

# Fond du Lac Public Library Opportunity Center

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32 Sheboygan St.  
Fond du Lac, WI 54935

# **INTERVIEWING**

*Selling yourself effectively to potential employers.*

## What We Will Cover

- Definition and purpose
- Why should I know how to interview well
- Preparing for the Interview
- Interview parts and pieces
- Types of Interviews
- Answering questions
- Common Questions
- How to handle TOUGH questions
- Asking questions
- Following Up

## Definitions and Purpose

- What is an interview
  - A conversation between you and the employer
  - Designed to measure your background and experience for the job
  - Also used by job candidates to determine if they want to work for this particular employer
- Interviews are often done in phases with each phase used to further define the final candidate(s)

## WHY

- To effectively market (sell) yourself to potential employers
- Establish a positive relationship with the interviewer
- Leave a strong positive impression of yourself
- Present yourself in the best possible light

## **Preparing for the Interview**

- Understanding the position
  - Identify skills and experiences necessary to perform the job
  - Understand how your competencies and experiences best fit the position
- Understanding the organization
  - Do you really want to work there
  - Why
  - How will you fit with the culture

## **Know What to Say in the Interview**

- Plan and prepare in advance
- Develop answers to common questions
- Be specific; don't generalize
- Remember the interview is where you market (sell) yourself. Leave a good impression.
- Be positive and enthusiastic
- Think about your answer before giving it.
- Vary your voice, change volume, don't be monotone
- Be consistent
- Think

## **Interview Parts and Pieces**

- Initial introduction of participant(s)
  - Position overview or description
  - Introduction of the interviewer
  - How the process will unfold
- Questions for you
- Questions from you

- Closing
- What happens next

## **BEGINNING THE INTERVIEW**

### **Elevator Speech or TMAY**

- A 30 second to 1 minute overview of you
- Career highlights
- Work experience
- Education

### **What it IS NOT**

- IS NOT your life history
- Is NOT a discussion of your personal life

### **Group Exercise**

- Take several minutes and write your own 30-second to 1 minute elevator speech.
- Remember to emphasize:
  - Education
  - Experience
  - Career interest

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## **Types of Interviews**

- Behavioral
- Instinct, Conversational or “Gut”
- Demonstration or situational

## **Behavioral Interview**

- Is structured and focused on behaviors and the job
- Objective, systematic and consistent
- Uses examples from your past to demonstrate how you will perform in the future
- *How do you know this is a behavioral interview?*

## **The questions begin with phrases such as**

*“Tell me about a time...”*

*“Describe a situation”*

## **Answering Behavior Based Questions**

- Use a structured response
- STAR
  - Situation – what was happening and how were you involved
  - Time frame – when did this happen
  - Action taken – what specifically did you do and how did you do it
  - Results – what happened, what was the outcome
- The result isn’t as important as the how you got there.

## Group Exercise

- With a partner answer the following; “*Tell me about a time that you had a challenging project. What did you do to complete this?*”
- Each partner should attempt to answer the question using the STAR technique. The listening partner should take notes to ensure that each piece of STAR is used.
- Discuss as a group

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## Instinct, Conversational or “Gut” Interviews

- Characteristics or Traits
  - Appear unstructured
  - Appear to be simply two people talking
  - The interviewer may focus on value or personal characteristic type questions
  - Interviewers are very friendly and easy to get along with
  - Uses general or first impressions to make a decision
- How do you manage these
  - Do not over relax or get too comfortable
  - Be informal but also be professional
  - Emphasize how well you work with others; give examples

## **Demonstration or Situational**

- Sometimes called “in-box” exercises.
- You will be presented with a situation where you will actually perform some work.
- This could be in a mock environment or a live environment.
- You will be expected to perform as if you are really on the job.
- Sometimes the interviewer will role play with you.

