

## How to Use

These flash cards are designed to reinforce the teachings in *Knock 'em Dead: The Ultimate Job Search Guide* (current annual edition). Use them to rehearse for interviews after reading the book. Covering a variety of interview situations, the flash cards help you turn job interviews into job offers. Each card begins with a challenging interview question or situation, then explains the intent behind a question and how to frame your answer, or the considerations behind a situation and how best to respond to it.

But more than giving you canned answers, the flash cards offer a proven system for answering all questions; so don't memorize the answers—instead, use the insights to create honest answers reflecting your unique work experience.

Abbreviations for building blocks of *Knock 'em Dead* philosophy that you'll find referenced in the flash cards include:

*KED*—*Knock 'em Dead: The Ultimate Job Search Guide*

*TJD*—Target Job Deconstruction. A method for building a more powerful resume and preparing for interviews. *KED* Ch. 2.

*Performance Profile*—The part of your resume that captures your skills as they relate to the target job's priorities; how you build this comes in useful for answering interview questions. You can learn about the *Performance Profile* in *KED* chapters 2 & 3.

*Transferable Skills and Professional Values*—A sequence of 12 *transferable skills* and *professional values* sought by all employers that are the foundation of professional success. You can learn about them in *KED Ch 1*.

When you see a word or phrase in italics, for example, *communication skills*, it refers to one of the *transferable skills* or *values*. To get the best out of the flash cards, read *Knock 'em Dead: The Ultimate Job Search Guide* or *Knock 'em Dead: Secrets & Strategies from the Insiders*.

All the best,

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—From a *Declaration of Principles* jointly adopted by a Committee of the American Bar Association and a Committee of Publishers and Associations

How should you dress for an interview?

Your appearance shows consideration for the interviewer and the occasion. You are trying to get hired, not dated, so you want to cause the least offense to the greatest majority of people. Go for clean-cut and lean toward conservative. Your appearance demonstrates your understanding of professional dress codes. Even when you are interviewing at a company with a casual dress code, dress as you would to meet their most important client. (See *KED* Ch. 6.)

Tell me a little about yourself.

The interviewer wants to know if the interview is going to be time well spent. You already have the answer to this question. Your Performance Profile (Resume chapter) provides a condensed professional work history that focuses on the experience most critical to employers. Doing your *TJD* exercise determined how employers prioritize the job's needs, and writing the Performance Profile encapsulated everything relevant in a few short sentences. Your answer gives the interviewer justification for taking you seriously because it shows how clearly you understand and possess the job's requirements.

What are the transferable skills?

The transferable skills are a set of skills that corporate Human Resources have determined underlie success in all jobs, in all professions, and at all levels. They are known as transferable because they are seen as being transferable from job to job within a profession. There are seven transferable skills. Whatever the responsibilities and duties of your job, the transferable skills help you do them better. Possession of these skills encourages people to see you as a professional within your field.



The following *body language* may have negative connotations:

- A. Crossed legs
- B. Folded arms
- C. Touching one's mouth
- D. All of the above

**D.** If you take a pad for notes, it's acceptable to put it on your crossed legs; plus, it makes you look organized. Taking notes reduces unconscious nervous gestures like playing with your hair/tie/blouse/face/nose. (See *KED* Ch. 7.)

Which of the following should you *not* do during the interview?

- A. Smoke/chew gum
- B. Look at your watch
- C. Ask about salary
- D. Take or make cell calls or texts
- E. All of the above

**E. Believe it or not, people do these dumb things at interviews every-day. None of them are acceptable, and all of them make negative statements about your grasp of professional behavior.**

Which of the following should you ask at the conclusion of the telephone interview and before the face-to-face interview?

- A. "How many interviews are there in the selection cycle?"
- B. "Who will I meet at the interview?"
- C. "What is the time frame for filling this position?"
- D. "How many other people are in consideration at this time?"
- E. All of the above

**E. All of the above. The answers to these questions will be important in helping you structure your performance during the face-to-face interview that is to come.**

What are some guidelines for walking during an interview (entering the interview office, taking a tour of the building, etc.)?

You want to appear alert, professional, open, and friendly.

1. Don't slouch; stand straight.
2. Smile and make eye contact with people you meet.
3. Give a short handshake. Use a firm but not a bone-crusher grip.  
Let people know you are pleased to meet them.
4. Avoid crossing your arms or legs while standing.
5. Don't put your hands in your pockets or on your hips or your thumbs in your belt.



Which of the following should you bring to your job interview?

- A. Several copies of your resume to distribute to people you meet
- B. A decent folder with a pad of paper and writing instruments
- C. Reference letters
- D. A list of job-related questions you can ask the interviewer
- E. Directions and telephone numbers
- F. Information about the company, job, and the people you will meet

All of the above.

Which of the following personal adornments are considered part of an acceptable look for an interview?

- A. Tattoos, provided they're tasteful and not overdone
- B. Short-sleeved shirts or blouses
- C. Men's earrings
- D. Wedding bands

**D.** Wedding bands are acceptable. Always wear a long-sleeved shirt or blouse; it is an accepted part of professional *dress*. Women's earrings are fine—men's, not so much. Visible tattoos, piercings, and studs will have a negative impact on 99 percent of employers.

Employers want employees who are skilled at identifying, preventing, and resolving problems in their area of responsibility. In what order should you present examples of your problem-solving skills?

1. Identify the steps to solve the problem.
2. Identify the *transferable skills* that help you implement the solution.
3. State the problem.
4. Isolate information relevant to the problem and its solution.
5. Recall the solution and the result of its implementation.

3, 4, 1, 2, 5. A subtle orientation to problem identification/avoidance/solution will appeal to any employer.

Tell me about yourself.

This is one of the first and most commonly asked interview questions. The interviewer wants to quickly learn about you in terms that show you are qualified for the job. How you answer sets the tone of your meeting.

Here's how you prepare your answer: Complete the *TJD* exercise from *KED* Ch. 2; this will show you what skills/experiences employers consider most important for success in the job. Then, going through your resume, pull out four to six points (education, years' experience, stages your career has gone through) that demonstrate you can do the job.



What are your qualifications?

The interviewer is interested in job skills, experience, and academic qualifications as they relate to the needs of the job. Itemize your skills, experience, and other qualifications as they relate to your *TJD*. Your answer should show the interviewer that you understand the problems that your job is there to solve and prevent. Present yourself as someone who understands the problem-solving nature of your work, and you've taken a dramatic step toward the job offer.

What interests you most about this job?

Interviewers dream of finding applicants who really understand their work, the role it plays in profitability, and who take *pride* and joy in a job well done. The more you are fully engaged in your work, the greater success you will have. Learn how to portray this aspect of the professional you and you almost have a lock on that job offer.

Your answer will show that mastering the *technical skills* of the job is a meaningful pursuit for you in and of itself, that you understand how doing the job well is a small but important part of departmental and company success, that you enjoy surmounting the specific everyday challenges of the job, and that this company has the reputation for being a great place to work for people who feel the same way.

What are you looking for in your next job?

Ask not what your company can do for you, but what you can do for your company. You are there to get a job offer, so focus on the fulfillment you get from working with a team similarly committed and for a company with a solid reputation. Don't talk about what you want in return for your efforts until an offer is on the table. You can add learned and earned professional growth to this, but don't position yourself as someone expecting a promotion in six months or as someone after your boss's job.

What bothers you most about your job?

The interviewer wants to make sure your pet peeves don't conflict with the conscientious execution of your duties and responsibilities. Imagine hiring a receptionist who hated being rushed or talking all day. Keep your answer focused on those aspects of your work that everyone agrees are annoying and end your answer on a positive note about how you deal with them: You take the rough with the smooth, and spend the time to do it well so you don't have to do the damn thing over.



Are you willing to go where the company sends you?

Define the question further before you answer: "Are you talking about business travel, or me or the company relocating?" Your short answer is yes, because you are at any job interview to a) get the offer and b) improve your skills at turning interviews into job offers. A "no" response might result in no offer being made. You don't have to accept the job, but without the offer you have no decision to make.

What is your greatest strength?

Talk about a priority job skill. For example, a sales professional might talk about prospecting for new clients, illustrating the answer with the tactics and strategies used. Second, talk about one or more of the *transferable skills* (see *KED* Ch. 1) that help you execute this critical part of your job; for example, good *time management* and *organization* are must-haves in a world that values *multitasking*.

This way you give a complete and believable answer that also speaks of skills you bring to all other aspects of your work.

What would you say are the major qualities this job demands? *or* What would you say are the traits a competent \_\_\_\_\_ would possess?

The question asks you to define what it takes to be successful in your profession. Answering effectively is going to take some preparation. Read about *transferable skills* in *KED* Ch. 1, to recall how successful people become successful. Then complete a *TJD* exercise in *KED* Ch. 2, tying your *transferable skills* to the job's priorities.

Do this and you'll not only be able to answer this tough question, you will also have a blueprint for long-term professional success.

What are the most repetitive tasks in your job?

If something has to be done frequently, it is obviously critical to success.

The answer you give reveals your real understanding of the job, and your attitude toward these repetitive tasks demonstrates your degree of professionalism. Your answer will show that you recognize this, and if you don't exactly enjoy doing it, you at least recognize its importance and do it conscientiously and well, and maintain a high energy level as you do so.

Avoid a laundry list of the boring parts of your job, but if these are raised, address your tactics for handling them and keeping a high *energy* level.



What do you think it takes to have a successful career?

Success takes understanding of your profession, your industry, personal *commitment*, focus, and sacrifice. The interviewer wants to know in what measure you possess these qualities in order to give the job your maximum effort. Your answer should stress your long-term investment in making a difference with your presence. Mention activities in professional associations and classes you've taken that demonstrate your ongoing *commitment* to success.

What would you like to be doing five years from now?

The interviewer wants to know if you see yourself as having a career rather than a long series of jobs. Does your future see you doing this job, but at a higher level as a subject matter expert, and/or do you plan to grow into management? If you are *committed* to professional growth, your answer carries more weight when you illustrate this *commitment* to date and outline your future plans for self-improvement, rather than cite a title you would like to hold. (See *KED* Ch. 10.)

What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?

You cannot know other candidates' capabilities. Smilingly disarm your interviewer with this, then say, "But what I bring is . . . ." Your answer will then demonstrate your grasp of the job's responsibilities, (*TJD*), the problems that occur in each area, and the *transferable skills* that allow you to consistently deliver on them. Finish with a brief review of what you are like as a professional colleague, personalizing the behavioral profile for success you identified in your *TJD* exercise. (See *KED* Ch. 2.)

Why should I hire you?

Keep your answer short and to the point. Show you understand the job's responsibilities and explain the *transferable skills* you have that will allow you to fulfill them. Personalize the *behavioral profile for success* you identified in your *TJD* exercise. (See *KED* Ch. 2.)

Finish with: "I have the qualifications you need [itemize them], I'm a *team player*, I take direction, and I have the desire to make a thorough success."



Name the seven *transferable skills*.

*Technical skills, Critical Thinking, Communication, Multitasking, Creativity, Teamwork, Leadership.* These *transferable skills* help you do every single day in your professional life well. Building *transferable skills* will make you more productive and more successful in your work and will show employers that you are serious about your career. Think through the priorities of your job until you can identify which *transferable skills* help you do that that work, and how they help you do so. When appropriate, weave casual reference to them into your answers and they will carry more weight.

How should I handle a DWI?

Find out if it will show up on your official record; this differs from state to state. If you need to drive for the job (for example, in a sales job), don't expect an offer. Employers look for consistency. The worst thing is saying there isn't something when there is. If the application asks about DWI charges, answer and leave it be; if not, don't offer this information until background checks are close. Then be brief: "It happened, I was young, etc." and explain what you learned from it. Try to get it expunged from your record. You can start with a Google search.

How do you stay current?

We live in an age of technological innovation in which the nature of every job is changing about as quickly as you flip these cards. This means you must look to ongoing professional education as the price of sustained employability. In your answer, talk about the importance of this and the importance of keeping abreast of changes in the profession. You can refer to:

- Courses you have taken or are planning to take
- Books you have read or book clubs you belong to
- Membership in professional associations
- Subscriptions to professional journals

What are the *professional values*?

Professional values are the principles of behavior that as a professional you bring to your career every day. Clear *professional values* help you make the right decisions when no guidelines exist, when the right decision might not be immediately clear, or when there is no one to turn to for advice. As they become part of your professional self, you build respect and credibility with everyone you know. There are six *professional values*, and together with the *transferable skills*, they are the foundation of success on your next job and throughout your career.



How did you spend your vacations while at school?

If you're just entering the workforce for the first time, your greatest disadvantage is your lack of experience. That is why this question can really help you. Your answer should show that you did things over the past few summers that have helped prepare you for this job. Any work experience is valid if it taught you lessons about the world of professional work, whether it's flipping burgers, interning, or volunteering. What's important is that you did *something* and learned from the experience.

What is the least relevant job you have held?

Only mention “least relevant jobs” that aren’t on your resume if they are way in the past. Otherwise the interviewer is going to wonder what else you left off. You can learn even from jobs irrelevant to your career. So your answer notes that every job you’ve held has given you insights into general business practices. For instance, you learned how important teamwork and reliability both are when someone didn’t show up for a shift at the burger joint. (*KED* Ch. 2.)

Of all the work you have done, where have you been most successful?

Your answer should demonstrate your ability to contribute in the company's areas of most crucial need. Illustrate your answer with specific examples from your current or previous jobs and be ready to explain why you've been able to achieve success in this particular area. Your answer should address the *transferable skills* (see *KED* Ch. 1) you brought into play to help achieve that success.

What aspects of your job do you like the best?

As long as what you like makes you successful at what you do, and ideally helps the department reach goals, you are fine. Your answer should address those responsibilities that are most important to doing this job successfully (*TJD*). You might talk about the *transferable skills* that enable you to do these aspects of the job well: “Because I really understand how to *multitask*, I don’t find this aspect of the job nearly as frustrating as some people.” (See *KED* Ch. 1.) Stress that you like the sense of achievement that comes with a job well done.



What do you like least about your current job? *or* What would you change about your current job?

You'll be knocked out of the running if your "least liked" components match up with the job's "most critical" components, so you'll refer back to your *TJD* in preparation for facing questions like this. All jobs are stressful, and all jobs have their repetition, so it's likely that your "least liked" will feature both repetitive and stressful aspects of your work. Behind the question, interviewers want to know how you handle these parts of your job. You should readily be able to identify examples of both boring/repetitive and stressful aspects of your work and how you deal with each of them. In each, it is important that you recognize why you feel the way you do and can explain how you ensure that these aspects of your work are still executed faultlessly.

What achievements are you most proud of?

