



Traditional Interviews

Traditional interviews have become less commonplace as behavioral and case interviews have become more prevalent. However, traditional interview questions are often co-mingled with behavioral or case questions. Because traditional interviews require less preparation and less interpretive effort on the part of the interviewer, some interviewers who lack focus or preparation time may use a traditional interviewing style when they are looking for the kinds of specific answers that more explicitly requested in behavioral or case interviews. Or, they may be seeking qualitative information about your “fit” with the employer.

Traditional interview questions tend to focus on your beliefs, your professional or management style, your preferred ways of interacting and how you would handle hypothetical situations. The benefit of traditional interview questions is that they enable the interviewer and job candidate to establish a rapport and to get to know each other in a less pressurized environment than the behavioral or case interview.

Preparing for a Traditional Interview

The extent to which traditional interviews questions will comprise all or part of the interview will vary depending upon the preferences of the interviewer. Here are some tips for answering traditional interview questions:

- Answer the question directly. For example, if the interviewer asks what you believe about a workplace issue, state your beliefs clearly and concisely.
- Have your “60 second infomercial” ready. You may be asked to describe yourself. This is an opportunity to provide a one to two minute synthesis of your professional value to the organization you are interviewing with and to briefly summarize your qualifications for the job. Have your infomercial well rehearsed and ready to go!
- Even if the interviewer does not ask for specific examples of your behavior or for you to apply case analysis to a situation, do it anyway. Providing an example of your behavior in a relevant situation to back up a stated belief or letting the interviewer know that you possess analytical and interpretive skills by referring to a business case will strengthen your presentation.

- Resist the temptation to ramble. When asked an open-ended question, it is natural to give a rambling, wordy answer. Maintain your focus and provide concise, direct answers to questions. You can signal the interviewer that you are finished answering by re-stating the question in an affirmative way (e.g., “And that’s how I believe employee relations disputes should be resolved.”)
- Ask questions and be conversational if it seems natural. Interviews that feel more like conversations can be positive so long as you remain “on message” (why your skills, values and experience align with the position and company) and professional.

Samples of Traditional Interview Questions and Answers

Question: Tell me about yourself.

Answer: (60 second infomercial) Right now I’m finishing up my graduate program in Behavioral and Organizational Science. During the last two and a half years in graduate school, I’ve had an opportunity to greatly expand my understanding of the dynamics of organizational change. Last semester, I completed a case study of a local company that had recently been sold and re-organized. After interviewing managers in the acquiring company and managers in the company that was acquired, I had the opportunity to provide Human Resources with some suggestions about how to handle the change process given the disparate cultures of the two organizations.

Prior to my graduate school experience, I worked as a human resources generalist for (COMPANY NAME). During my three years there, I learned all aspects of the human resources function and acted as the employee relations liaison for a major division. I also partnered with a department that was doing a significant re-organization.

I’m here with you today because I believe my experience and skills make me a strong candidate for your Director of Change Management position. Your company has a strong track record of innovative human resource policy innovation and is continually re-inventing itself to keep pace with consumer demands. That’s the kind of dynamic, changing environment where I believe my skills in organizational behavior and human behavior can be of the greatest value.

Question: What is your management style?

Answer: (Blend an example into your answer) I believe that the most effective managers are those who advocate for their area across the organization and who keep the lines of communication open with their staff.

For example, my former company was ready to launch a new product that required a lot of consumer research. I discussed the research plan with my staff and I discovered that two of my best analysts were excited about expanding their skills in precisely the

kind of research that was being considered. With their permission, I spoke with the Director of Research and volunteered my analysts for the project. The result was that my analysts gained new skills and really understood the value of working for the company. And it didn't hurt that my department's reputation was greatly enhanced.

Question: What do you think about the important of innovation?

Answer: **(Blend a knowledge of case analysis with your opinion)** I believe that innovation for its own sake can be a mistake, but that innovation which is managed to provide strategic benefit to the organization is vital.

For example, Lincoln Mercury saw sales of its Cougar model sinking. They re-designed the vehicle from the ground up and introduced it as a much smaller, mid-priced sporty coupe. But because the company did not make any other strategic moves to position itself for success with a younger audience, the car didn't sell despite getting strong reviews. The new model was withdrawn from the market within two years and the Cougar faded into memory. Here, the innovation seemed to be a knee-jerk response to falling sales and wasn't coordinated with a strategic effort to re-position the brand.

In contrast, Apple is a company that has proven very adept at innovating. They had the strongest presence of any brand within educational institutions and lots of kids grow up using Apple computers at school. So expanding their product line into digital music players and online music sales really made a lot of sense given their target demographic. They also have the sleekest desk top computers on the market, and the designers and multimedia buffs who tend to use Apples for their functionality are attracted by the looks of the product as well, and they command a price premium over Windows PC's.