## **Common Questions**

- Common Questions you will be asked
  - How to answer
- Common Questions You may wish to ask
  - How to answer

## **Commonly Asked Questions**

- TMAY
- Why do you want to work here?
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- Why did you leave your most recent job?
- Where do you see yourself in 5-years?
- Describe a weakness
- What salary are you looking for?
- What was your last boss like?
- Tell me about a failure you had and what you learned from it.
- How do you explain the gaps in your employment?

- When were you most satisfied in your job?
- Describe a time when you did not get along with a co-worker.
- What motivates you?
- How would your former boss or co-workers describe you?

## HOW TO HANDLE TOUGH QUESTIONS

### What Are Tough Questions

- Questions that you can't or don't want to answer.
- Questions that are difficult to answer.
- Questions that are "illegal"
- Questions designed to get negative information.

### Tough Questions

- Describe a weakness.
- Describe a trait e.g. selfish, hard headed, disorganized
- Responses
  - Use strength as a weakness. *"I sometimes get so caught up in making certain my part of the job is done that I forget that other people have their own parts. When I do this I have to remind myself that I am a part of a team."*
  - Describe a situation where this answer applies.
- *"What do you consider the biggest mistake of your life to be?" "What would you like to change about your past?"*
- *"Tell me about a time at work when you disappointed yourself by not following your principles or values."*
- Responses:
  - *"This part of my life has some things that I am not very proud of. At that time I had a problem with \_\_\_\_\_."*

- Briefly describe an event that shows how you learned from these experiences
- State your commitment to constant improvement.
- *Samples*
  - *“What is the biggest flaw in your personality when your feelings get hurt?”*
  - *“What do you do most often when handling stress at work?”*
  - *“Tell me about a time when you were not successful coping with pressure in your life.”*
- Responses
  - *“I have to admit I am not perfect but I am committed to improving myself.”*
  - Give an example, use the STAR method
- “Why were you fired?”
- Response:
- Explain the circumstances; tell the truth; explain what you learned; try and convert this to a benefit.
- Examples:
  - *“Sometimes you get into situations with different personalities that don’t fit well with your values.” “...and this was one of those times – yes I was fired.” “However, by watching this person as they interacted with others I have learned to be more alert to organizational politics.”*
  - Describe how you use this situation to make things better now and in the future.
- *“Why would you be interested in this job after working at much higher levels in the past?”*
- Response
  - First – consider if you have the appropriate skills, how happy you will be in this role and why you personally are considering this job.
  - THEN: Admit that you are concerned with that question too. Don’t discuss salary; talk about your strengths and accomplishments; talk about the impact this will have on your lifestyle; leave your higher qualifications out of the conversation; indicate your commitment.

## Individual Exercise

- Using the question examples previously given write down how you would answer these difficult questions.
- Look closely at what you have written. Does it meet the definition of :
  - Explain the circumstances
  - Tell the truth
  - Explain what you learned
- How can you turn this into a strength?

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### Handling the “ illegal” question

- How would you respond?

How old are you?  
Where were you born  
How long before you plan to retire  
Are you planning on having any  
children

How would you respond?  
How would you respond?  
How would you respond?  
How would you respond?

## Group Exercise

- As a group discuss how each of these questions could be answered

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## Asking Questions

- Remember interviewing is a 2-way process
- Use your questions to measure how you would fit in the organization and how promising long term employment could be.
- This shows you are actively interested and can set you apart from other candidates.

## Questions to Ask

- What is the culture like in this company?
- What are the strengths of this company?
- How did this position become available?
- How does this company's future growth look?
- What are the most important characteristics you want in the person you will hire?
- What is the most immediate challenge you have?
- What are the next steps in the process?

## “Killer” Questions

- Knock the interviewers socks off with these questions.
  - Why do you work here?
  - What in my background and experience convince you I am the right person for this job?
  - If you and I were disagreeing, how would you want to go about resolving it?
  - What parts of my background and experience are causing you a challenge in selecting me for this job?