Be honest and don't exaggerate contributions to major projects. Share the success and you are seen as a *team player*. The examples you use are most effective when they relate to the job's priorities. To guarantee your illustrations are relevant, use the examples you identified in the *TJD* exercise. (See *KED* Ch. 2.) Finish with, "I believe that as my skills continue to grow, my biggest achievements are still ahead of me."

What's the most difficult project you've tackled at your job?

Examples you use in answers to interview questions are always best when they reflect the employer's priorities for the job (*TJD*). Whenever possible, discuss projects that parallel work you are likely to do at the new job. You will state the project, its challenges in some detail, your *critical thinking* process to isolate causes and possible solutions, and how you used *multitasking* skills to prioritize and stay on top of everything as you successfully completed it, identifying the value it delivered to your department.

What do you think of your current/last boss? *or* How could s/he have done a better job?

Never criticize management. People who complain about their employers are recognized as troublemakers who cause disruption in a department. This question is the interviewer's way of finding out if you're going to cause trouble. No manager is going to bring on someone likely to affect *productivity* and make his/her job more difficult. This question is the interviewer's way of finding out if you're going to cause trouble. You both liked and respected that manager, and appreciated both the guidance and encouragement to grow.



Describe the best/worst manager you ever had.

The danger is in talking about your worst boss. Your answer interests the interviewer because of what it says about you. There is no getting out of the question, so make it someone from way back and turn the question into a positive about you. For example, "The manager at a convenience store where I worked in school was awful. He was a tyrant who could never explain what he wanted, but could always find fault. He harassed the staff and was rude to the customers." Then you smile. "He unwittingly taught me exactly how not to behave."

What kind of experience do you have for this job?

This is a golden opportunity to sell yourself, but think about your *TJD* exercise (see *KED* Ch. 2) and what's critical to the interviewer: S/he is looking for someone who has the skills and background to execute the job's responsibilities, whose experience shows an understanding of priorities, and who can contribute quickly to current projects. The company wants a problem solver, someone who can bring value to projects quickly. Before answering, you might first ask what will be your assignments in the first few months. With that information, you can tailor your answer to fit the manager's immediate needs.

What have you learned from jobs you have held?

You've learned that little gets achieved without *teamwork*; that there's invariably sound thinking behind *systems and procedures*; and that to get to the root of problems, it's better to talk less and listen more. But most of all, you've learned that you can sit on the sidelines watching the hours go by, or you can get involved and make a difference with your presence. You do this because you can't stand marking time; you're goal oriented, and time goes quicker when you're engaged; and besides, when you're involved the relationships you build are with people like you.

Tell me how you moved up through your career.

Avoid a rambling answer. Review the importance of your job's role in the success of the department and company, the type and quality of work you have done, and your *commitment* to personal development and shared goals. In each of these areas, you should identify the *transferable skills* and *professional values* that are foundational to everything you do.



What aspects of your work do you consider most crucial and why?

The answer to this will first show your grasp of why the job exists and the role it plays in achieving departmental and company goals. The second and most crucial point is how your *technical* and *critical thinking skills* (see *KED* Ch. 1) enable you to anticipate/prevent and identify/solve the problems that crop up every day in your functional area. You cannot do this without a complete understanding of critical *transferable skills* and the *TJD* exercise (see *KED* chapters 1–2).

What are you looking for?

Your goal at interviews is to turn them into job offers; nothing else matters. Beware of too much emphasis on what you want from the company. Focus instead on those things that you want to bring to the company. You can customize this example to your profession and needs: "I get a real sense of achievement from solving customer problems, so I'm looking for an environment and people who have similar *commitment* to professional development and each other."

How do you define *communication skills*?

“It’s my ability to communicate effectively with people at all levels.  
This means my:

1. *Verbal skills*
2. *Written skills*
3. *Listening skills*
4. Competency with new *communication* media
5. *My dress*
6. *My body language*
7. *My social graces*
8. *My emotional maturity* in trying situations.”

(See *KED* chapters 1, 6, and 7.)

Of all the work you have done, where have you been the most successful?

What you do well must be relevant to the critical responsibilities of the job. Expect a request for illustration. To answer, you need an objective grasp of the results you are expected to deliver every day. You'll only know for sure when you have completed a *TJD* exercise (see *KED* Ch. 2). Then, knowing what is really critical to employers, you explain how a relevant combination of your *technical* and *transferable skills* (see *KED* Ch. 1) allows you to prevent and solve the everyday problems that are at the heart of your job.



How should I handle having filed bankruptcy?

There is no need to bring it up unless asked or until you are close to an offer and you know that a background check is part of the process. It will show up in a credit check so be honest, professional, and as brief as possible. Don't give any information about the circumstances; they aren't necessary, so no one wants to know.

What an employer does want to hear is that you have turned the corner and everything is under control now. They do want to know, very briefly, what you learned and have done to rebuild your credit and get back on your feet.

Once it's behind you, get it expunged from your record.

What is more important on your job—written or oral *communication*?

Both are important. Oral communication is critical for relationship building and all instances where reaching agreement on complex issues is required—for example, closing the sale. Written communication is more efficient in communicating information without the extra time that goes with conversation, outlining complex ideas, and (after the verbal discussions) confirming agreement on them. If it's important, put it in writing. The question is not which is more important; it's which is the tool best suited for the job. Written communication becomes more important the higher up you climb. (See *KED* Ch. 1.)

What is your greatest weakness?

This often comes right after the question about your greatest strength. It is an invitation to put your head in a noose, and you won't get away with a lame answer, so decline the invitation by preparing. We all share a weakness: staying current with the rapid changes in technology that affect our work. First, talk about these difficult-to-keep-up challenges, then follow with examples of how you are trying to keep up with technologies that affect your *productivity*. "I'm currently reading about . . ."; "I just attended a weekend workshop where . . ."; or, "I'm signed up for classes at . . . ."

How do you deal with complex problems in your job?

Every job from CEO to the fast-food server has its problems and challenges. This question examines your grasp of *critical thinking*, one of the *transferable skills*, and asks you to explain your approach to problem solving. You objectively define the problem, its causes, then possible solutions and their impact on both the problem and the company. You seek input from others where appropriate and then implement the solution. If asked for an example, you'll need to recall the results and the *transferable skills* you used in the process and the results. (See *KED* Ch. 1.)



What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?

The employer is looking for people who can make decisions and solve problems, not those who'll dither instead of do. You want to come across as someone who's decisive but not precipitate, who considers the implications of actions on outcomes, as well as any side effects those actions might have on other activities, and if they conflict with existing *systems and procedures* or other company priorities. Emphasize that having analyzed the situation and reached a logical conclusion, you act.

How do you plan your day?

This examines the *time management skills* that enable you to *multitask* productively. (See *KED* Ch. 1.) In your answer, explain three steps you take every day:

1. You set time at the end of every day to review today's and plan tomorrow's activities.
2. You prioritize all the planned activities.
3. You stick to those priorities to make sure the important work gets addressed first.

This is known as the *Plan, Prioritize, Do, Review Cycle*, and no one succeeds over the long haul without it.

How do you organize for major projects?

Major projects come along on top of everything else you are already doing and demand a revision of how you organize the execution of your regular duties. Your answer will explain how you first establish the final deadline and work backward from there to identify key milestone points and their dates for completion. Next, seeking as much input from others as possible, you create a plan of attack for completion. Finally, you review your regular work schedule and re-evaluate existing priorities to accommodate the major project. Be prepared to illustrate your answer.

Tell me about a job or project for which you had to gather information from many different sources and then create something with the information.

This question examines your *critical thinking*, *time management*, and *communication skills*. (See *KED* Ch. 1.) Your answer should ideally outline how you determine:

- The questions that would gather the information needed
- The best medium for gathering the information
- The time frame for gathering the information
- The process for monitoring and evaluating feedback
- The process for putting the information into a useable format
- How the gathered information was subsequently used

If you have never done things this way, you now have a new awareness and template for professional growth.



Tell me about an important goal you set recently.

The goal you set is important and should be related to your professional performance. Use either a development goal or a *productivity*/performance standard goal. With a development goal, explain why you chose it, how it helped you grow, and the benefits of completion. With a *productivity*/performance standard goal, explain why you chose it, how it helped/will help the department and/or company, and the benefits of completion. You can add to this how you integrated achieving the goal into all your other activities through *multitasking*.

How many projects can you handle at one time?

You must be honest; no one will believe an answer like, “I can handle as many as you can give me.” At the same time, you don’t want to give the impression that you can only handle one thing at a time. If you want to progress in your career, you will have to master the skills of *multitasking*, which involves judging the relative importance of different priorities and implementing scheduling strategies to meet them all. Give an example of how you plan, prioritize, and coordinate each project’s component parts.

Describe a typical day for me.

This is another question interviewers ask to get insight into your *time management* and *organization skills*. From your *TJD* exercise (see *KED* Ch. 2), explain the priorities of an average day. Describe how you organize your day to stay on top of the day's breaking events and your ongoing priorities. Explain how at the end of each day, you set priorities for the following day's work based on a review of what has been achieved today. Avoid any statement that implies your *energy* level decreases toward day's end.

Describe a project that required a high amount of *energy* over an extended period of time.

Pick a project relevant to the job's priorities. All professions are an endurance race, and not everyone has the same degree of stamina. Your manager would prefer a team of marathon runners. You need to show through your answer that you maintain calm in the face of pressure and that your *organization* and *time management skills* will get you through any crisis. Pick a project to describe that was important to the organization and that, hopefully, increased your profile within the company. If you reasonably can, talk about how diet, exercise, and other considerations help you maintain peak *productivity*.



What area of your skills/professional development do you want to improve at this time?

Don't damage your candidacy with careless admissions of weakness. Choose a skill where you are competent, but which everyone, including the interviewer, knows demands constant personal attention.

*Technology skills* as they apply to your job could be a good example of a "weakness" that every committed professional shares. Cite the importance and challenge of staying current in this area and finish with saying, "\_\_\_\_\_ is so important, I don't think I will ever stop paying attention to this area." Be prepared to explain how you are working on this skill development right now.

Name the professional values.

Motivation and Energy, Commitment and Reliability, Determination, Pride and Integrity, Productivity, and Systems and Procedures. These are the principles that should inform everything you do in your career every day. They define a true professional and build respect and credibility with everyone you know. During job interviews, you won't speak about them as formally as you might about how a transferable skill helps you be more productive. But if you believe in them, they will naturally weave themselves into your answers and help brand the professional you.

Think of a crisis situation in which things got out of control. Why did it happen, and what was your role in the chain of events and their resolution?

In crises there are those who stand and watch and others who step up. You can guess which the interviewer wants to hire.

Be prepared with an example that shows how you were caught up in the events, but not the cause of them. Address how you stayed calm (you don't have to be superhuman), focused on problem causes, then solutions. You did whatever was needed to get things back on track. It doesn't hurt if this meant doing work that someone in your position wouldn't normally do or that you sacrificed personal plans.

Tell me about a time when you came up with a new method or idea.

The question examines your professional grasp of your job; its role in profitability, systems, and *procedures*; and your *critical thinking* and *creativity skills*. Your answer should be job-related. It needn't be a world-changing idea—just show that you think intelligently about your work and that you're the kind of person who tries to make a difference when you can. Explain who benefited and how it raised productivity, and, if you can show it, the time and money saved (or money earned). If you can, include testimonials from your superiors: "The CEO went out of his way to praise me at a company-wide meeting for . . . ."



What do you do when there is a decision to be made and no *procedure* exists?

You need to show that even though you're more than capable of creativity, you're not a rogue who ignores *systems and procedures*. Explain that the first thing you'd do is to discuss the situation with your boss. That's exactly what the hiring manager wants to hear. Make clear that in developing any new approach/*procedure*/idea, you'll stick to *systems and procedures*, not devise a new system that fits the whim of the moment.

How many hours a week do you find it necessary to work to get your job done?

Present yourself as having good *time management* and *organization skills* (see *KED* Ch. 1). Take the time to explain how your time management skills allow you to *multitask* and therefore be more effective. At the same time, make clear that you're always willing to do whatever the situation demands to get the job done right and on time. "I try to plan my time effectively and usually can. Our business always has its rushes, though, so I put in whatever effort it takes to get the job finished."

What would your coworkers tell me about your attention to detail?

Say that you never pay attention to the details, and you'll hear a whoosh as your job offer flies out the window.

Your answer obviously lies in the question. They would say you pay attention to detail, because your ability to focus and your *critical thinking skills* allow you to identify all the component parts of a given job. In addition, your *time management* and *organizational skills* ensure that you get the job done in a timely manner without details falling through the cracks.

What problems do you experience working alone?

The interviewer wants to know how far you perceive your personal authority and responsibility to extend. As an employee with well-developed *transferable skills* and *professional values* (see *KED* Ch. 1), you should be self-reliant and able to function without constant supervision. If you are new, learn the rules and play by them to get to this place.

There's no specifically right or wrong answer to this question, since it will depend on the culture and *procedures* of the company you're interviewing with. Cite examples that show you can solve problems that come up on a daily basis, that you seek advice but aren't needy, and that you're guided by the company's *systems and procedures* in all things.



What aspect of the company interests you most?

If you don't understand what the company does and is known for, you will lose out to candidates who do. This is a chance to showcase knowledge you've gained through your extensive research. You need to have visited the company website and read media coverage on the company and its key executives (Google News) and general news about the issues affecting your profession. Your research will raise as many questions as it answers and you can use this in your answer: "I read that \_\_\_\_\_, and wonder how this is affecting you . . . ?" Such questions demonstrate engagement with your profession and get the interviewer talking, perhaps giving you useful information.

What do you like/dislike about your current job?

Criticizing a prior or current employer is a red flag that you could be a problem employee. Most interviews start with a preamble by the interviewer about the company. The information s/he gives you can help answer this question.

Keep your answer short and positive: You liked everything about your last job but you are looking for a new opportunity and the kind of environment/opportunity described by the interviewer earlier; you replay the pluses described by the interviewer. For instance, if you're interviewing at a small company after coming from a big one, you can stress the greater opportunities for breadth of experience.

What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your field?

You know the answer to this one: It's a brief recital of your *transferable skills and professional values*.

You might say: "To be successful in my field? Drive, *motivation*, *energy*, confidence, *determination*, good *communication*, and *critical thinking*. Combined, of course, with the ability to work with others."

How did your boss get the best out of you?

“Can I manage you?” is behind this one. It’s an opportunity to tell your prospective boss how you (would) like to be managed: Your boss always outlined projects at the start, noting deadlines, expected results, anticipated problems, and workable responses. S/he always shared the benefit of experience. You agreed on a plan of attack for the work, and how and when you needed to give status updates along the way. Your boss was always available for advice, preferred doing so early or late in the day, and taught you to take the work seriously but encouraged a collegial team atmosphere.

