

INTERVIEWING

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The interview is the single most important step in the job search process, and thorough preparation is essential. To interview effectively you need to know what you have to offer, what the employer is like, and the kind of position you want. Being able to answer questions with relevant details and in a conversational manner is very important.

First Impressions

It is always important to make a good impression on the interviewer. Arrive at least 10 minutes early for the interview. Look polished: Dress professionally, avoid perfume or cologne, and wear only simple jewelry. Most importantly, look confident: Give a firm handshake, make good eye contact, and smile!

The Purpose of an Interview

Employers are trying to get enough information about your background, strengths, and level of interest to determine if you meet their needs. As a prospective employee, you need to be learning as much as you can about the position and workplace so you can decide if they are what you want.

Interviewers have three major criteria in mind when interviewing candidates: 1) Can you do the job? 2) Will you do the job? and 3) Are you a good fit with the organization? As such, they will be asking a variety of questions to determine if

you match their needs. There are many types of interview styles or formats. Described below are some of the most common. You may encounter any or all of these, sometimes all in the same interview.

Traditional Interview Questions

Traditionally employers have asked questions designed to help them gain a feel for who you are and what makes you unique: your motivation level, your background and strong points, your interest in the position, and the aspects of your personality that may affect how you perform on the job, such as organization, interpersonal skills, decision-making, teamwork, etc. The questions asked might be seeking expansion of information presented on your resume, or focus on the qualities and skills that you can bring to the table.

Sample Questions:

- Tell me about yourself.
 - Keep your answer to one or two minutes, don't ramble.
 - Give a short version of your resume—general goals, skills and background.
- Why are you interested in our organization? What interests you about this job?

- Project an informed interest, know products, size, income, reputation, people, history, etc.
- Talk about their needs, how you can make a contribution to the company goals.

More Questions:

- Of the courses you have had at college, which courses have you enjoyed the most? Why?
- What is your GPA? How do you feel about it? Does it reflect your abilities?
- Since attending college, what is the toughest decision that you have had to make?
- What have the experiences on your resume taught you about managing and working with people?
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- What can you contribute to this company?
- If I asked the people who know you well to describe you, what three words would they use?
- Describe the type of manager you prefer.
- What type of work environment appeals to you most?
- What important trends do you see in our industry?

INTERVIEW ADVICE

Career Services offers a variety of services to help students and alumni prepare for interviews.

Interview Seminars

These seminars are offered on many Wednesdays throughout each semester. No sign-up is required. See the schedule on the insert pages.

Mock Interview Program

Career Services provides scheduled, one-hour appointments during which you can practice interviews. The purpose of this practice session is to help you learn what to expect from real interviews and improve the way you present yourself. The videotaped interview is replayed for visual feedback. In addition, the interviewer will provide you with a constructive verbal evaluation. Call or stop by to schedule an appointment.

Intake Counselor Advice

Discuss your questions about interviewing with an intake counselor. Counselors are available weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. in 112 MBNA Career Services Center. If other students arrive ahead of you, you may need to wait from 15-30 minutes.

Interview Videotape

View videotapes discussing proper interview techniques. The tapes are available between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. weekdays in the Career Library, 115 MBNA Career Services Center.

- We are looking at a lot of great candidates; why are you the best person for this position?

Behavioral Interview Questions

Based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to examine past behavior, behavioral interviewing is now widespread among recruiters. The technique involves asking a series of questions designed to get the candidate to talk about how he or she handled certain situations in the past. Interviewers

feel that they can make more accurate hiring decisions by focusing on an applicant's past actions and behaviors, rather than subjective impressions of a candidate's self-proclaimed qualities.

Here's how it goes: Typically, the interviewer will have determined several behavioral characteristics that would be most important for on-the-job success and will base questions on the characteristics identified. You will be asked to share situations in which you may or may not have exhibited these behaviors. You won't be able to theorize or generalize about events, rather, you will be asked to provide details. The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas identified by the interviewer, rather than on areas that you may feel are important.