## Finishing the Interview

*“Based on our discussion of the company, the job and my background I am very interested in taking this to the next step”*

## Following Up

- At the end of the interview
- What to ask
- What to do
- When to do it
- When does following up cross the line into becoming a pest -

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## 50 COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Review these typical interview questions and think about how you would answer them.

Read the questions listed; you will also find some strategy suggestions with it.

### **1. Tell me about yourself:**

The most often asked question in interviews. You need to have a short statement prepared in your mind. Be careful that it does not sound rehearsed. Limit it to work-related items unless instructed otherwise. Talk about things you have done and jobs you have held that relate to the position you are interviewing for. Start with the item farthest back and work up to the present.

### **2. Why did you leave your last job?**

Stay positive regardless of the circumstances. Never refer to a major problem with Management and never speak ill of supervisors, co-workers or the organization. If you do, you will be the one looking bad. Keep smiling and talk about leaving for a positive reason such as an opportunity, a chance to do something special or other forward-looking reasons.

### **3. What experience do you have in this field?**

Speak about specifics that relate to the position you are applying for. If you do not have specific experience, get as close as you can.

### **4. Do you consider yourself successful?**

You should always answer yes and briefly explain why. A good explanation is that you have set goals, and you have met some and are on track to achieve the others.

### **5. What do co-workers say about you?**

Be prepared with a quote or two from co-workers. Either a specific statement or a paraphrase will work. Jill Clark, a co-worker at Smith Company, always said I was the hardest workers she had ever known. It is as powerful as Jill having said it at the interview herself.

### **6. What do you know about this organization?**

This question is one reason to do some research on the organization before the interview. Find out where they have been and where they are going. What are the current issues and who are the major players?

### **7. What have you done to improve your knowledge in the last year?**

Try to include improvement activities that relate to the job. A wide variety of activities can be mentioned as positive self-improvement. Have some good ones handy to mention.

### **8. Are you applying for other jobs?**

Be honest but do not spend a lot of time in this area. Keep the focus on this job and what you can do for this organization. Anything else is a distraction.

### **9. Why do you want to work for this organization?**

This may take some thought and certainly, should be based on the research you have done on the organization. Sincerity is extremely important here and will easily be sensed. Relate it to your long-term career goals.

### **10. Do you know anyone who works for us?**

Be aware of the policy on relatives working for the organization. This can affect your answer even though they asked about friends not relatives. Be careful to mention a friend only if they are well thought of.

### **11. What kind of salary do you need?**

A loaded question. A nasty little game that you will probably lose if you answer first. So, do not answer it. Instead, say something like, "That's a tough question. Can you tell me the range for this position?" In most cases, the interviewer, taken off guard, will tell you. If not, say that it can depend on the details of the job. Then give a wide range.

### **12. Are you a team player?**

You are, of course, a team player. Be sure to have examples ready. Specifics that show you often perform for the good of the team rather than for yourself are good evidence of your team attitude. Do not brag, just say it in a matter-of-fact tone. This is a key point.

### **13. How long would you expect to work for us if hired?**

Specifics here are not good. Something like this should work: I'd like it to be a long time. Or As long as we both feel I'm doing a good job.

### **14. Have you ever had to fire anyone? How did you feel about that?**

This is serious. Do not make light of it or in any way seem like you like to fire people. At the same time, you will do it when it is the right thing to do. When it comes to the organization versus the individual who has created a harmful situation, you will protect the organization. Remember firing is not the same as layoff or reduction in force.

### **15. What is your philosophy towards work?**

The interviewer is not looking for a long or flowery dissertation here. Do you have strong feelings that the job gets done? Yes. That's the type of answer that works best here. Short and positive, showing a benefit to the organization.

### **16. If you had enough money to retire right now, would you?**

Answer yes if you would. But since you need to work, this is the type of work you prefer. Do not say yes if you do not mean it.