That said, look for clues as to the management style of the hiring manager and the environment of the department or company. Is it a place where everyone works together most of the time? Or are employees encouraged to work on their own with minimal supervision? Tailor your answer to the needs of the manager.



How necessary is it for you to be creative on your job?

*Productivity* is important in all jobs and it is *creativity* that generates productivity improvements, so looking for better ways is part of your job. Free-flowing creativity in copywriters is mandatory. Where the job demands strict adherence to policies and *procedures*—say, accounting—creativity is encouraged within the strict boundaries. Your answer reflects how, individually and as a part of team, you are always looking for better ways, that when your colleagues also love their work, it's something you talk about; ideas come from communication. If you can, give an example of a team-generated idea.

Tell me about a responsibility/project/task that you've enjoyed.

Here the interviewer learns if you spend your time on *productive* or busy work. Obviously, use an example that shows you involved in work that has real relevance to the success of your job/department (see the *TJD* exercise in *KED* Ch. 2). Be enthusiastic as you talk about the project, why it was important, its challenges, their causes, your solutions, who helped, and how they helped. Weave relevant *transferable skills* into your conversation and mention how *teamwork* played a role.

What have you done to become more effective in your position?

The interviewer wants to know if you are committed to your profession and is looking for at least one example. If you want to remain current and viable, technology changes mean your job skills must always be in development.

In your answer, talk of the mentor relationships you have formed, the books and professional commentary you've read, the professional organizations you belong to, the certifications you're earning, courses you are enrolled in, and webinars you attend. If you aren't doing such things, wake up and start now. This is your life calling.

How should I handle a felony?

First, make sure it's on your record and will show up in a background check. States handle felony records differently and the information an employer may inquire about may also differ. Learn what you have to disclose to an employer but don't disclose more than you have to. Briefly, tell the employer what you've learned and that it is behind you. Discrepancies between your application and reality can cause problems.

There's no need to discuss issues that didn't result in conviction or anything that has been expunged.



What is an adequate reward for your efforts?

This is a manageability question and money probe rolled into one. The interviewer wonders if you expect a Nobel Prize for showing up to work. Do not get dragged into money discussions until it is specifically put on the table. This time will come. Until then, concentrate on making yourself the prime candidate. Your reward comes from a job well done, a happy workplace, colleagues who care about doing the most they can rather than the least they can get away with, a supportive manager who encourages you to succeed, and a company that values professional *commitment*.

How do you rank among your peers?

The interviewer is trying to examine your self-esteem. In some cases (for instance, in sales), it may be possible for you to quantify this: "I'm number two in the nation." In other cases, you'll be more subjective, but you should strive to be realistic. You might try this, adding real-life details: "There are two groups in my department: those who make a difference, and those who watch. I'm in the first group."

What prime responsibility does your job have in common with all other jobs?

The corporation is a complex machine geared toward making money in some way, and your job is one small cog in that complex machinery. If the machine could work without the cost of your cog, it would. This means that without your job there would be problems in the money-making machinery. Consequently, at its heart, your job exists to solve the problems that occur in your area of responsibility and to prevent many of those problems occurring in the first place.

Describe a situation where your work or an idea of yours was criticized.

The interviewer wants to know how you handle criticism as well as uncovering possible weaknesses. Put your example in the past, make it small, and show what you learned from the experience. When possible, talk about a poor idea rather than poor performance. Focus your answer on your ability to accept criticism and learn from it. Show that you go through these steps to become maximally *productive*:

- Listen for understanding.
- Confirm the understanding.
- Ask for guidance.
- Confirm the expected outcome.
- Show a satisfactory resolution.
- Address how the experience helped you grow.



Describe to me how your job relates to the overall goals of your department and company.

Every company is in business to make a profit. Your job is an important cog in the machinery that makes this happen. Show your understanding of this fact and your awareness of the problems that crop up every day and get in the way of the company maximizing *productivity*. Identify that your job, at its core, is to anticipate and prevent problems from arising and to solve the problems that your job exists to address. Show that you are alert to how your individual efforts fit into the big picture. Your awareness and best efforts affect everyone else's ability to do their work. (See the *TJD* exercise in *KED* Ch. 2.)

What would you say are the most important responsibilities in your job?

First, explain the role your job plays in the responsibilities of your department, and how it supports the department's mandate to contribute to the *productivity* and profitability of the company in specific ways. Second, explain that your single most important responsibility is the satisfaction of your customers: those people who are directly impacted by your work. This holds true whatever your job. Finally, outline the most important responsibilities of your job that allow you to do this. You will find these already prioritized in your completed *TJD* exercise (see *KED* Ch. 2).

What day-to-day decisions or judgment calls do you have to make?

Apart from identifying obvious decisions you make on your own versus those that require you to consult management, there are other points you can make. Your answer can show you are on top of all those constant judgment calls that affect the quality of your work output. At its heart, your job is about the solution and prevention of problems, so talk about the judgment calls you make every hour to prevent problems from arising in your area of responsibility. It's the little judgment calls along the way that prevent big problems.

If you went to your boss for a raise, why would you be doing it?

You will answer that—apart from normal annual reviews, and given that your salary is comparable to industry norms—raises/promotions are only awarded for consistent performance considerably above the norm that results in tangible benefit to the employer.

Avoid answers such as, “Because I deserve it.” Explain that it would most likely occur as a result of a combination of skill development and effectiveness delivered over time and likely to include:

- Increased workload and/or responsibilities
- Significant and tangible contributions above the norm
- Enhanced professional and academic accreditations



How do you feel about your progress to date?

This one can tell the interviewer about your skills, professionalism, objectivity, and self-esteem. Your answer should illustrate a *commitment to productivity* for the company and itemize the extra effort you invest in professional development. Explain how you ensure that your work is executed effectively, and, if you can, cite endorsements given you by managers. Finish by saying that being at this interview means you've gone as far as you can with your present employer and that you expect the environment at \_\_\_\_\_ and new ways of doing things will encourage a new spurt of growth.

Do you consider yourself successful?

Don't fall into the trap of just giving a yes or no answer to this question. Expand your answer to explain why you're successful, first defining "success" as making a meaningful contribution with your work. Among the qualities you should describe are the *transferable skills* and how they help you be successful in your work, plus the roles of *motivation*, tenacity, and resilience. If you have had recent job changes, it's okay to tell the interviewer that, while not all of them may have been planned, every new situation has enhanced your skills, professional awareness, and adaptability.

Is it ever necessary to go above and beyond the call of duty in terms of effort or time to get your job done?

You need to show that you will step up when the time comes. It's also tricky because on the one hand corporate culture encourages burning the midnight oil, yet many managers are leery of people who portray themselves as coming into the office at 3 A.M. on Sunday to get the job done so don't be heavy-handed in your answer. Your answer is most effective when you say "yes" and then illustrate with a story of making extra and special efforts. The story you tell can be the extra effort and time you invested to make a sale, or the team pushed to bring in a major project that was critical to your departmental/company success.

Tell me about a time when an emergency caused you to reschedule your workload/projects.

The story you tell should illustrate your flexibility and willingness to work extra hours when necessary. Demonstrate that your multitasking/*time management skills* allow you to change course without having a nervous breakdown. The question examines how you handle emergency imperatives and you'll make points when you add that your strong planning and time management skills not only see you through high-pressure situations, they also allow you to stay on top of your regular responsibilities. (For more on *transferable skills*, see *KED* Ch. 1.)



In a tightly run job race when there is nothing to choose between two candidates, who gets the offer?

The candidate who is most intelligently enthusiastic about the job. An employer knows the more motivated candidate will work harder, turn in better work, and, because of the enthusiasm for the work and the job, be a better team player. When you show your interest, motivation, and energy, it makes a positive impression because most candidates are so nervous they are stiff and formal. Headhunters the world over agree that asking for the job with reason and enthusiasm will often be the tie breaker.

Tell me about an occasion when your performance didn't live up to your own expectations.

This is a tough one. You're being invited to reveal weaknesses and make points against your candidacy. Be honest (as that will earn you points), but put the example in the past and use an example that has a second chapter: how when all was lost, rather than quit, you stayed with it until you had the situation turned around. Finish your answer by explaining what you learned and have applied from the experience: "I think we learn more from our mistakes than we do our effortless successes."

How long will it take you to make a contribution?

This question is a great opportunity to shoot yourself in the foot. It takes time to understand systems and *procedures*, who the power players are, and why things are done the way they are. You might ask a question of your own: "To help me give you a more specific answer, what will be my major goals and assignments for the first three months?" Once you know the specifics, you can estimate the time it will take to start paying your way, then finish with, "But making real contributions? That requires being part of the team, which will be a priority."

In what areas do you feel your supervisor could have done a better job?

Whatever the temptation, do not criticize your managers. This is another short, sweet, and shut-up response: "My boss is/was great. I have always been so busy learning from \_\_\_\_\_ that I haven't ever thought of how s/he could have done a better job. S/he has really brought me to the point where I am ready for greater challenges. That's why I'm here."



How do you take direction?

There are two kinds of direction: the kind you get when your boss has all the time in the world, and the kind you get when s/he's under the gun. An answer reflecting this reality will make you points. Make it clear that you're able to take criticism without getting upset and that your first priority is to get the job done in the best way possible. Try to show yourself as a low-maintenance employee who gets expectations straight at the start of a project, and seeks advice when it is needed or offered.

If you could make one constructive suggestion to management, what would it be?

What matters here is less the specific content of your answer than the tone. Say, "I don't know," and it implies you lack initiative, intelligence, and *motivation*. Say, "They should have . . ." and you could mark yourself as uninformed or a troublemaker. Suggest what you know to be true but management rarely gets: Most people want to do a good job, and quite a few will make the effort. Management should create an environment where striving for excellence is encouraged and where those retired on the job have the opportunity to change or to leave. Everyone would benefit.

What are the five secrets to getting hired?

You know the job and understand the world in which it operates. You understand that your job exists to solve and prevent problems. You are excited and motivated by the challenges of your work and the role of your profession. You are seen to possess the *transferable skills* and *professional values* that brand a true professional. You are a team player and recognize that the quality of your work affects the ability of your colleagues to do their work.

Tell me about an occasion when your work or an idea was criticized.

This question gets at how you'll handle criticism in the future. Your example should describe a poor idea rather than poor work. Put the example in the past and address how you handled the criticism: You listened and asked questions for clarification; you fed back what you heard to make sure the facts were straight; you sought advice and confirmed expected outcomes; you went away and fixed the problem. Show that a satisfactory resolution was reached, recognizing the manager's positive impact, and tell what you learned from the experience.



**Tell me about a time when you exceeded expectations.**

This is a chance for you to sell yourself. Part of the question is to find out what you consider exceptional, so be sure to sell what objective evaluation tells you is important (see the *TJD* exercise in *KED* Ch. 2); don't overkill; and, as a *team player*, acknowledge any supporting roles. Part of the point of the question is to find out what you consider exceptional. Try to quantify your contribution in terms of *productivity*: saving time or money or making money for the company.

When was the last time you got really frustrated or angry?

Choose frustration over anger, and cite a circumstance where you were frustrated for the right reasons. For example, you could tell how frustrated you got with an old friend who always liked to do just enough to get by, and whined about you “kissing up” to management. Explain how after months of this you finally had enough, telling him that if he got involved with the work instead of complaining, the time would go quicker, he wouldn’t be spreading negativism, and people would want to work with him more.

How long would you stay with the company?

The interviewer might be thinking of offering you a job. Since you want to encourage him or her to really sell you on the job, end your answer with a question of your own that puts the ball back in the interviewer's court. For instance, "I want to settle down with a company where everyone makes an effort to do the best they can and to work together. I'm committed to building my skills and my career, I take direction well, and love to learn. Growing professionally in an environment like this I should be a happy camper. How long do you think I would be happy here?"

Can you work under pressure?

Say “no” and there goes the job offer. Just say “yes” and you can expect the follow-up: “Tell me about a time when you had to work under pressure.” Illustrate your reply to this with example(s) of your coolness under fire. If possible, be prepared with examples that include both external pressures—demands from customers, vendors, and so forth—and demands from within the company. You don’t waste time complaining, you focus on staying organized and on top of all your commitments, so that the pressure that goes with every job doesn’t escalate because you didn’t pay attention to the details.



What is the most difficult situation you have faced?

You're really being asked two different questions: "What do you consider difficult?" and "How did you handle it?" You must have a good story ready for this one in which the situation was tough and allowed you to show yourself in a good light. Don't talk about problems with coworkers. Instead, focus on specific job performance problems, the solution to which brought value to the company. The sequence your answer should follow: *Problem, Solution, Results, Value*.

What have you done that shows initiative?

Are you a doer, someone who will look for ways to make a difference with your presence to save money or increase sales? Or are you a person who's content to sit back and do things the same old way "because we've always done it this way"? Obviously you want to shine as the first type. The story you tell shows you stepping up to do a job others didn't see or didn't want to do, but which nevertheless needed to be done. It's great if you can describe a job that was important but lacked glamour and so was overlooked.

What would you say about a supervisor who was unfair or difficult to work with?

You would make an appointment to see the supervisor and explain that you felt his/her behavior toward you must mean that you were doing something wrong—that you wanted to find out what the problem was so that you could fix it and have better relations. You would enter into the discussion diplomatically, taking responsibility for any *communication* problems that might exist.

Why do you feel you are a better [manager/scientist/assistant] than some of your coworkers?

Speak disparagingly of your coworkers and it can work against you. The trick is to answer the question without accepting an invitation to show yourself in anything but a flattering light. "I don't spend my time thinking about how I am better than my colleagues, because that would be detrimental to our working together as a team. I believe, however, some of the qualities that make me an outstanding \_\_\_\_\_ are . . . ." From here, go on to itemize specific *technical skills* of your profession and a selection of the *transferable skills* and *professional values* that make you a beacon of *productivity*.



How have you benefited from your disappointments?

It's well said that we can learn more from our failures than our successes, so this is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your *emotional maturity* and *critical thinking skills* (see *KED* Ch. 1).

Success in life depends on making mistakes and learning from them. Your answer will explain you treat disappointments as a learning experience: you look at what happened, why it happened, and how you can do things differently at each stage. You might quote Thomas Edison, the greatest inventor of the modern age, who defined *creativity* as 99 percent perspiration and 1 percent inspiration and explained his success as knowing more ways to not do something than anyone living.

Give me an example of a time when you were told no.  
What did you do in response?

The answer depends on your job. If you are in sales, the interviewer is looking for the techniques and attitude you use to overcome rejection to make the sale.

You confirm the reason for the “no”; re-evaluate your angle of approach and how you are communicating in light of the rejection; then either come back with new reasoning or perhaps later with a new approach. This holds true in non-sales jobs too, but if it’s clear you were told “no” for good reason, you accept it and learn from the experience. Also see card #101.