Sample Questions:

- Describe a major problem you have faced and how you dealt with it.
- Give an example of when you had to work with a group to accomplish a task or project. What was your role in that group? How did you ensure that all members were involved?
- What class did you like the most? What did you like about it?

Sample Question and Answer:

- Tell me about a time when you were on a team, and one of the members wasn't carrying his or her weight. How did you address the situation and what was the outcome?

"I was assigned to a team for a business class project. One of our team members wasn't showing up for our work sessions or doing her assignments. I finally met with her in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. She told me that she was preoccupied with another class that she wasn't doing to well in, so I found someone to help her with the other course. She not only was able to spend more time on our project, but she was also grateful to me for helping her out. We finished our project on time, and got a "B" on it."

Follow-up questions will test for consistency and determine if you exhibited the desired behavior in that situation: Can you give me an example? What did you do? What did you say? What were you

thinking? How did you feel? What was your role? What was the result?

You will notice an absence of such inquiries as, Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses.

How to Prepare for Behavioral Interview Questions:

- Think of recent situations that demonstrate some of the most commonly sought after behaviors, especially leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation; remember STAR
 - S—Describe the Situation.
 - T—What Task(s) did you identify that had to be completed?
 - A—What Action did you take?
 - R—What was the Result of your actions?
- Be honest. Don't exaggerate or omit any part of the story.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

One of the supposed benefits of this technique for employers is that candidates cannot prepare for these questions in advance. However, you can help yourself by anticipating the types of questions you might receive and dredging your memory for examples of past behavior. You may be able to guess at some of the questions by analyzing the job requirements beforehand.

Case Interview Questions

Another common interview format, especially for consulting firms, is the case interview. It is also probably one of the most difficult and feared formats around. In it, you'll be asked to analyze a hypothetical business problem and come up with solutions on the spot. Case interview questions are designed to test your ability to think analytically under stress, with incomplete information.

Every case interview problem presented is trying to judge all or some of the following:

- How do you go about arriving at a solution? Identifying key concepts, processing thoughts in an orderly manner, separating important facts

from irrelevant facts, are all factors that illustrate your thought process.

- To what degree do you have insight and knowledge of relevant issues in a business problem scenario? Some examples: competitive threats, barriers to entry, competitive advantages, target marketing, pricing strategies, etc. Your goal is to recognize which type of business analysis is appropriate for the specific case(s) presented.
- Can you handle basic quantitative analysis? It's just arithmetic, but you better know it. Quick, if you have 10% margins on a \$15 widget that you're selling, and you sell 4,000 units, what is your profit?
- Are you creative? Can you come up with a new approach to a problem, find a hurdle that nobody else had noticed, offer an insightful remark?
- Do you possess the communication skills to sell your ideas, answer to criticism about your ideas, or train users on the result of your ideas?

Some Helpful Hints:

- Listen carefully to the material presented. Take notes if you want to, and be sure to ask questions if you are unsure about details.
- Take your time. If you need a minute or two to collect your thoughts and work through your answer, say so.
- Offer a general statement or framework up front to serve as an outline for your answer. As you proceed with your answer, draw on the outline of your framework.
- Focus on key, broad issues first.
- Orient your answer toward action. Suggest specific steps that can be taken to solve a problem, not just theory.
- Be conscious of resources. If it relates to the problem, ask your interviewer about the budget, capital, and other resources that the client can allocate to the solution.

To do well, you need to enjoy the intellectual challenge of analyzing tough problems and coming up with reasonable solutions.

Do research on *yourself*, first. Know what kind of job you want and what makes you feel qualified.

How Can I Best Prepare?

Do research on yourself, first. Know what kind of job you want and what makes you feel qualified. Think about what information you want to include in your responses. Don't go in "cold" and expect to do well, but don't memorize, either.