### **17. Have you ever been asked to leave a position?**

If you have not, say no. If you have, be honest, brief and avoid saying negative things about the people or organization involved.

**18. Explain how you would be an asset to this organization**

You should be anxious for this question. It gives you a chance to highlight your best points as they relate to the position being discussed. Give a little advance thought to this relationship.

**19. Why should we hire you?**

Point out how your assets meet what the organization needs. Do not mention any other candidates to make a comparison.

**20. Tell me about a suggestion you have made**

Have a good one ready. Be sure and use a suggestion that was accepted and was then considered successful. One related to the type of work applied for is a real plus.

**21. What irritates you about co-workers?**

This is a trap question. Think real hard but fail to come up with anything that irritates you. A short statement that you seem to get along with folks is great.

**22. What is your greatest strength?**

Numerous answers are good, just stay positive. A few good examples: Your ability to prioritize, Your problem-solving skills, Your ability to work under pressure, Your ability to focus on projects, Your professional expertise, Your leadership skills, Your positive attitude .

**23. Tell me about your dream job.**

Stay away from a specific job. You cannot win. If you say the job you are contending for is it, you strain credibility. If you say another job is it, you plant the suspicion that you will be dissatisfied with this position if hired. The best is to stay generic and say something like: A job where I love the work, like the people, can contribute and can't wait to get to work.

**24. Why do you think you would do well at this job?**

Give several reasons and include skills, experience and interest.

**25. What are you looking for in a job?**

See answer # 23

**26. What kind of person would you refuse to work with?**

Do not be trivial. It would take disloyalty to the organization, violence or lawbreaking to get you to object. Minor objections will label you as a whiner.

**27. What is more important to you: the money or the work?**

Money is always important, but the work is the most important. There is no better answer.

**28. What would your previous supervisor say your strongest point is?**

There are numerous good possibilities:

Loyalty, Energy, Positive attitude, Leadership, Team player, Expertise, Initiative, Patience, Hard work, Creativity, Problem solver

**29. Tell me about a problem you had with a supervisor**

Biggest trap of all. This is a test to see if you will speak ill of your boss. If you fall for it and tell about a problem with a former boss, you may well blow the interview right there. Stay positive and develop a poor memory about any trouble with a supervisor.

**30. What has disappointed you about a job?**

Don't get trivial or negative. Safe areas are few but can include:  
Not enough of a challenge. You were laid off in a reduction Company did not win a contract, which would have given you more responsibility.

**31. Tell me about your ability to work under pressure.**

You may say that you thrive under certain types of pressure. Give an example that relates to the type of position applied for.

**32. Do your skills match this job or another job more closely?**

Probably this one. Do not give fuel to the suspicion that you may want another job more than this one.

**33. What motivates you to do your best on the job?**

This is a personal trait that only you can say, but good examples are:  
Challenge, Achievement, Recognition

**34. Are you willing to work overtime? Nights? Weekends?**

This is up to you. Be totally honest.

**35. How would you know you were successful on this job?**

Several ways are good measures:  
You set high standards for yourself and meet them. Your outcomes are a success. Your boss tell you that you are successful

**36. Would you be willing to relocate if required?**

You should be clear on this with your family prior to the interview if you think there is a chance it may come up. Do not say yes just to get the job if the real answer is no. This can create a lot of problems later on in your career. Be honest at this point and save yourself future grief.

**37. Are you willing to put the interests of the organization ahead of your own?**

This is a straight loyalty and dedication question. Do not worry about the deep ethical and philosophical implications. Just say yes.

**38. Describe your management style.**

Try to avoid labels. Some of the more common labels, like progressive, salesman or

consensus, can have several meanings or descriptions depending on which management expert you listen to. The situational style is safe, because it says you will manage according to the situation, instead of one size fits all.

**39. What have you learned from mistakes on the job?**

Here you have to come up with something or you strain credibility. Make it small, well intentioned mistake with a positive lesson learned. An example would be working too far ahead of colleagues on a project and thus throwing coordination off.