What do you do when you have a great deal of work to accomplish in a short time span?

Employers want players who don't fold in the crunch. This is a chance to highlight your *emotional maturity*, *critical thinking*, and *time management skills*. Interviewers look for people who, when the going gets tough, show their *commitment* and *determination* and kick their analytical and planning skills into high gear. Open with your understanding that 90 percent of success with any project is in the preparation: You determine everything that needs to be done and then prioritize that list. You create a plan of attack for each task, determining deadlines and critical milestones along the way, and the steps and resources needed to reach all of them. If asked for an example, use one for which you received praise from your boss.

How much money do you want?

Ask for too much and you don't get an offer. Ask too little and kick yourself for years. The answer is to give a salary range, not a single dollar figure. Do this by coming up with three numbers:

- The least money you would accept.
- A dollar amount that constitutes a fair offer.
- A dollar amount that would make you go to heaven on the spot.

Kick out the lowest, because you can always negotiate downward, and you have a salary range that you can give with confidence: "I am looking for somewhere between . . ."



Have you ever had to make unpopular decisions?

As you climb the professional ladder, unpopular decisions are invariably part of the job. Work increasingly requires interaction with divergent publics, all with different needs, and each demanding satisfaction. *Leadership* skills help you make the unpopular decision, *teamwork* and *communication skills* help make them palatable. Your answer needs to show that you're not afraid to disrupt the status quo when that decision is the way to best satisfy the business obligations we all live by. Simultaneously stress your effort to make the decision workable for all parties. With a requested example, explain how subsequently everyone accepted its necessity.

How well do you work alone?

All jobs require interaction and individual effort, and every manager wants staff who can work toward a common goal while taking responsibility for getting on with the work. A manager hasn't the time to crank-start every member of his/her team each morning. Your answer should say that at the beginning of new initiatives, you like to get clarification of expectations/outcomes and deadlines, plus how and when your boss likes status updates, and that while your job demands *teamwork*, you are a self-starter who, once understanding expectations, gets on with it.

In working with new people, how do you go about getting an understanding of them?

Any new hire is expected to become part of the group, which means getting an understanding of the group and its individual members. When you start a new job, everything is alien and becoming a member of the group gives you the best chance of a fast, successful start in that job.

Understanding that everyone likes to give advice is the key to your answer. Explain to the interviewer that everything will be new, and you have found that the best way to understand and become part of a new team is to be open, friendly, and ask lots of questions. If you can, use an example from starting a previous job, where you quickly became a trusted and valued member of the team.

Have you ever had difficulties getting along with others?

This question examines your people skills and manageability. Are you a *team player*, or are you going to disrupt the department and make the manager's life miserable?

You can give a yes-or-no answer, and shut up, but if you think through what you are going to say, your answer can also say something about your professional values. In this case, you say that there are two types in every department: the type that is engaged and committed to peak performance everyday, and the type that does their job but without the same level of *commitment*. You can and do get on with everyone, but tend to bond more with the people who take a genuine *pride* in becoming their best.



What kind of work environment do you function best in?

Your research should have included insight into corporate culture (see *KED* Ch. 3). Is it a suit-and-tie kind of place or do employees wear jeans and have NERF ball battles? You can address this in terms of your compatibility with the corporate culture, but you can also say that above all, you'd probably like to work in an environment that took work seriously and had a friendly atmosphere. You'd like to understand the written and the unwritten rules of both the group and your boss. Finish, smiling, with, "And I'd look forward to your insights when I start."

What different levels of management do you interact with?

This is a way to determine both the level and relative sophistication of your professional experience and its match with the demands of the job. Possible follow-up questions might examine your comfort and intimidation levels. To the extent you can, define the different management ranks you have dealt with and, if you can, weave in how you adapt your interaction to their different needs and agendas.

What is your role as a team member?

Every company depends on individual initiative being harnessed to *teamwork* to achieve the complex tasks that result in departmental success and corporate profitability. Describe how you do your job in ways that help others do their jobs most efficiently and harmoniously and that you have a responsibility to encourage others' success at all times. Answer with a concrete example of how you contributed to the work of a team and enhanced its success. In particular, show that you're aware of how your work as an individual and a team member fits into the larger goals of the department.

Tell me about a time when, in difficult circumstances, you pulled a team together.

Everyone has responsibility for team health. People who take responsibility when it's easier not to are an exception rather than the rule, and stepping up at these times is the right thing to do for the team and for your professional growth.

Talk about a time when the poop hit the paddle wheel and leadership was absent. Your answer shows you calmly focused on the right issues and leading by common sense, common goals, and a positive example. Your answer helps position you as someone who has the stuff of *leadership*.



Tell me about a time when your team fell apart. Why did it happen and what did you do?

Bad things happen in the best of departments, so managers want to know what you will do: point the finger of blame and do nothing or show yourself as part of the solution. Your answer presents you as a *team player* who keeps calm when it is easy not to and who, by example, accepts responsibility for staying focused on solutions rather than apportioning blame. If you are a manager, it happened early on and was necessary.

How interested are you in sports?

The interviewer is looking for involvement in groups, as an indicator of your team and social orientation. A recent survey found executives who listed group activities among their interests made an average of \$3,000 per year more than their sedentary colleagues. In answering this question, always add a reason why you feel the activity supports your professional life. Apart from team sports, endurance sports (running/cycling) are seen as a sign of *determination*. Games of skill (bridge/chess) demonstrate critical thinking skills.

Do you consider yourself a natural leader or a born follower?

You believe the complexities of *leadership* make you reluctant to regard anyone as a natural leader, because molding others into a cohesive team and leading them involves delicately tuned skills: the desire; exemplary *technical*, psychological, *communication*, and *motivational skills*; a sense of responsibility; and then a lifetime of *commitment*. Simultaneously, any leader will always be a *team player* with his/her team's success at heart. Any leader is also a player in a higher team and must always know how to follow. With effort, these skills can come to be seen as natural.

Define cooperation.

The question asks you to explain how you function as a *team player*, taking direction and working for the overall success of your department/company. Your answer will explain that cooperation is doing your job in a way that enables your colleagues to do theirs with a minimum of disruption. "It's a person's willingness to always sacrifice personal comfort to assure the department/company reaches its goals. It's a person's desire by hard work and goodwill to be part of something significant: making the team something greater than the sum of its parts."



What difficulties do you have getting on with people from different backgrounds and interests from yours?

You don't have any, and if you do, get over it. Say, "I don't have any." But don't leave it there—add that you don't have any problems working with people different from you. In fact, you find it energizing: "Our differences are enriching. People have different life experiences and different ways of coming at problems. Working with people different from me is a golden opportunity to grow personally and professionally."

When you joined your last company and met the group for the first time, how did you feel?

Past actions can predict future behavior. The interviewer wants to know how you get along with people and whether you'll fit right into the existing team or be a square peg in a round hole.

Naturally, you felt a little nervous, but you are friendly, open, helpful, and genuinely interested in your work. Consequently, you just made the effort to be this way and asked lots of questions, showed appreciation, and remembered everyone's name.

Can we check your references?

References get checked, so there is only one answer to this question if you ever expect to get an offer: “Yes.” You are also within your rights to request that reference checks of current employers wait until you have started your new job. You may also say, “I wish to keep matters confidential until we have established a mutual fit.” You should also know what your references are going to say. (See *KED* Ch. 3, for a fuller discussion of this critical topic.)

Tell me about a time you put your foot in your mouth.

The interviewer is examining your *communication skills* and ability to interact productively with others. This one is tricky because it asks you to show yourself in a poor light. Use something minor, don't over-emphasize the negative aspects of your action, and end with how the experience improved your performance at work. Example: First, pausing for careful thought, you explain how you let slip about a colleague's surprise party, you felt terrible, apologized, and promised yourself nothing like that would ever happen again. This taught you to be very careful about confidentiality and workplace communications.



Have you ever been fired?

Many people confuse getting laid off or downsized with getting fired. If you were laid off as part of a general workforce reduction, be straightforward, short, and then shut up. Don't over-explain; it makes you sound guilty. Say "no" if you can, but if you have been fired, this is a complex issue that can't be handled on a flash card, and you'll need to study the discussion on what to do in *KED* Ch. 10.

Why were you fired?

Don't mistake getting laid off with being terminated for cause. Firing someone is unpleasant and never a decision any manager makes lightly; getting fired is a black mark that you have to handle. The first and most important thing is to take responsibility for the actions or behavior that led to your dismissal because 99 times out of 100 the responsibility lies at your door. Study the discussion of how to handle a past termination in *KED* Ch. 10. Always explain how your behavior changed as a result.

Why have you changed jobs so frequently?

Employers are reluctant to invest time and money in bringing job-hoppers up to speed. This needs to be a short answer; dwelling on it only makes interviewers probe for more. Cataclysmic events of recent times might mean you can honestly say, "Not by intention, I've just been caught in the upheavals and layoffs of the last few years." Your reasons for leaving each job need to be carefully thought out in advance so you can give the reasons briefly.

Tell me about the problems you have living within your means.

If you have experienced severe financial difficulties, you'll need to address them and how they have been handled. The answer needs to be carefully thought out and short, emphasizing that you are in control of the situation. Otherwise: You continually strive to improve your skills and your living standard. Your problems are no different from that of this company or any other—making sure all the bills get paid on time and recognizing that every month and year there are some things that are prudent to do and other expenses that are best deferred.



Wouldn't you feel happier at another company?

Questions like this can cause your stomach to cramp. Just remember to treat it as a stress question to see how you handle sudden pressure. The first step is not to feel intimidated. Then answer “no” and explain why this company is a good fit and how you can contribute. End with a question of your own. For example, “What would be the first project I would be involved with?” This identifies a critical area in which to sell yourself and encourages the interviewer to think of you as an employee.

Why did you leave \_\_\_\_\_?

This is a checkbox question—ask the question, check the box, and move on. You can get into trouble with TMI. Any answer longer than fifteen words is too long. If the interviewer wants more, s/he will ask.

Acceptable reasons: job not as described; company in financial difficulties; downsized; declined to relocate; too many changes—management, pay plans, direction; underpaid; incentives eliminated; limited or no growth. Acceptable reasons for a salesperson: quota raised; territory shrunk/changed; accounts taken away; commission changed; unpaid commissions; product doesn't work/overpriced/noncompetitive.

In a test, you're given a phone to handle a complaint from an irate customer. You should:

- A. Tell the customer you're just following company policy and they're going to have to live with it.
- B. Promise the customer anything they need in order to make the complaint go away.
- C. Ask the interviewer how to handle the problem.
- D. Listen to the complaint, gather all relevant information from the customer, and inform the caller that you'll consult with the necessary people in the company and get back to him or her.

**D.** Since you don't know all the details of the company's policies, this is the safest alternative. **A** and **B** either give too little or too much to the complainant, while **C** just pushes the problem onto the interviewer, rather than displaying your tact and initiative. In handling the call, it's essential that you be calm and professional, especially since the role player may deliberately try to provoke you in order to test your coolness under fire.

What do you do if interviewer talks but doesn't ask questions?

Typically interviewers talk little, but sometimes you'll meet an inexperienced interviewer or someone distracted for other reasons.

Whatever is behind the lack of questions, the situation means you are getting the opportunity to sell yourself as the best candidate for the job. As the interviewer talks, whenever you have something to add about your skills, ask, "That's interesting. Would it be of value if I told you about my experience with . . . ?"



At a restaurant interview, when the check comes you:

- A. Pick it up. The interviewee *a/ways* pays for the meal.
- B. Offer to split the check with the interviewer.
- C. Pick it up and hand it to the interviewer.
- D. Ignore it.

**D.** The protocol of the occasion dictates that the interviewer will pick up the tab for the meal.

Have you done the best work you are capable of doing?

This is a challenging question. If you say yes, the interviewer could think you're a know-it-all. Include the essence of this in your reply: "I'm proud of my professional achievements to date, especially \_\_\_\_\_. But I am always growing professionally and as my abilities increase, so does my capacity for making more and greater contributions. I am always *motivated* to give my best, and in this job there are always opportunities to contribute." Be prepared with examples of achievements of which you are proud.

What do you do to sell yourself when the interviewer talks nonstop and doesn't ask you questions?

While other candidates leave the interview frustrated, there is a way to steal the show. That nonstop nervous chatter offers great insights into what the company is looking for and who it will hire. Eager to make your case? Wait till s/he pauses for breath and ask, “Would it be of value if I told you about my experience with . . . ?”

Rate yourself on a scale of one to ten.

The interviewer wants to plumb the depths of your self-esteem and self-awareness. Be careful: Answer ten and you'll come across as insufferable. On the other hand, anything less than seven and you might as well walk out of the interview. The safe answer is around eight, saying that you always give your best, which includes ongoing personal and professional development so that new skill levels always open the door for further improvement. Give an example to illustrate your point.



“Why should I hire you?”

Tie the employer's needs to your capabilities. Matching responsibilities to skills comes from *TJD* and your *Performance Profile*; asking, "What are my top priorities in first six months?" and "What will I have achieved by then?" defines the results you are expected to deliver. Your answer addresses the abilities you bring to each deliverable, weaving in *transferable skills* as they support your argument, and acknowledging that you are a team player and that you listen to direction. If they don't ask, use this as a closing statement to land the next interview or close on the offer.

In hindsight, what have you done that was a little harebrained?

You are never harebrained in your business dealings, and you haven't been harebrained in your personal life since graduation, right? The only safe examples to use are calculated risks from your past that ultimately turned out well. One of the best, if it applies to you, is: "Well, I guess working my way through college and raising a family while I held down a full-time job. I graduated in \_\_\_\_\_ and it has paid off, but looking back it was a little harebrained."

In your current job, what should you spend more time on and why?

Enlightened self-interest dictates that ongoing career management strategies identify and develop the skills demanded in an ever-changing work environment. So your answer might address that existing skills always need to be improved and new skills learned, and then cite an example of something you are working on now. Unless you are in sales/marketing, you could add that with networking seen as so important by everyone today, you should probably be investing more time in that, but there always seem more pressing issues.

What do you do when you are not working?

Employers ask this to get a sense of who you are as a person. It doesn't matter what you do as long as it isn't watching TV every night. People who are engaged in life outside of work are more engaged at work. That you have passions and pursue them is a plus; that you are engaged in your community likewise; sports tend to say you are competitive and fit; team sports or any group activities support your *teamwork* credentials; intellectual pursuits speak to your *critical thinking* skills.



What is the worst thing you have heard about our company?

This question can come as something of a shock. As with all stress questions, your poise under stress is vital; if you can carry off a half-way decent answer as well, you are a winner. The best response to this question is simple. Just say with a smile and a laugh: "You're a tough company to get an interview with." It's true, it's flattering, and it shows that you are not intimidated.