Do research on the employer. First get the basics, including the company's size, location(s), product(s), or service(s). Then look for details relevant to the position you seek: job description, training, advancement paths, etc. You may need to look several places to get this information, including:

1. The Employment Services room housing company binders (114 MBNA Career Services Center).
2. Company home pages on the World Wide Web, many of which can be found from links on Career Services' homepage through OCR.
3. References in the third floor of the Paterno Library such as *Standard and Poor's*, *Dun and Bradstreet's*, *Moody's Manual*, and state manufacturing directories or other types of directories.
4. Contacting the local chamber of commerce or the company's public relations or personnel department.
5. Talking with someone in the company or agency in the type of position of interest to you.

Use Career Services. Take advantage of the variety of free services:

1. Interview skills seminars, one class period, repeated often during much of the semester. No sign-up is required. The location and times are printed in the Career Guide and posted at Career Services.
2. Meet with a career counselor, a chance to discuss your fears, experiences, and questions.
3. You can also practice, using Career Services Mock Interview Program. Through this program you can par-

ticipate in a videotaped, simulated interview which is replayed so you can receive feedback from a trained interviewer. To make an appointment, see the staff assistant in 111 MBNA Career Services Center anytime between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on weekdays.

What Is the Best Approach to Answering Questions?

Recruiters are surprisingly accurate in sensing "canned" answers. These canned responses don't give interesting or reliable information about you. When you answer, remember these guidelines:

1. There is no single right answer. It's often how you answer that is more important than the exact content.
2. Be honest. Don't pretend, for example, that you were sure about your major from the very start if, in fact, you weren't. The details about how you chose your major may be much more interesting and communicate some very positive things about how you make decisions.
3. Don't look for ulterior motives. Some questions are asked purely out of curiosity or to help you relax. Recruiters are not going to conclude that you lack sufficient interest in the field if your favorite course was not related to your major. A genuine answer is almost always more interesting.
4. Give details and examples. General responses become boring and don't help the recruiter get to know you. You need to be specific. Details illustrate your points and make answers more vivid and memorable. Therefore, when discussing one of your strengths, give an example or two illustrating that strong point. When mentioning the course you liked most, give some details to illustrate what you liked and why.
5. Stay focused and don't ramble. Give details that are relevant but don't start telling long stories that include unnecessary details. Some candidates make the mistake of repeating themselves when they haven't thought of how to wrap up the answer, too. Respond directly and succinctly.

6. Keep the position in mind. What details can you give that are relevant to the type of job you are interested in? When you think of some, try to remember to include them. For example, if you worked at a summer camp and are now looking for a sales position, you can mention how you were successful at persuading the participants to enjoy your programs.

How Can I Best Respond to a Question About Salary?

Fortunately, it is seldom asked during the initial interview. When asked, you need to answer carefully. It is usually best to give a salary range and to have an idea what the range for your field is. Salary information for some occupations is available in the Career Library (115 MBNA Career Services Center).

What Types of Questions Should I Ask?

You make the best impression if you ask questions about what you are seriously interested in concerning the company and job. What do you want to know more about? Don't be afraid to be specific, because specific questions convey genuine interest.

If many of your questions have been answered by good company literature, tell the recruiter, mentioning some of the more important questions and perhaps even a brief summary of what you have learned.

Stay away from questions about benefits and salary, this is usually discussed during the second or site interview. Do not ask for the same information that is in any company literature you received.

Questions to Ask Employers

- Would you please describe the duties of the job for me?
- What skills or qualities are especially important for me to be successful in this position?
- What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?

- What kind of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
- What products (or services) are in the development stage now?
- What are your growth projections for next year?
- How do you feel about creativity and individuality?
- Will I have the opportunity to work on special projects?
- How much responsibility will I have in planning, decision-making, etc.?
- Is your company environmentally conscious? In what ways?
- In what ways is a career with your company better than one with your competitors?
- What is the single largest problem facing your staff (or department) now?
- What do you (the interviewer) like best about your job/company?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- How often are reviews given?
- Are salary adjustments geared to the cost of living or job performance?
- Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?

