history, and maths at school, I knew that I wanted to read psychology so I researched the top departments in the country. However, I decided that I wanted a four-year course that offered an industry placement, as I felt that having a year's practical work experience would put me in a much stronger position than graduates who had spent three years studying theory without experiencing its application.*



# *Tell me about a significant project that you managed*

When asked about a significant project that you've managed, be aware that the interviewers are not only interested in what the project was, but also in how you organised it and made it happen. In answering this question, make sure that you tell the interviewers how you planned the project and then subsequently delivered it.



Have a personal example to talk about. Be ready to talk about when you managed a project, what the project was, why you were given the piece of work initially, and what actions you took in order to make it a success.

## *Now give me an example of a project that went wrong*

In an interview, be ready to talk about projects that didn't turn out so well, along with those that did. Whenever you tell an interviewer about a situation that you handled well – such as in answering 'Tell me about a significant project that you managed' (see the preceding section) – you may also get asked about a situation that didn't work out so well.



Talking about failure is okay as long as you can show that you did everything in your power to attempt to deal with a situation, but that it failed because of circumstances out of your control.



Make sure that you can explain any lessons that you learned from a project or piece of work that went wrong.

# *Give me an example of a difficult decision that you have made*

Be ready to talk about a difficult decision you've had to make and why it was difficult. For example, was the decision tough because you had to deal with many sources of information and the right choice was unclear? Or was the decision tricky because of the emotional impact or consequences on yourself or other people? This example demonstrates what I mean:



Interviewers are much more interested in work decisions than personal ones. Avoid talking about personal decisions such as whether to move house, start a family, or get divorced.



Interviewers like to hear about any analytical techniques you used or even just brainstorming ideas weighing up pros and cons.

**Up NEXT:  
How to deal with  
difficult and  
unexpected situations**



# Dealing with Panel Interviews

In a panel interview, you may find yourself confronted with a row of up to eight or ten interviewers. Panel interviews are particularly popular in the public sector and for more senior roles.

To pass panel interviews with flying colours, follow these tips:

✓ Follow the lead of the interviewers. If faced with many interviewers, you may not be offered the chance to shake hands and say hello to each of them. In some cases, not all the interviewers even introduce themselves.

✓ Maintain eye contact mainly with the person on the panel who asks you each question. Do look occasionally at the other panel members when answering the question, but for the most part maintain eye contact with the person who actually asked you it.

✓ Don't let yourself be put off by a panel. The questions fly at you from all corners, but take your time to answer each at your own pace.



# *Handling video conferencing and Webcams with finesse*

Video conferencing tends to be restricted to high-level appointments, but a growing number of employers are exploiting Webcam technology to conduct first interviews over the Internet.

Follow this advice to help your hi-tech interview run smoothly:

- ✓ Dress smartly.
- ✓ Avoid wearing too much white (beware screen glare!).
- ✓ Check your Webcam settings.
- ✓ Speak more slowly than normal (watch out for time lags).
- ✓ Avoid using hand gestures (they blur on screen).



If you experience any technical problems – such as not being able to see or hear the interviewers clearly – speak up immediately! Don't expect the problem to go away of its own accord.



**Can you think of any questions you might have for an interviewer?**





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**Any  
questions?**

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