Why should I hire an outsider when I could fill the job with someone from inside the company?

This question asks, “Why I should hire you?” Answer in two steps. The first is a recitation of your *technical* and *transferable skills*, tailored to the job’s needs. In the second part of your answer, ask: “Those are my general attributes. However, if no one is promotable from within, you must be looking to add strength in specific ways. How do you hope the person you hire will benefit your department?” The answer is your cue to sell your applicable qualities.

Can you put your education behind you and start from scratch in the professional world?

For the entry-level candidate, this may come as a shock. You spent all that money and time educating yourself. Was it worthless? In a word, no. The interviewer wants to know about your flexibility and your understanding that all the education in the world can't prepare you for every challenge you'll face in your professional life. You answer showing understanding that your education is just your entrée and that starting professional work is when your education really begins.

What job in our company would you choose if you were free to do so?

No one wants to be told that they're hiring their own replacement so don't answer, "yours." Start by answering that you enjoy and want to stay in your line of work, steadily growing in skills and responsibilities. Pick a position above the one you're applying for but in the same area of the expertise. It goes without saying that in naming that position, you should have a clear idea of just what it entails. So your answer also identifies why you have chosen this position and what you are doing to work toward it.

Mold your answer around the idea that you have a career path in mind, one that will take you to greater and greater heights of responsibility within the company.



Walk me through your job changes.

This question coming early in an interview helps the interviewer understand the chronology and reasoning behind your career moves and gaps in employment. Don't worry about gaps; you're not unique, and everyone has to deal with them. You must be ready to walk through your resume, without hesitation, making two statements about each employer.

1. What you learned from that job that applies to this one.
2. Why you left.

Make sure the nugget of experience that highlights your work with each company relates to the needs of the job for which you are interviewing.

Are you married?

If you are, the company is concerned about the impact your family duties and future plans will have on your tenure there. Although illegal if it is asked, it's best to answer this question and remove any doubts the interviewer might otherwise have. Your answer could be, "Yes, I am. Of course, I make a separation between my work life and my family life that allows me to give my all to a job. I have no problem with travel or late hours; those things are part of my work and family obligations have never interfered. My references will confirm this for you."

Do you have/plan to have children?

This question is illegal and none of the interviewer's business, but answer the concern behind the question: Will children interfere with your work obligations? Your goal is to remove reservations to your candidacy. For example, "I've been a single parent for five years and have this under control, and, as my references will confirm, I have never missed a day of work for these obligations."

How much money are you making?

This can and will be checked. Lying can cost you a job, and termination with cause can cause you problems going down the road. Do not exaggerate. If your earnings are within the range common for people at your level and in your geography, you can just give a simple answer of the figure, adding, "Of course with all the normal benefits." If you are earning considerably below the norm, you can explain that you are aware of this and part of making the move is to bring your earnings more in line with what is competitive for your experience and abilities.



What are your salary expectations?

Too much and you don't get the offer, too little and you sell yourself short. First recount your understanding of the job's deliverables and seek agreement. "Have I missed anything?" Then, "I'm looking for somewhere between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_" and give a range (you'll need to study *KED* Ch. 19, for how to come up with the right range). Finish with a question of your own: "What did you have in mind for someone of my track record?"

Have you ever been refused a salary increase?

Answer "no." Most other answers can cause problems. An example of a justifiable request that was refused might parallel the following true story. An accountant in a tire distributorship made changes to an accounting system that saved \$65,000 a year, plus thirty staff hours a week. Six months after the methods were obviously working smoothly, he requested a salary review; he was refused but was told he would receive a year-end bonus. He did: \$75. If you can tell a story like that, by all means tell how you were turned down for a raise. If not, it is best to explain that your work and salary history show a steady and marked improvement over the years.

How much do you need to support your family?

This question is sometimes asked of people working on a draw against commission. If this scenario describes you, be sure you have a firm handle on your basic needs before you answer the question or accept the position.

For salaried positions, you don't want to imply that a subsistence salary is acceptable. In this instance, give a range from your desired high-end salary down to your desired midpoint salary. A range answers the question but doesn't restrict negotiation. (See *KED* Ch. 19, for advice on how to do this.)

What do you hope to be earning two to three years from now?

The interviewer is probing your desired career and earning path and is trying to see whether you have your sights set high enough—or too high. A salary range, tied to a specific job, achievable within the time-frame, is the best answer. Without significant promotions and/or job changes, increments between 3–10 percent are typical.



At the conclusion of the interview, what should you do?

- A. Ask about salary and vacation benefits.
- B. Request that the interviewer give you an evaluation of your interview performance, so you can improve it.
- C. Ask for the next interview.
- D. Ask for an expedited hiring decision.
- E. Say you have other opportunities to consider.

C. Ask for the next interview, and if there is no next interview, ask enthusiastically for the job. “I can do this job [explain why] and I am excited about joining your team. What do I have to do to get it?” Enthusiasm is always a tie-breaker. Stay away from any topic that isn’t relevant to getting an offer on the table.

Following the interview, your follow-up letter should:

- A. Cite date and time of the interview.
- B. Be addressed to the interviewer by name.
- C. Thank the interviewer for the opportunity.
- D. Emphasize your qualifications and interest.
- E. Ask for the next interview and/or the job.
- F. All of the above.

F.

What can you do if you are momentarily stumped for an answer?

After a question is asked, you can pause for thought, then ask the interviewer, "Can you help me with that question?" or "To make sure I understand, could you run that by me again?" The question will usually be repeated in more detail, buying you more time to think. You can use this a couple of times in an interview and it will just seem as if you are listening with close attention.

What can you do if you are completely stuck for an answer?

Admit it. Rather than stumble, smile and say, "Interview nerves have gotten the best of me. Could we come back to this a little later please?" Your brain is quite capable of working in the background and coming up with a response as you answer other questions. If the interviewer comes back to the problem question, you'll probably be ready. If the question is not raised again and you've come up with a great answer, bring up the topic yourself.



Which of the following men's accessories is not acceptable to wear to an interview?

- A. Briefcase
- B. Earrings
- C. Handkerchief
- D. Analog watch

**B. Earrings.** While standards are slowly changing, earrings on men are considered unprofessional in many business environments. Yes, you have the right to wear an earring, and an employer has the right to discriminate in this area.

Which of the following should you *not* do when greeting the interviewer?

- A. Give a firm handshake with one hand only
- B. Extend your hand for a handshake only when the interviewer does
- C. Give a firm handshake with both hands
- D. Shake for two-to-five seconds only

C. A firm handshake with one hand only is appropriate.

What are some useful questions to ask during an interview?

- What are the most immediate challenges of the job?
- What are the most important projects of the first six months?
- What skills are most important to success on this job?
- Why do some people succeed and others fail doing this work?
- Why is the job open?
- What do you want me to have achieved six months from now?

All of these questions deliver information that demonstrates your engagement with your work and will help you promote your candidacy with new and relevant information about your qualifications.

What are some common questions you should *not* ask during an interview?

- How much does the job pay?
- What are the benefits?
- How much vacation do I get?
- How many personal or sick days do I get?

You are at the interview to sell yourself. Asking these questions doesn't advance your candidacy. Concentrate on what you can do for the company, not what the company might do for you. The time for these questions is when an offer is made.



How long should your answers to interview questions be?

Always be succinct. Your answers to hiring managers will usually be longer and more technical than those you give to a recruiter; the recruiter will always ask for more if necessary. Try to complete all but the most complex of your answers in under two minutes. This takes time and preparation, which is why you are using these flash cards. The time you take learning to express yourself succinctly will be repaid in the stronger impression it makes about your communication skills. If you are heading past that two-minute point, ask if the interviewer wants you to continue.

Is it a good idea to just “be yourself” at a job interview?

No! Common—and bad—advice. Remember your first day on your first job when you read that sign: “Your mother doesn’t work here—pick up after yourself”? You immediately started to develop a whole new set of *professional behaviors* that would help you survive in your professional life. It should be obvious that you behave differently at work than you do at home, so at job interviews always wear your professional persona. However, be the real professional you, not some stiffer, more formal, and unsmiling version of yourself.

How should you dress for an interview?

Your appearance shows consideration for the interviewer and the occasion. You are trying to get hired, not dated. You want to cause the least offense to the greatest majority of people. Go for clean-cut and lean toward conservative. Your appearance demonstrates your understanding of professional dress codes. Even when you are interviewing at a company with a casual dress code, dress as you would to meet their most important client. (See *KED* Ch. 6.)

Tell me what you know about this company.

It always gets asked, and you must have an answer because it demonstrates how seriously you are taking the opportunity. If you've done research on the company, you shouldn't have trouble. Visit the company website. Google for information, and "Google News" the company name and names of senior executives for media coverage. Try to show in your answer that you know what the company does, what its product line is, where it fits into the industry, and that you are aware of any new products or services.



What other companies are you interviewing with and for what positions?

Interviewers understand that you're not devoting every bit of your attention to their company, but they might want to know something about your focus. It's none of their business, so the safest answer is to be nonspecific: "I'm targeting companies within my area of expertise that friends in the industry tell me are well-respected. You guys have a really good reputation . . ." Then finish with a question of your own: "What kind of people do best here?"

What would you do if one of our competitors offered you a position?

The interviewer wants to know if you're really interested in the company or if you've just chosen it randomly. This is a good chance for you to explain why *this* job is best suited to your skills and professional goals. Having researched the company will give substance to your answer. You can say something along the lines of, "I'm interested in working for you because of your reputation for encouraging people who have real *commitment* to their work. I want to work here because I'm anxious to grow professionally and I think you'll bring out the best in me."

Whom did you choose as your references and why?

The interviewer is looking for a logical mix of people without any obvious omissions. You will be expected to have immediate supervisors and peers as references; tell the interviewer who you've chosen and, if you know, what they will say. If you have only worked at one company and all your managers and peers are still there, you will bring this up and ask the interviewer what s/he recommends. Read *KED* Ch. 3 for how and when to develop your references and how to get the most out of them.

What should you do if the interviewer seems disorganized and unprepared?

Interviewers have bad days too. It can be nerve-wracking on the other side of the desk, and you don't know what emergencies might be causing the distractions. Relax—whatever is causing the problem, it isn't you. In preparing for interviews, you developed a series of questions to ask that would help you gather information and keep up your end of the conversation. You can make a great impression by starting to ask these questions now. They'll show the interviewer that you really understand what the job is about and help you gather important information that you can use to sell your qualifications and suitability.



What should you do if the interviewer experiences constant interruptions from the phone or by employees walking into the office?

Interruptions give you time to develop suitable follow-up points to the conversation prior to that interruption. This provides an opportunity to sell yourself by showing you are organized and analytical. Make a note on your pad of where you were in the conversation and, looking at it briefly, refresh the interviewer on where you left off. You can rephrase and add to your additional comments and s/he will be impressed with the new information, as well as your level head and organization.

What should you do if the interviewer talks but doesn't ask questions?

Show interest. Sit straight, look attentive, and make appreciative murmurs. Then, as you learn about the job and the company, ask questions that give you information about the real challenges of the job. Feel free to jump in with relevant information about the topic being discussed with questions starting, “Would it be of value if I described my experience with . . . ?”

What should you do if the interviewer seems focused on the drawbacks and negative aspects of the job?

This usually means the interviewer has had problems with past hires. If, for example, s/he talks about reliability problems, show that you recognize the importance of reliability, especially in “our profession.” Illustrate your technical skills in and commitment to that particular aspect of your work. Finish by asking the interviewer, “Why do people fail in this job?” If you can do the job, this will give the focus you need to set yourself apart from other candidates.

What should you do if the interviewer spends time talking about “the type of people we are here at XYZ Corporation”?

Your response is to listen with interest: This is what you have heard about the company; you have always wanted to work for a company with that atmosphere. In fact, it is why you were so excited to get the interview. Ask what types of people don't do well at the company, and you have a clear profile of how to position yourself. You'll also need to ask questions of your own about the deliverables of the job so that you can present your qualifications effectively.



What should you do if the interviewer asks closed-ended questions, ones that require no more than a yes-or-no answer?

Yes-or-no answers to closed-ended questions will not get you closer to a job offer. The trick is to treat each closed-ended question as if the interviewer has added, "Please give me a brief yet thorough answer." Closed-ended questions also are often mingled with statements followed by pauses. In those instances, agree with the statement in a way that demonstrates both a grasp of your job and the interviewer's statement. For example: "That's an excellent point. For cost containment to work, there's a constant demand for attention to detail. My track record in this area is . . . ."

What should you do if the interview asks a stream of negative questions?

The more stressful the job (sales, for example), the greater the likelihood of your having to field negative questions, because the interviewer may want to create stress to see if you can take the heat. Give your answers with a smile and do not take the questions as personal insults; they are not intended that way. Negative questions can also come from frustrations in hiring for this position. You can set yourself apart by asking, "What are the problems you have had in hiring for this position?"

Sell me this pen.

This question often comes up for sales professionals. But every employee needs to know how to communicate effectively and sell appropriately. This is what the interviewer is getting at with this apparently out-of-the-blue request. Start by asking some questions to determine the customer's needs. Then proceed calmly to name the benefits of the pen and explain how it will satisfy those needs. Close with a smile and a question of your own that will bring a smile to the interviewer's face: "How many gross shall we deliver?"

Are you looking for a permanent or temporary job?

This question is often asked of young candidates. The interviewer wants reassurance that you are genuinely interested in the position and won't disappear in a few months. Go beyond saying, "Permanent." Explain why you want the job: "Of course, I am looking for a permanent job. I intend to make my career in this field, and I want the opportunity to learn the business, face new challenges, and learn from experienced professionals like you."



Do you like/expect routine tasks/regular hours?

The interviewer knows from bitter experience that most recent graduates hate routine and are hopeless as employees until they come to an acceptance of such facts of life. Explain that, yes, you appreciate the need for routine, because those repetitive tasks are obviously an important part of the job. As far as expecting regular hours, you should make it clear that you are always ready to step up whenever extra effort is needed.

What type of position are you interested in?

Usually aimed at entry-level candidates, it can tempt you to mention management. Tell the interviewer you are interested in an entry-level job, which is what you will be offered anyway. "I am interested in an entry-level position that will enable me to learn this business from the ground up and will give me the opportunity to grow professionally when and as I prove myself."

What do you like about this job?

The interviewer asks the question to see your grasp of what the job entails on a day-to-day basis. To answer, you need to understand the deliverables of the job: See the *TJD* exercise in *KED* Ch. 2. With this information, your answer can then show the interviewer your real-world grasp of the work, and the fulfillment doing it gives you. You should also add to this your understanding of the department and company as a desirable place to work, one that encourages people to be successful with the tools, coaching, and atmosphere that allow them to become their best.