What Reasons Do Recruiters Have for Rejecting Candidates?

1. No enthusiasm. Answers often short. Tone of voice lacks interest or motivation.
2. Vague answers. No details given, words are general and not relevant to the type of job.
3. Very fidgety. Little eye contact, many nervous mannerisms, such as playing with hair, rubbing hands, etc.
4. Know-it-all attitude. Lack sincerity. Try to show off all they know about the field. Make superficial remarks to impress the interviewer.
5. No career direction. Have no idea what they want in a job. Unable to show how their skills and experiences prepared them for work in any field.

Points to Remember

1. The recruiter saw something in your resume that was impressive. Go into your interview remembering that this person already likes what he/she saw.
2. The interview is a two-way conversation. Try to relax and enjoy the opportunity.
3. Be specific, not vague. You'll be much more interesting.
4. Think about your answers ahead of time. Don't memorize, but have a focus and don't ramble.
5. Be prepared to describe why you are interested in that employer and give specific characteristics about the kind of position that you want.
6. Sell yourself. If you don't state what your strengths, skills, and accomplishments are, the recruiter will be unable to see you as a good candidate.
7. Genuine self-confidence and confidence in your ability to perform well at the job are your best assets in any interview. This attitude on confidence is one of the best indicators to the employer that you are the person needed for the position.
8. Don't forget to assess the company to see if you would like to work for them.

The Site Interview: What to Expect

The site visit or interview is the make or break point for job offers. If, after an on-campus interview, you are offered an interview at the employer's facility, you can consider yourself in a strong position. But don't think that an offer is a "sure thing." Rather, think of this phase of the interview process as the way for both you and the employer to get a more in-depth assessment of each other.

An employer is offering you the opportunity to convince all of the principal players that you are the right candidate. As a candidate you need to see the company and some of its people first hand in order to evaluate an offer (if made). After a site interview you can make a more informed decision about the position, the people, the environment, long-term career opportunities, and the community.

- Learn as much as you can about the company by reading the company's literature, looking at their web page, and reviewing industry and business publications. You can also talk to employees who are Penn State alumni to learn more about the company-LionLink www.lionlink.psu.edu.
- If you receive an offer for a site interview, respond promptly and professionally. If you are not interested in that company, decline politely. Never go on a site interview for "practice." Don't schedule back-to-back site interviews.
- If you accept the offer, you should ask the person coordinating the trip who will be responsible for making the arrangements for the trip and if you should keep track of your expenses. This is very important because expenses are handled in very different ways: 1) the employer may make all the travel arrangements (including flights, hotel, meals) and cover all expenses; 2) you handle your arrangements (the employer may assist you with this) and the employer will reimburse you later for your expenses; or 3) the employer may offer a site interview that is completely at your expense. Most medium- and large-sized companies (as well as many smaller ones) will pay your expenses, but some will not.
- Request a schedule and directions to the hotel and the facility before traveling. Maintain the company's emergency travel number and number for your contact person.
- You should plan to bring several extra copies of your resume; copies of paperwork (e.g., applications) that you may have forwarded to the employer; names and contact information of your references; an up-to-date transcript; the names and addresses of past employers; and a notebook and black or blue pen.
- Travel lightly to avoid checking luggage, if you can. When you arrive, make a trial run to the office location. At the hotel inquire about any messages or packages that may have been left for you. Note: You should verify prepayment, but be prepared for a credit card imprint.
- Many times you can expect a full day of interviews including a lunch meeting. During your site interview, you may meet potential co-workers, department managers, and potential supervisors, all the way up to the president of the company. The interviews may be one-on-one or panel and could range from 1/2 hour to 2 hours in length. You may also participate in a tour.
- If you attend a lunch or dinner meeting, remember to remain professional. Although the atmosphere may seem more relaxed, the employer is still evaluating you. Abide by the following: Do not order alcohol, Do not talk or chew with your mouth open, Do not swear.
- You may spend some time with a human resources representative for a discussion of benefits and, perhaps, salary. Many employers have a set salary range for entry-level positions. Other employers have salary ranges that are more negotiable. You should be prepared to discuss salary, understanding what the going rates are for people in your field and how certain geographic areas affect salaries. For more information on salaries, talk to the intake counselor in 112 MBNA Career Services Center. Remember: Your best bet is to let them bring up the discussion of salary.
- Often the final meeting of the day is with your contact person or employment manager. During this session they often offer answers to any final questions you may have, explain follow-up procedures, and discuss reimbursement of your expenses. Make sure all of your questions are answered.
- Most companies only offer site interviews to candidates they are seriously considering, so you may find yourself with an offer at the end of the day or very soon afterwards. Do not feel compelled to accept offer on-site. You should take time to consider the offer in terms of your needs and in comparison to other offers you may have.
- After your interview, you should manage expenses according to the company's policies. Remember if the company is covering expenses, usually parking, cab fares, meals, mileage, airfare, and hotel accommodations are reimbursed. Things like personal phone calls, room service snacks, and in-room movies are not covered.
- Send out thank you letter(s) to the person(s) who will be making the hiring decisions. You may also want to write thank you letters to people with whom you want to continue to network.
- Feel free to contact the company if you have not received a response in the agreed-upon timeframe. Also contact any of the interviewers for whom you have additional questions.