**40. Do you have any blind spots?**

Trick question. If you know about blind spots, they are no longer blind spots. Do not reveal any personal areas of concern here. Let them do their own discovery on your bad points. Do not hand it to them.

**41. If you were hiring a person for this job, what would you look for?**

Be careful to mention traits that are needed and that you have.

**42. Do you think you are overqualified for this position?**

Regardless of your qualifications, state that you are very well qualified for the position.

**43. How do you propose to compensate for your lack of experience?**

First, if you have experience that the interviewer does not know about, bring that up: Then, point out (if true) that you are a hard working quick learner.

**44. What qualities do you look for in a boss?**

Be generic and positive. Safe qualities are knowledgeable, a sense of humor, fair, loyal to subordinates and holder of high standards. All bosses think they have these traits.

**45. Tell me about a time when you helped resolve a dispute between others.**

Pick a specific incident. Concentrate on your problem solving technique and not the dispute you settled.

**46. What position do you prefer on a team working on a project?**

Be honest. If you are comfortable in different roles, point that out.

**47. Describe your work ethic.**

Emphasize benefits to the organization. Things like, determination to get the job done and work hard but enjoy your work are good.

**48. What has been your biggest professional disappointment?**

Be sure that you refer to something that was beyond your control. Show acceptance and no negative feelings.

**49. Tell me about the most fun you have had on the job.**

Talk about having fun by accomplishing something for the organization.



## HOW TO HANDLE TOUGH QUESTIONS:

### 1. Know the Question.

Some examples of tough questions during a job interview are:

Are you married, divorced or separated?  
How old are you?  
Do you have any credit card debt?  
Do you pay a mortgage or do you rent?  
What political organizations do you belong to?  
Are you using birth control?  
Do you go to church regularly?  
Does your spouse support your career choice?  
How much do you weigh?  
How tall are you?  
How many children do you have?  
What kind of car do you own?

### 2. Step 2

Decide if the question is proper.

Though some of these questions may seem harmless and you have a willing answer ready for each of them, you do not legally have to answer them during a job interview. Though it may seem impolite to refuse to answer a question that does not seem to have any bearing on the job requirements, there is an easy way to still answer an improper question, but in such a way that it illustrates to the person doing the interview that you can handle yourself in questionable situations.

For example, if the interviewer wants to know if you are...divorced, have young children, living with someone, how old you are, and so on, and you feel the question is inappropriate, your response could be as simple as, "Does a ... divorce, having young children, living with someone, my age, etc.)... have a direct bearing on the responsibilities for this position?"

### 3. Step 3

Answer an improper question with a question.

Sometimes, answering an illegal question while asking a question in return can move the interview along, without putting you in an unfavorable light, while still allowing you to tell a little bit more about yourself. Isn't talking about yourself what the interview is for anyway?

#### 4. Step 4

Show them you are a STAR.

Some questions may require a detailed response. Your answer should include 4 basic lines of reasoning. These 4 basic lines of reasoning can be remembered using the acronym STAR.

1. Describe the situation the interviewer is asking about.
2. Describe the time when this occurred.
3. Describe the actions you took to
4. Describe the results of your actions.

#### 5. Step 5

Organize your answer BEFORE speaking.

What if the interviewer wants to know if you belong to any political organizations? They don't really need to know this and if your political views are not the same as the interviewer's, it may cost you the job. An example of this type of answer would be:

Situation: I have a keen interest in politics and how the world works.

How: My views are based on research and personal values.

Actions: I don't allow my personal views to interfere with my work responsibilities.

Results: This allows me to create strong business and customer service skills.

Evaluation: The manner in which I separate my work and personal life has allowed me to build long lasting relationships with those I work with.

#### 6. Step 6

Turn an improper question to your advantage.

As you can see from the answer, though you did not answer the question asked (Do you belong to any political organizations?) your answer showed you are an