What's your idea of how this industry/profession works?

The interviewer does not want a dissertation, just the reassurance that you don't think it works along the same lines as a registered charity. Your understanding should be something like this: "The role of any company is to generate revenues, as quickly, efficiently, and consistently as possible; doing so in a manner that will encourage repeat business from the existing client base and new business from word of mouth and reputation." Finish with the observation that it is your responsibility to work as a reliable member of the team that helps achieve these goals.



Why do you think this industry/profession will sustain your interest over the long haul?

This question is often asked of career changers or entry-level candidates. Your answer should speak both to your pragmatism and to your *motivation*. “I believe the profession offers stability and professional growth potential over the years for someone who understands hard work and *commitment* [explain why]. I’ll be using [*technical*] skills that are areas of strength, and [examples of your *transferable* skills] from which I derive great personal satisfaction. The work fits my personality and the profession has my respect.”

What do you think determines progress in a good company?

Your answer identifies the technical skills required and supports them with the *transferable skills* and *professional values* that enable the technical skills to be executed with consistent excellence. Begin with each of the *technical skills* you know are required to do the job, then follow with each of the other *transferable skills* that help you to do the job well. Finish with reference to the *professional values* of integrity, commitment, a willingness to play by the rules, the ability to take the rough with the smooth, and the good fortune to have a manager who wants you to succeed.

Do you think first employers should consider grades?

If your grades were good, the answer is obviously “yes.” If they weren’t, your answer needs a little more thought: “Of course, an employer should take everything into consideration. Along with grades there should be an evaluation of real *motivation*; plus, the best academics don’t always make the most productive professionals. Einstein and Edison, the two most productive minds of modern times, had terrible academic records.”

How did you pay for college?

Avoid saying, “Oh, Daddy handled all of that.” Your parents may have helped you out, but if you can, emphasize that you worked part-time as much as you could. People who paid for their own education make big points with employers, because it shows *motivation*, and the experience always delivers a better grasp of the professional world. If this isn't you, find and listen to someone who can tell you what working in the professional world teaches you, and use the knowledge



We have tried to hire people from your school/your major before, and they never seem to work out. What makes you different?

This question examines your poise under pressure and *critical thinking skills*. It may be asked because the interviewer has genuinely experienced problems. It's often asked of candidates for sales jobs, where pressure situations have you thinking on your feet. However, you can't answer this question without more information. "First, may I ask you exactly what problems you've had with people from this background?" The answer will buy you time to think through your answer while the interviewer talks. Your answer should illustrate how and why you are different. That you listened and asked an intelligent question for clarification will set you apart, even before you start to answer.

What was the last book you read (or movie you saw)?  
How did it affect you?

Your answer doesn't have to refer to the actual last book you read (or movie you saw), just to a book (or movie) that had some positive impact on your life. Ideally, you want to mention a book/video that has helped you improve yourself professionally—for example, Martin Yate and his commentaries on *critical thinking*, *multitasking*, and *teamwork*.

What are the most rewarding aspects of your job?

Your answer will tell the interviewer about your priorities. Don't answer off the top of your head; instead use your *TJD* exercise and your knowledge of *transferable skills* (chapters 2 & 3 of *KED S+S*) to sell yourself. Talk about some challenging aspect of the job, the skills you bring to it, your satisfaction in doing it well, and how it hones one or more of the *transferable skills*: "I always get a kick out of calming down an angry customer. It's not that hard if you ask *intelligent questions* and build rapport."

Of the jobs you have held, which did you like least?

Be careful that your example does not speak negatively of your willingness to take the rough with the smooth that goes with every job. Put your answer in the past. “Burger King—hated smelling of french fries . . . .” Then show that you learned, too. “When you get involved, there’s always something to learn. I learned that . . . .” End by moving the conversation forward. “But the worst day on this (professional) job is always better than the best day in that kitchen.”



How did you get your last job?

The interviewer is looking for initiative. Show that you went about your search with planning, *organization*, and intelligence, the same way you'd approach a work project. At least show *determination*. For example: "I was turned down for my last job for having too little experience. I asked the manager to give me a trial for the afternoon, then and there. I was given a list of companies they'd never sold to. I picked up the phone and didn't get close to a sale all afternoon, but she could see I'm the kind of person who always steps up."

What are some of the problems you encounter in doing your job, and what do you do about them?

Don't answer this with what you personally find difficult. Rather, address the problems that are an everyday part of your job. Refer to your *TJD* exercise for all the information you'll need to identify responsibilities, employer priorities, the problems that occur in these areas, and how you handle them. Then you'll be able to give an example in an area you know is critical to the interviewer.

For instance: "My job's fairly repetitive, so it's easy to skip things that cause problems down the line. I always look for problems—it keeps me motivated. To give you an example . . . ."

How does this job compare with others you have applied for?

This question examines what you hold valuable. If the interviewer hasn't told you about the job, ask for more information about the job and department before you answer. Most jobs with the same or similar title are usually pretty much alike. It is the working environment and the company culture that make them different. It is best if you have researched the company in all the usual ways, including using your social networks to talk with people who work/ed in this company and ideally this job and department (see *KED* Ch. 3). If you don't, you can lose out to someone better prepared.

What makes this job different from your current/last one?

No two jobs are the same. See card 187. Start your answer, “The differences seem to be . . .” and ID functional differences in responsibilities, size, scope and applications of your work, explaining the differences. You also want to identify the similarities, since the second part of your reply needs to show you can handle the differences. “I can be successful because . . . .” Then match your *technical skills* and most relevant supporting *transferable skills* to the job’s requirements.



In your last job, what were some of the things you spent most of your time on, and why?

You know what is most important in your job. If not your *TJD* will tell you, and that's where you spend most of your time. Employees come in two categories: those who want to get the job done and those who believe in "busy" work while they watch others do it. The best professionals have good *time-management skills*, so they can also talk about the many other tasks they stay on top of. Your answer needs to show that nothing important slips through the cracks.

Tell me about something you are proud of.

What you think is important reveals your grasp of the job's priorities and your capabilities. You've already identified the problems that occur in each of your major areas of responsibility *and* examples of how you handled them when you completed the *TJD* exercises. Use a major job priority and talk about one of your problem avoidance or problem solution examples from this area. Finish by tying it into a supporting *transferable skill*. "Finding the problem and fixing it was great, but what I'm most proud of is that my *time management skills* helped me do this without skimping on anything else."

What have you learned from jobs you have held?

You've learned:

1. Every job exists to help a company turn a profit; your job is a small, important cog in the machinery that makes this happen.
2. You have to achieve superior *technical skills*, and be thoroughly engaged in your work.
3. You have to constantly build the *transferable skills* (*critical thinking, communication, etc.*) that help you do everything else well.
4. You get more done when you're a *team player* with everyone in the department, and with everyone who interacts with you or your work.

Tell me about a time when things went wrong.

You are asked to talk about something that went wrong. Do so with an example that turned out fine in the end. At its core, every job is concerned with solving problems . . . things going wrong and putting them right; your *TJD* process identified a number of such examples you can use. Choose an example and paint it black but don't point the finger of blame. End with how the problem was resolved and maybe get in a plug for your *transferable skills*: “. . . So *determination* and *teamwork* put things right in the end.”



When have your diplomacy skills been put to the test?

Diplomacy is required when working with internal and external clients. It is needed to prevent problems from arising and in solving them when they do. The corporation values the diplomatic skills that grow from *emotional intelligence* and *critical thinking*, and this ability to bring people together is the mark of every true professional and potential leader; it's how you want to be seen. Look at the problems you identified in the *TJD* exercise and find one that called for diplomacy. Diplomacy becomes more important the higher you climb.

How do you manage your work week and make realistic deadlines?

Your answer essentially covers these points, “Everything revolves around deadlines. At the end of each day, I review my progress and make a prioritized To-Do list for the next day based on deadlines. Next morning I arrive already knowing where my energies are focused and psyched for the battle.” Study the pages on *multitasking* in the *transferable skills* section of Ch. 2 of *KED*, and you’ll be able to answer this and any question about deadlines, organization, priorities, and juggling with flying colors.

Tell me about a time when you had to extend a deadline.

Since the need to extend a deadline marks a setback for any project, this question looks for performance weaknesses and examines your *multitasking time management* skills. It's happened to everyone, so focus the answer on your accountability and your willingness to adjust a deadline in order to satisfy the overall goals of the project; it was better to be late and have an informed and happy customer than on time with something that didn't work. Finish with what you learned from the process: In tough situations, quality work and good *communication* usually pay off.

Tell me about a time when you persuaded others to adopt your ideas.

This question examines your *transferable skills*, especially your *communication* skills. Avoid criticizing anyone for not being wise enough to immediately see how right you were. Your example needs to show you selling an idea that was right for the company and everyone concerned. Work in references to your *listening, communication, critical thinking*, and *teamwork skills*, saying, in part, "I listened carefully to everyone and thought through the impact of the options on each of their needs. Next time we talked, I had the arguments and together we agreed on the new approach."



How do you usually go about solving a problem?

When confronted with a problem, you take these steps:

1. Define the problem.
2. Ask for whom it's a problem.
3. Ask why it's a problem.
4. Seek input from everyone affected by the problem.
5. Ask what's causing the problem.
6. Determine the options for a solution.
7. Consider what time, cost, and resources it will take to implement each option.
8. Ask what the consequences of each option are.
9. Choose the best solution that satisfies needs without causing more problems.

These are the steps a consummate professional takes.

What new skills or ideas do you bring to the job that other candidates can't offer?

You cannot know what skills others bring to the job. You need to acknowledge this at the beginning of your answer, demonstrating *critical thinking skills*. Then continue, saying what you understand the role of the job to be—helping the department be successful by conscientiously identifying, preventing, and solving the problems that come under your responsibilities. Itemize the job's priorities, the *technical skills* they demand, and the *transferable skills* that help execute them efficiently. Your answer should include reference to being a member of a team and working for the good of that team and finish with mention of your strongest *professional values*.

How have you prioritized or juggled your workload in your current job?

This is a *multitasking* question. *Multitasking* is today's most prized workplace skill because it maximizes individual productivity. Your answer needs to address the Plan/Do/Review cycle talked about in *KED* Ch. 1. At the end of every day, the last thing you do is to review today and plan for tomorrow, rating each task based on its priority: A must be completed today, B should be completed today if possible, C needs to be done but is not critical today. You are then able to start each day knowing exactly where you need to focus your time and energy.

Give me an example of your *leadership* skills.

Management is getting work done through others. Use an example that demonstrates bringing your team together to deliver on a critical productivity priority. The example should not show you saving the day but rather you empowering your people to succeed; all the better if it shows your caring development of team members' skills along the way. You take the time to publicly praise them and privately review the developmental lessons learned from the project upon completion. If you aren't in management, the foundation of leadership is being a team player, always working toward shared goals and embodying the spirit of this answer.



What professional behaviors do you think contribute to success?

The *transferable skills* and *professional values* that help you do your job well can be thought of as behaviors just as readily as skills. These twelve *skills* and *values* underlie success in every profession; but don't just list them, choose the ones in which you feel particularly competent and tie each into priority responsibilities, showing how that skill/behavior helps you be successful. You might begin, "*Multitasking* plays a role in all my responsibilities; for example . . ." Finish with how together they combine to make you a competent professional and reliable colleague.

What skills are most critical to this job?

Fail to answer this, and you can kiss the offer goodbye. The *TJD* exercise (*KED* Ch. 2) tells you exactly how employers prioritize the responsibilities of your job; tie each relevant skill into the activities where it's applied. You can boost your answer by adding an illustration of how each *transferable skill* helps: "*Critical thinking* helps me make the right decisions; *multitasking* (time management) helps me manage my activities, and priorities [and so on]."

What skills would you like to develop on this job?

You can only answer this question well if you are engaged enough in your work to really understand the *technical skills* critical to your job's success. The *TJD* exercise (*KED* Ch. 2) will tell you about the responsibilities and skills demanded and you want to develop each of these. Technology also changes your work continuously. Your answer acknowledges these considerations. It should also address your desire to develop the general business awareness and understanding of how your profession will adapt to stay viable and make continuing contributions.

How resourceful are you?

Your answer talks about *creativity*, *motivation*, and *determination*. It also addresses *critical thinking skills* in how you anticipate and prevent problems in your work and how you approach them when they do arise. You'll need to develop an example of resourcefulness. The problem you wrestled doesn't need to be of planetary proportions, but it does need to show you calmly thinking through the issues, your resilience in the face of challenges, and your willingness to stay with difficult tasks through completion.



Give me an example of a time when you have convinced people over whom you had no authority of an approach to a task.

Your answer addresses leadership, your *communication skills* supporting *professional values* like *integrity* and *motivation*. The foundation of leadership is being a team player, always working toward shared goals and embodying the spirit that wants everyone to succeed in challenges that are beyond individual contribution. The example has to show you working for the good of the department and working for it in the right ways. While it's nice for your examples to talk of major contributions, they don't always need to be of major significance—it's the demonstrated attitude that counts.

What type of decisions do you make in your work?

Your answer addresses the quality of decisions you make: that you are making the right decisions about your work to ensure that its execution anticipates, prevents, and solves problems; that your decisions ensure that your work is done with due consideration for the work of others who must deal with your work product; and that you make the right decisions to protect the integrity and reputation of the company. To a lesser degree your answer also addresses the extent of your authority with the examples of the decisions you make and how you make them.

If I hired you today, what would you accomplish first?

Show that you think. Before answering, ask, "What are the most critical projects/problems you'll want me to tackle?" Gear your answer to first getting settled in the job, getting to know everyone, and understanding how the department functions. Then address the interviewer's most pressing priority in light of the information you've been given.

Tell me how you've helped attain a corporate goal.

All jobs exist to help the company make money. Your job is a cog in the machinery of your department, which supports the profit imperative in a specific way. Your responsibility is to anticipate, prevent, and solve the problems that interfere with your department's mission to contribute toward profitability. Your answer shows how your cog meshes with the larger departmental cogs that in turn deliver on corporate goals, noting that you do your job conscientiously for other functions that interact with you or your work product.



Why is this job right for you at this time in your career?

Is this opportunity simply another in a series of meaningless jobs or is it part of a conscious, thought-out career path?

Explain how your personality fits the role of the job, how your skills match the needs of the job and align with your chosen career path. Add, "I want to develop my \_\_\_\_\_ skills and your job seems the right opportunity. I believe I'm ready to assume broader responsibilities in \_\_\_\_\_ and my track record shows I have always succeeded in building skills with an opportunity like this."

What career path interests you in the company?

Most often asked of entry-level candidates. At the start of your career, it's okay not to have a chosen path; say that you have a general sense of direction and ask for more information, "What are the options for someone in my position?" Use the new information to give a reply that shows *emotional maturity* and realism: As you get a little experience here in the real world, develop your skills and based on contributions you make advance in responsibility, you believe logical career paths will become more evident.