Remember that the site interview is the best opportunity you will have to evaluate the company in terms of the people, the environment, the culture, the organizational structure, and work and leisure life. If you decide that the job and the employer are right for you, don't feel shy about telling the employer that you are eager to join their team. But, never be afraid to decline an offer if it is not right for you. Remember that long-term career satisfaction is the goal of the whole process.

Legal/Illegal Areas of Questioning

In all situations pre-employment questions should be job-related. Any requests for information or administration of tests that have no relationship to the job and/or that cannot be substantiated as being a valid measure of the applicant's ability to perform the job should be avoided by recruiters.

Students are encouraged to discuss concerns related to any of these areas of questioning with a career counselor. Deciding how to respond during an interview is often not easy and may depend on a variety of factors in any given situation.

Below is a guide to assist in the proper use of pre-employment questions/inquiries.

1. Name

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Other names under which the applicant has worked in order to check educational or employment records or references, if it is a standard practice to check such references.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Maiden name of a female applicant.
- Specific questioning of the applicant's name that would indicate lineage, ancestry, national origin or descent.
- Spouse's name.

2. Gender & Marital Status

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Gender of applicant can be asked if based upon a job requirement; whether applicant can meet work schedule of job; whether applicant has activities, responsibilities or commitments that may hinder meeting attendance requirements (should be asked of all applicants, regardless of gender).

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Marital status of applicant; dependents of applicant or child-care arrangement; family planning or pregnancy status.

3. Age

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- If a minor, requirement that applicant state his/her age and submit proof thereof in the form of a certificate of age or work permit. Based upon job requirements can ask if applicant is over 18; also in case company has mandatory retirement age, can ask if applicant is older than that mandatory age.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Requirement that applicant state his/her age or date of birth.
- Requirement that applicant produce proof of age in the form of a driver's license, birth certificate or baptismal record, year graduated from high school.

4. Height & Weight

There are NO acceptable pre-employment inquiries. Any inquiry into height and/or weight of applicant unless a bona fide occupational qualification (required to perform the job) is unacceptable.