How do you balance your life with your work?

The company wants *commitment* from you, and also to know you can pace yourself. Reply by explaining your work is the most important thing because it dictates your overall success in life, and also that your physical well being and outside interests keep you healthy and tuned for work in other ways too. Examples of your outside interests might demonstrate physical, intellectual, and or community activities.

How is your personality reflected in the kinds of activities you enjoy?

It supports your candidacy if your answer reflects the *skills* and *values* that are complementary to your work. “I love to cook and entertain. That’s the salesman coming out in me. I love sharing experiences with people, and I’m very outgoing. I always feel as if I should be doing something.” Or, “I’m an analyst by profession and a numbers and patterns guy by inclination so I enjoy chess and music; they tap the skills I love to use and complement my work.”



What have you done that shows your willingness to work?

Your answer should use an example that speaks to your *motivation* and engagement with your work, one that shows you making extra effort, taking on a difficult or unglamorous task that no one wanted, and one that had problems and required *determination* and *resiliency*. Then finish with a statement that captures motivation, “I stick with my commitments. I am invested in doing good work and commit whatever time and effort is necessary to finish tasks properly because I know other people’s productivity depends on all aspects of my work being done properly.”

How have your career *motivations* changed over the years?

Your answer should reflect a desire to do a good job for its own reward and to make a contribution as part of a team. For example, “Over time I’ve realized the importance of *teamwork* if we are to make meaningful contributions. I take great pleasure in doing my job well, but working together as a team you achieve more complex goals, things that no single person could.” Follow up with how you hope this will help you work toward specific goals.

What personal qualities do you think are necessary to make a success of this job?

Your answer reads “personal qualities” as *professional values*, because they are the personal qualities you bring to your professional life. The keyword here is *commitment*. You approach your work with the intent of doing the right things for the right reasons. You are *committed* to professional success for the privileges it brings to your personal life. This means you can also talk about your *commitment* to improvement of the *technical skills* of your job and mention some of the *transferable skills* that help you be successful in all your life’s *commitments*.

Tell me about a time when people overruled you or wouldn't let you get a word in edgewise?

How you answer depends on what job you're applying for. For example, a lawyer or sales professional who doesn't listen carefully, process information quickly, and argue persuasively is in for a rough time. If you're in customer service, *listening skills* and conciliation are key. Your answer describes a situation where you remained calm, thought things through, and answered respectfully and successfully.



In a role-playing test, you're given a phone and told to handle a complaint from an irate customer. To deal with the complaint, you should:

- A. Say, "Okay, I'm going to show some leadership! We'll do things my way!"
- B. Go around the room and ask each person what they want to do and then take a vote and do what the majority decides.
- C. Suggest, "Let's take a moment to gather our thoughts, then each, in turn, address the issues from our unique perspective."
- D. Say nothing and wait for someone else to suggest an agenda for the meeting.

**C.** This is the strategy most likely to encourage a team-oriented solution. A risks you coming off as arrogant and unwilling to listen to anyone, B reduces leadership to voting—usually a nonproductive approach—while D leaves you abdicating responsibility altogether.

How do you regroup when things haven't gone as planned?

Here's what you should do in real-life and in your answer:

"I pause for reflection as long as the situation allows—this can be a couple of minutes or overnight. I analyze what went wrong and why. I'm careful to look for the things that went right, too. I'll examine alternate approaches, and time, resources, and cost considerations. Then I'll review the situation with a peer or my boss to get a second opinion. This way I can always bounce back with the right new approach. I can't always avoid making mistakes, but I learn from the experience."

What kinds of people do you like to work with?

This is the easy part of what can be a tricky three-part question (see #220 and #221). Obviously, you like to work with people who are fully engaged in their work and who come to work with a smile and to make a difference with their presence; with people who are there to get results, not just mark time till the end of the day. You like to work with people who have *pride*, honesty, *integrity*, and *commitment* to their work.

What kinds of people do you find it difficult to work with?

This is often the second part of a three-part question (see #219 and #221). Your answer comes from understanding why your job exists: it's a small cog in the complex machinery of making a company profitable, so you might say, "People, who don't care about their work, and don't care about being part of something larger than themselves, people who have the time to find fault but never to find solutions." End by noting that while they aren't the best coworkers, you don't let them interfere with your *motivation*.



How do you work with (these) difficult types of coworkers?

Sometimes this question is on its own or it's the third part of a three-part question (see #219 and #220). First, you don't let such people affect your *motivation* or quality of work. Second, you don't buy into their negativism by encouraging them. You are polite and professional but prefer to ally yourself with the people who come to work to make a difference. You maintain cordial relations but don't go out of your way to seek close acquaintance. Life is too short to be demotivated by people who think their cup is half empty and it's someone else's fault.

Tell me about an event that really challenged you. How did you meet the challenge? How was your approach different?

This question examines *critical thinking*, *creativity*, and *motivation*. Your answer outlines the steps a professional would logically take. You defined the problem: its causes, who it affected, and why and how it happened, then determined possible solutions and the cost of their implementation in terms of time, money, and resources. Then, describe how you decided on the best approach. Explain your solution and its value to your employer, and, finally—and only if you know—how it was different from other people's approaches.

Describe the situations in which you're most comfortable as a leader.

As a leader, no decision is easy, and no decision can be made without careful thought about its ramifications. The decision to terminate is generally accepted as difficult. Your answer needs to show you took all possible steps to build a good employee out of a troubled one, but that once the decision was made, you executed it with dispatch and in adherence to *systems* and *procedures*. Finally noting that you have always felt cutting out the bad apple is always appreciated by the people who were carrying his load.

Tell about when you had to make a decision and no procedure existed, but things didn't work out well in the end.

Pull your example from the past, and finish with what you learned from the experience. For example, “I stopped doing a report that no one read. I thought I was gaining time for more important tasks. My manager explained that the records were for continuity, for the next person who had my job. It was a long time ago, but I have never forgotten the lesson: There’s always a reason for *systems* and *procedures*. I’ve had some of the best-kept records in the company ever since.”



Personal space is important to everyone. At an interview, you don't want to crowd the interviewer or seem distant. During the meeting and leave-taking parts of the interview, the closest you should stand to the interviewer is:

- A. 15"
- B. 3'
- C. 30"
- D. 1'

C.

Why do you think that some companies with good products fail?

This question can be asked of any experienced professional, but it's asked most often of C-suite executives. Typically companies fail when: product lines are overtaken by technology and/or the competition; there is inadequate fiscal management; inappropriate branding, mismanaged technology; marketing/sales strategies or staff are inadequate; and most often by a combination of these factors. Cite your overall awareness and then address your answer to business acumen, the *critical thinking*, and decision-making issues that affect each of these areas within your sphere of expertise.

Describe a time when the existing process didn't work and what you did about it.

If the process was faulty, you needed to show initiative and *leadership* in fixing it. Don't suggest that management was hopelessly incompetent and only you could save the day.

In your example, show you approached the problem and its solution logically. You used *time management* and *organization skills* with *critical thinking* to break the solution down into specific steps. You used your *communication skills* to clearly explain the situation and options that could change it, working within the chain of command at all times.

Tell me about a good process that you made even better.

There is usually a reason for systems and procedures; they exist to insure the overall smooth running of the complex money making machinery that is a corporation. This often means that a process in your area could be streamlined, except it would complicate someone else's job. Processes are generally improved by simplifying/streamlining them, thus improving *productivity* for everyone involved with this activity, or whose work is affected by it. The skills you can bring to the fore in your answer are the ones you use to handle any problem: *critical thinking*, *creativity*, a logical process, concern for impact of the solution on all stakeholders, and *communication skills* used to sell the change.



Tell me what you think our distinctive advantage is within the industry.

Answering this question requires research. This is best done via Google and Google News searches, citing company name; names and titles of senior executives; the company name and variations on “competition”; and the industry name plus “competition” variations. Use your social networks to find people who work or have worked for the company and can give you insight. Best of all? Be nice to headhunters so they’ll give you the scoop on these issues. End your answer by acknowledging, “I know you could give me a much better picture. What can you tell me? I’m interested.”

How do you take direction?

This is a manageability question. Avoiding problem employees is a major concern for hiring managers.

Manageability is defined in different ways: the ability to work productively alone and with others; the ability to take direction when it is carefully and considerately given; and, possibly dearest to the manager's heart, the ability to take direction when it isn't carefully and considerately given (and will feel like criticism). Your answer acknowledges these issues, noting that you can take constructive criticism because that is how you learn and improve: You listen, confirm your understanding, ask for directions, follow directions, learn from the experience, and eradicate the issue.

What do you feel is a satisfactory attendance record?

If you are not in management, the answer is obvious. If you are a manager, you believe attendance is a matter of management, *motivation*, and psychology. Your employees know you expect their full attendance, and you keep them motivated with a congenial work environment and the challenge to stretch themselves. Giving people *pride* in their work and showing respect for good effort is also part of your equation, as is never giving lame excuses and staying on top of the work.

In what ways has your job prepared you to take on greater responsibility?

It's your existing skills, plus your attitude to learning and growth, expressed as confidence in success based on track a record that delivers professional opportunity. Whether or not the question is focused on your potential for future growth or your ability to do well in this new, more responsible, job, your answer first shows your ability to meet the deliverables of the target job. Then talk about your history of *commitment* to professional growth, with examples of past/current skill development programs.



How do you handle rejection?

Frequent question in sales interviews. The interviewer wants to know that you don't take rejection personally. Example: "I accept rejection as an integral part of sales. If everyone said, 'Yes,' there'd be no need for my job. Mine is a job of *communication*, *determination*, and resiliency. It's nothing personal, rejection is part of the process. Each 'no' bringing me closer to a 'yes' If the product isn't needed today, it's not rejection of me, the company, or product line forever, it's just a new potential client identified, with some of their needs established."

Tell me about a situation in which it was difficult to remain objective.

This examines your ability to stay calm under pressure: your *emotional maturity* and your *critical thinking* skills. Even if you're deeply invested in a project, if it's not in the company's best interests, you have to let it go gracefully. "I identified a new online resource, but my manager had to pull funding at the last minute. This was frustrating after all the work, but I understand the need to revise budgets and make hard decisions about what programs need to be cut. When cuts are made, they're in the best interests of success."

What are your outstanding qualities?

Another opportunity to talk about *transferable skills* and *professional values*. Offering a laundry list of all twelve of the *skills* and *values* would be overkill. Put one or two in context: “I’m *committed* to *technical* competency in all areas of my job. My *critical thinking* skills help me anticipate, prevent, and solve problems, and my *multitasking* abilities allow me to pay attention to the details. The quality of my work is in appreciation of everyone who subsequently has to deal with its results.”

Tell me what makes you tick as a professional.

You take *pride* in your work and being part of something meaningful, so you enjoy *working with others* who share the same *values*. You are fully engaged in your work because you like to make a difference with your presence at work and see results. You believe in personal development and that means developing professional skills. You like to be part of a team with people who are similarly committed and fully engaged and proud of what they do every day.



What accomplishments are your greatest source of *pride*?

If you are short of specific achievements, speak directly to the problems and challenges you face every day in your work. It can be making a sale, serving food efficiently, winning a case: anything that ties into the goals of your work is valid. You can also tie it into larger issues: how selling that policy protects your customer, how efficient service helps people get to their priorities, how that acquittal gave someone a new beginning. Comments of this nature show you see connectivity between daily tasks and the benefits the recipients of your work experience as a result.

Tell me about your relationship with your previous bosses.

This is an obvious manageability question: What will you be like as an employee? Always be positive; you *never* say anything negative about a former manager because it can be easily misinterpreted. Identify what you learned from each about doing your job conscientiously. If you can, identify how managers really got the best out of you and the lessons they tried to teach. You may never have considered these things before, so as well as answering this question, considering it will help you grow to greater success in the future.

**Tell me about a situation that frustrated you at work.**

This question is about *emotional intelligence* and *critical thinking*, so whining about your frustrations won't impress anyone. The interviewer wants to know how you channel frustration into *productivity*. Show yourself to be someone who isn't managed by emotions: You acknowledge the frustration, then put it aside in favor of achieving the goals of the job you are paid to do. Give an example of a difficult situation where although you recognized that everyone was understandably frustrated, you remained diplomatic, objective, and found a solution that benefited all concerned.

How much do your clients enjoy working with you?

In consulting, PR, or marketing, give an illustration of repeat clients and why they became that way. Your answer explains that good relationships come from trouble-free service, and anticipating and solving issues (never problems in this context) in a professional manner.

A client is also anyone who interacts with you or the product of your work. When the quality of your work shows consideration for what others must do with your product as part of their job, departmental relations are improved because of your interaction and the goodwill it created.



What community projects that use your professional skills are particularly interesting to you?

Many companies try to be good citizens, and giving back to the community is good for the company image and increases customer loyalty. Your involvement supports these goals. If you haven't thought of this before, consider becoming involved in a welfare-of-the-community activity. It speaks of a person doing good with his or her life, which can help your candidacy. It's also fulfilling and builds your sense of self and will expand your professional networks (see *KED* chapters 3 and 4).

Do you prefer to stick to a schedule, or do you prefer to be spontaneous at work?

All professionals have a schedule that allows them to maximize productivity. Nothing happens spontaneously in the professional world—even in the professionally creative jobs, creativity happens on schedule. If you say spontaneous, you will be seen as unorganized and unprofessional. Your answer states that productivity demands a schedule plus *time management* and *organization skills* to maximize that productivity. At the same time, you should make it clear you are not a slave to schedule; rather, these *prioritization skills* allow you the flexibility to respond to critical issues because you are always on top of your work.

How will you complement this department?

The department you work for has a specific role in the process that helps the company make money, and your job exists with a specific responsibility to support this process. Because you understand that your job is a small but vital cog in a complex machinery, you will complement the department with the *technical skills* required by the job (Identify), and the *transferable skills* and *professional values* that help you do every aspect of your job well and helps others do theirs because you understand your responsibilities as a *team member*.

Tell me about an effective manager, supervisor, or other person in a leading role.

As part of your *TJD* exercises (*KED* Ch. 2), you identified the behavioral profile of the best person you've ever seen doing each aspect of the job for which you're applying. Using one of these as your illustration will provide a relevant answer and will demonstrate that you understand what it takes to be successful in your profession.



Tell me about a project you completed ahead of schedule.

An example that simply demonstrates good luck is a lost opportunity to sell yourself. Your answer should focus on your *critical thinking*, *multitasking*, *time management*, and *organization skills*. Talk about how scheduling the different steps of the project helped bring it in on time and in keeping up with all your other responsibilities that also had deadlines. Then address how anticipating problems minimized their occurrence and building time into the schedule allowed adequate time for dealing with problems that did arise. If possible, finish with an endorsement of your success from management or a client.