5. Physical Condition

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- If applicant is able to perform tasks defined in the job description; if the applicant indicates that he/she can perform tasks with an accommodation, he/she may be asked how tasks would be performed, and with what accommodations. Whether there are any types of jobs for which applicant should not be considered because of a physical or health condition. If disability is apparent or applicant has volunteered information about a disability, he/she may be asked to describe or demonstrate how functions would be performed. Also acceptable are statements by employer that offer may be made contingent upon passing a physical exam/test (only if this is a bona fide occupational qualification).

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Applicant's physical disabilities where no particular physical attributes are required for the job being sought.
- Questions concerning general medical conditions which do not relate to job performance.

6. Race or Ethnic Background

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- None. This information can be volunteered by the applicant if the applicant believes it is in his/her best interests.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Complexion: color of skin, eyes, hair, etc.; or other questions directly or indirectly indicating race or ethnic background.

7. Religion/Creed

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- An applicant may be advised concerning normal hours and days of work required by the job to avoid possible conflict with religious or other personal convictions; whether applicant can meet work schedules of job with reasonable accommodations by employer if necessary.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquiries into religious denomination, preference, affiliations. Any inquiry into the applicant's observance of religious holidays.

8. Special Working Conditions

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Statement by employer of special demands such as hours or shift to be worked, travel, overtime, and frequency might be required; whether applicant can meet the demands of the job.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Any inquiry as to applicant's ability to meet special demands of job that are non-job related, i.e., children, means of transportation, etc.

9. Education

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Any inquiry regarding education, licenses/certificates, and degrees related to the position sought; schools attended.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Any inquiry asking specifically the nationality, racial or religious affiliation of a school.

10. Experience

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquiry into work experience. (Applicant must be given the opportunity to explain any adverse reports received from previous employers.)

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquiries of protected class members (women, minority, people with disabilities, aged) based on generalizations about that class.

11. Military Experience

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Military experience, duties performed, and dates served in the Armed Forces of the United States.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- National Guard or Reserve units. Military Service records. Applicant's whereabouts in 1914-18, 1941-45, 1950-53 or 1966-73. Type and date of discharge. Discharge status, unless it is the result of a military conviction.

12. Financial Status

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquire if applicant has ever been refused a bond, if bonding is required for that position. Inquiries about credit rating, charge accounts, etc., that relate reasonably to performing the particular job in question.

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Applicant's credit record (charge accounts, bankruptcy history, garnishments, or loans outstanding); or whether the applicant owns a car, home, etc., that do not relate to performing the particular job under consideration.

13. Address and Duration of Residence

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Current address and length of residence in state.

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquiry into place and duration of current and previous addresses, including foreign addresses.

14. Birthplace

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Can you, after employment, submit a birth certificate or other proof of U.S. citizenship? (if required by job) Whether applicant is legally eligible to work in the U.S.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Birthplace of applicants, parents, spouse, or other relatives. Requirement that applicant submit birth certificate, naturalization or baptismal record.

15. Citizenship, National Origin or Ancestry

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Are you in the country on a visa that would not permit you to work here? Whether applicant is legally eligible to work in the U.S. Statement that proof of U.S. citizenship or right to work in the U.S. may be required after employment.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Are you a U.S. citizen? Of what country are you a citizen?
- Whether applicant or his/her parents or spouse are naturalized or native born United States citizens.
- Date when applicant, parents, or spouse acquired U.S. citizenship; arrived in the U.S. or port of entry; or how long a resident of the U.S.
- Requirement that applicant produce naturalization papers or first papers.
- Nationality of applicant's parents or spouse; maiden name of applicant's wife or mother.
- Any and all inquiries into whether applicant intends to become a citizen of the U.S. or any other inquiry related to the aspect of citizenship

16. Security Clearance

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Have you ever held a security clearance; if so, level and date.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Employment is contingent upon applicant being able to get a security clearance. (Only if this is a bona fide occupational requirement.)

17. Languages

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- The languages applicant speaks, reads or writes fluently (if related to job). Whether a particular language fluency is a valid job requirement.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Language applicant reads, speaks or writes fluently, unless required to perform the job.
- How applicant acquired ability to read, write or speak a foreign language.
- Language commonly used by applicant or in applicant's home (Mother Tongue).

18. Emergency

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Name and address of person to be notified in case of an emergency.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Name and address of relative to be notified in case of an emergency.

19. Relatives/Spouse

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Can ask if applicant has friends and/or relatives currently employed by this company, if such information does not reflect a preference to hire friends and/or relatives of present employees.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- For other than minor applicant, name and/or address of spouse or any relative.
- The maiden name of the wife or mother of an applicant.

20. Arrest Record – None

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries: Any inquiry relating to arrest.

21. Conviction Record

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquiries about actual convictions that relate reasonably to performing a particular job.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquiries regarding convictions that do not relate to performing the particular job under consideration.

22. References

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Names of persons willing to provide professional and/or character references for applicant. By whom were you referred?

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Request for name of applicant's bishop, pastor or religious leader.

23. Organizations

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquiry into organization memberships or offices held if a profession, trade, or service organization related to the job.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Inquiry into membership in clubs, social fraternities, societies, lodges or organizations to determine the race, creed, color, religion, national origin, sex, or age of applicant.

24. Photographs

Acceptable pre-employment inquiries

- May be required after hiring for identification purposes.

Unacceptable pre-employment inquiries

- Requirement that applicant submit a photograph prior to being hired.

Ways to Handle Illegal Questions in an Interview

As can be seen in the previous section, it is illegal to ask job applicants questions if (1) the answers would vary depending upon the applicant's race, national origin, sex, religion, age, or handicapped status, and (2) the questions are not based upon valid job requirements.

Employers sometimes do ask questions that are technically improper or illegal. Many of them do so unintentionally because of their ignorance of the law. Others may do so to get to a legitimate concern, e.g., dependability. How do you answer such questions in a way that will meet your objective — a job offer?

When you are asked an illegal question, you have three options:

1. You can say you don't see the relevance of the question and don't answer. When completing a job application form, the answer can simply be omitted, without explanation. You may feel better by doing these things, but chances are likely that you wouldn't get the job.
2. Answer the question. After being hired you can go to the personnel manager or other appropriate person and explain why, for the organization's legal protection, the question(s) should be eliminated.
3. You can respond to the legitimate concern that probably lies behind the question, and ignore the illegal question itself. In other words, relate your answers to job performance in a very general way.

It is important that you decide now which of the three approaches you want to choose in responding to illegal interview questions, and how you intend to handle them if they come up.

The following are some examples of ways you may wish to respond when asked an illegal question:

Q: Do you plan to have any children?

A: I plan to pursue a career whether or not I decide to raise a family.

The employer may have a genuine concern about how long you might remain on the job—the answer ignores the illegal question but answers the interviewer's concern.

Q: Do you own your own home, rent, or live with your parents?

A: I'm not sure how this relates to the job. Can you explain?

This question is discriminatory and against the law. Your response doesn't offend and leaves the door open should the interviewer provide some relevancy; some interviewers are simply nosy.

Q: Have you ever been arrested other than for traffic violations?

A: If you are asking about convictions, there's nothing I've ever done that would give your company concern that I'd breach any trust that the job you have requires.

Some states allow questions about convictions but not arrests. The interviewer may be concerned about employee dishonesty, thus the question. Your answer satisfies the concern without turning off the interviewer.

SUMMARY

How to handle illegal or unfair questions is a highly individual decision. However, job applicants should consider two rules. First, plan ahead. Expect to be asked illegal questions and decide how you will answer them. Second, be professional. Even if you refuse to answer certain questions, be calm and low-keyed. Don't attack the employer or interviewer for asking the question. If you find it necessary to explain your refusal to respond, state your reasons rationally.

You are encouraged to discuss concerns related to any of these areas of questioning with a career counselor. Deciding how to respond during an interview is often not easy and may depend on a variety of factors in any given situation.