**Tell me about your least favorite manager or supervisor.**

You identified someone like this in your *TJD*. You don't want to give the impression that you're a troublemaker, so struggle to come up with an answer. "Well, most of my managers were pretty supportive . . . oh yes, there was one." Be careful to keep your comments professional, and minimize the negativity by showing your opinion was shared: "S/he was very critical but never gave advice on how things should be done. Even with mistakes, the advice was to do better but never how; that probably accounted for the high turnover."

What type of management style do you think is effective?

Your department has a specific role in corporate profitability. Your responsibility is to get work done through others and to build and help your team succeed in delivering on departmental obligations. Yours is a management title, but your job is leader; your people must have faith in your competency and believe that their success is your goal. You must understand and clearly define the department's role in profitability and ensure that every employee knows his or her role and deliverables. You deliver firm and fair guidance, and the attitude, motivation, and recognition to ensure team *commitment*.

How will you be able to cope with an environment that is so different?

Take an implied negative and turn it into a positive: "That's one of the reasons I want to make a change. After so long in \_\_\_\_\_ job, a fresh environment will stimulate me to look at everything in a new way. I'm sure to learn a lot and my earlier perspectives may pay off occasionally with a worthwhile insight."



Tell me about a time when you had a project that required you to interact with new levels within the company. How did you do this?

This might imply that you'll be representing your department and thus your boss at various levels of management. Said boss, naturally, wants to know how you are going to behave. In your example, demonstrate that you prepared by seeking adequate briefings on the players, their agendas, and exactly what was expected of you. As the project proceeded and new situations arose, you sought guidance, first succinctly giving your evaluation of the situation and courses of action. In short order both you and management were comfortable that you'd taken another step up.

Do you prefer working with others or alone?

Even when working on your own, you are never alone. Most jobs require a combination of independent work and activities that require interaction with others. However, even your independent work requires that you interact with others via the product produced by your work. This means that your independent work needs to be executed in a way that shows consideration for the *productivity* of others on the team, as well as those people (not just others in your department) whose work is in turn affected by the quality and timeliness of your work.

Do you make your opinions known when you disagree with the views of your supervisor?

This depends on the situation. For example when that input is encouraged with large projects and challenges being addressed in intra-departmental meetings, your supervisor will sometimes take a “devil’s advocate” position or encourage others to do so. But an open forum, especially inter-departmental meetings, is the time to show unity and cohesion. If pushed to talk about a direct disagreement with a supervisor, it was in the past, behind closed doors, the concern was rational, and with shared insights you found yourselves in agreement.

What situations do your colleagues rely on you to handle?

This examines reliability and professionalism. Your answer should tell the story of a *team player* who stands out by virtue of possessing the *technical skills* to do the job well, professional *commitment*, personal *leadership*, *creativity*, and *integrity*. They rely on you to always do your job well and to put the well being of the team and team goals first. Finish with, "I take my work seriously but not myself, and I always try to make a difference with my presence. My colleagues rely on me to be there when things get tough."



Tell me about a time when you needed to get an understanding of another person's situation before you could do your job.

If you are in sales, this is at the heart of consultative selling, and the answer is in your DNA. Otherwise you want to show a consideration for satisfying the needs of others so that they can do their jobs and the company can operate efficiently. You always consider the needs of others in your work; it is an integral part of your responsibilities. Your ability to understand the needs of others uses your *listening* and *critical thinking skills* and integrates these needs with departmental goals and company mandates.

Tell me about a situation when people were making emotional decisions about your project. What happened, and how did you handle it?

What the interviewer really wants to know is, how did you behave when, for pragmatic reasons and in the best interests of the company, a project of yours was canned or criticized? Did you act like a professional or like a spoiled brat? Your answer should reflect your focus on the well being of the company and the department, stressing what you learned from the experience.

Are you willing to make coffee?

Read this as, “Will you pitch in?” Your answer starts with a smile: “Yes, do you want cream with that?” If you feel the question smacks of sexual discrimination you might add, “If it’s part of the job description, of course.” Your answer continues without pause for response that you are always ready to pitch in with whatever it takes to help the department succeed in unusual circumstances. Follow by recalling a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty in the interests of your team.

What are the limitations of your current job?

Tricky. You don't want to criticize your current employer, but you do want to explain why changing jobs right now is best for you. You may also be able to comment on the lack of growth opportunity as justification for finding another company with better prospects. To keep your answer positive, focus on your desire to grow and find new challenges. You can use this as a transition by asking about the scope of the job at this company.



Who's the toughest boss you ever had, and why?

Tough doesn't mean bad, and you don't want to say anything negative about prior employers, so give a positive "That would be \_\_\_\_\_. She'd push people to their limits, and she was a stickler for doing things right, no matter what the outside pressures. She was always fair, and she recognized good, hard work. I'd call her a tough boss, but a good boss." Finish by showing that you "learned to stay calm and focused, and that you do what it takes to do the job right no matter the circumstances."

What if I said you aren't qualified for the job?

This could be possible rejection, and it could just be testing your *listening skills* and ability to remain calm under pressure. Listening skills caught “if,” so you hear the question as a hypothetical and reply calmly, “I would ask you to tell me where you think I might lack qualifications?” If new information could turn the situation around, share it. If not, address the qualifications you do have, your rapid learning curve, *transferable skills* and *professional values you bring to the table*, and the *motivated* employee this growth opportunity will make you.

Why would you want to leave an established career in one industry for an essentially entry-level position in another one?

The interviewer is trying to determine your *motivation* for choosing a new career and the likelihood that you'll be comfortable in a position with less power and responsibility than previously. Discuss your reasons for switching careers, and be sure you have a solid understanding of your target job and the new industry. Add that once you have your feet on the ground, your prior professional experience will help you make contributions sooner and with greater frequency than others at the same level.

Your resume has a gap. Why?

Whatever the reason, be honest. Discuss the decisions behind your absence from the workplace, whether they were the challenge of a job search during a major recession, to raise a family, or recuperate from an accident. What's most important to the interviewer is how long it will take you to be productive if hired. So emphasize that while you may not have been in the corporate workplace, neither have you been idle. Talk about how you have kept current with classes or part-time work, and/or what you have been doing to keep specific *transferable skills* polished.



I see you've been out of work for a while. What difficulties have you had in finding a suitable job?

Keep your answer positive—a laundry list of excuses sounds lame. Start with addressing how difficult job search is during a recession of this magnitude, that the opportunities have been scarce. The thrust of your answer should be that you're looking for a job that matches opportunity and challenge to your skills, and that this job, the one you're interviewing for, is good a fit [itemize the match]. Finish with, "With my years of experience, I'm a good \_\_\_\_\_, but job search skills are something I never had to learn and they're not my strong suit."

Have you ever taken a position that didn't fit into your long-term plan?

This can happen to anyone. Don't waffle; your answer is short and connects the experience with benefits to this job. Identify the circumstances and the job ("I'm the kind of person who'd rather do something than sit on my hands"), and what you learned. The job might not have been right, but the experience reinforced that "it's not the job but what you bring to it." Address the *professional values* and *transferable skills* you polished, that you learned every job is about *teamwork* and satisfied customers.

What concerns you the most about performing this job?

Except when an offer is on the table and you are being wooed, the interviewer is primarily concerned about your *technical skills* for the job, so never admit weakness when it isn't necessary. You want an offer, so turn the question around and gather useful information. "It seems straightforward. What have others found difficult to do?" This delivers a list of the job's challenges, which you can address one by one, showing how your *technical skills* and *professional values* allow you to meet those challenges and overcome them.

What interests you least about this job?

Potentially explosive but easily defused. Regardless of your occupation, there is at least one repetitive, mindless duty that everyone groans about but has to be done. For example, "Reports are probably the least exciting part of my job. However, I know they are important for communication, reference, and continuity, so I do them the end of the day as part of my daily performance review and next day planning." This response answers the question without shooting yourself in the foot, and shows that you possess *critical thinking, time management, and organization skills*.



Tell me a story.

Show that you think things through before speaking. “What would you like me to tell you a story about?” A story that relates to successfully tackling a work challenge is best; you identified a number of these in the *TJD* process in *KED* Ch. 2. Whatever story you do tell, make it one that shows you in a professional light, using *transferable skills*, living by *professional values*. Short of anything else, tell the story of the professional growth that prepared you to succeed in this job.

Recall a time when those around you were not being as honest or direct as they could. What did you do?

This question can come up in any profession and at any level. It comes up frequently in interviews for positions in retail, where petty larceny is a fact of life. Your answer should stress your own integrity without making you sound overly self-righteous. Outside of issues of petty larceny, the question and your answer addresses your *critical thinking skills* (what led you to the truth) and the *communication skills* that helped you get things onto a better path.

How do you handle pressure/tension?

Your answer addresses the underlying causes: letting things pile up, and too much to do in too little time. Good *technical* and *multitasking skills* help you avoid pressure building up, and your *multitasking* skills that come from TM&O help you manage high pressure times and still get everything done.

“I don’t so much handle pressure well as manage its causes well. When there is pressure, I have the *skills* and *commitment* to get everything done properly.”

With hindsight, how could you have improved your progress?

A question that asks you to discuss your commitment to success. As professional success affects so many other parts of your life, take time to think through the mistakes you have made, and commit to getting better control of your career for the future. Whatever you do say, with questions asking for information negative to your candidacy always put your answer in the past: You woke up, took responsibility, and corrected the situation. Show that you have learned from the experience, and how it supports your commitment to ongoing professional development.



You have been with one company a long time without any appreciable increase in rank. Tell me about this.

Analyze why this state of affairs exists. It may be that you like your professional life exactly as it is, you take *pride* in your work, and haven't pushed for promotions. If so, tell it like it is, because most people are eager for promotion—someone who isn't could make for a good hire; it could be your ace. If you wanted a promotion but didn't get it, you say, "I was told loyalty and doing a good job would be rewarded, so I did my job and built my skills, but nothing happened. I just woke up; that's why I'm here."

Have you ever had any financial difficulties?

A common question, especially if you deal with money. Tell the truth because when references are checked, salary and credit are at the top of the list. Your answer succinctly gives the circumstances, the facts of your difficulties, and where you stand today in resolving those issues. Do not bring up financial problems until this question is asked or an offer is on the table and references are to be checked. It's information that doesn't bring you closer to an offer and while it will kill some job opportunities, it isn't the deal-breaker it used to be.

During an interview conducted over a meal, which of the following options is best?

- A. Order spaghetti.
- B. Drink alcohol.
- C. Order the same food as the interviewer.
- D. Order the most expensive thing on the menu.

C. You are there sell yourself, so your safest course is to choose the same food as the interviewer and then don't worry about eating it. You're there to talk and be seen at your best, not eat. Alcohol and messy or expensive food and interviews don't go together.

What was there about your last company that you didn't particularly like or agree with?

Be careful not to criticize a manager, or you might be seen as a potential management problem. It is safest to say that you didn't have any of these problems. If there was an unhappy work environment and this opinion was shared by many, you can mention it but remain nonspecific although you might discuss that some people didn't seem to care about anything they did, and you found this difficult.



What is your general impression of your last company?

Always answer positively. There is a strong belief in management ranks that people who complain about past employers will cause problems for their new ones. Your answer is, "A good department and a company to work for." Then smile and wait for the next question or add, "I had gone as far as I could and could see no opportunities opening up so now seemed like the time to change."

What are some of the things you find difficult to do?  
Why do you feel that way?

Your answer should share a commonly acknowledged problem *and* advance your candidacy. For example, everyone has difficulties staying on top of all their responsibilities, and it will allow you to talk about the new strategies you are learning for *time management* and *organization*. If you are in management, terminations are something no one enjoys, and you can talk about how carefully you follow coaching procedures for troubled employees, but don't shirk from actions necessary for the good of your department, adding how a good team sees firing the work shy as recognition of their good efforts.

What would you say if I told you your presentation this afternoon was lousy?

This might be a criticism or it might be a manageability question. “If” is the key word here, so don’t assume you are being criticized. The question tests your critical thinking and communication skills. Answer with, “I would ask which aspects of my presentation were weak and why. If there was miscommunication, I’d clear it up. If the problem was elsewhere, I would seek your advice and take action to resolve the weakness.” This also shows you to be an employee who will respond to criticism in a professional and *emotionally intelligent* way.

What have you done that shows initiative?

There are two kinds of people in the workplace: the goal-oriented, who get things done as well and as efficiently as they possibly can, who make life easier for coworkers; and the task-oriented, who let tasks expand to fill the time allotted to them. You can guess who gets hired and gets ahead.

Use an example from your *TJD* exercise (see *KED* Ch. 2) that demonstrates initiative in doing your job and if it also worked to the benefit of the department, so much the better.



What are some of the things about which you and your supervisor disagreed?

This is a manageability question, and disagreeing with management isn't usually appreciated. It is safest to reply that you haven't had a cause to disagree, adding that you have a questioning mind, but your supervisor's directives always seemed to have a perfectly logical foundation. If you are really pushed for an answer, you can recall a problem employee whom everyone who cared really thought should have been terminated sooner than he was.

How well do you feel your boss rated your job performance?

If your references are checked and aren't good, you won't get the offer, and you won't get close to the offer without a positive reply. You were always rated positively, above the norm, or as capable of accepting further responsibilities, and you always succeeded with those new responsibilities. If you have copies of your appraisals, you can quote from them: "In fact, my boss recently said that I was the most productive engineer in the group, because . . . ."

You have a doctor's appointment arranged for noon. You've waited two weeks to get in. An urgent meeting is scheduled at the last moment, though. What do you do?

This is a question shell: The question within the shell—in this instance, “Will you sacrifice the appointment or your job?”—can be changed at will. To answer, use a simple technique that always directs you to an appropriate answer: Turn the question around. “If I were the manager with an important meeting, and someone chose to go to the doctor’s instead, how would I feel?” This will always lead you to the right behavior and the right answer.

How do you manage to interview while still employed?

Don't say anything that would make you appear underhanded. Make your answer short and sweet, and let the interviewer move on. Explain that you use vacation or personal days. "I had some vacation time, so I asked my boss what days would be most suitable. I plan to change jobs, but don't want to hurt my boss or department by leaving them short-handed when a little consideration would avoid the problem."



How long have you been looking for another position?

If you are employed, how long you have been looking isn't that important, but make it clear you aren't looking for just another job, you are looking for the right opportunity—for a strategic career move that will give you the opportunity to grow professionally in some way. If you need to talk of an extended job search, say you didn't realize how tough job search is in a recessionary economy. That you are good at what you do, but you're not so good at finding jobs and being smooth at interviews.

Have you ever been asked to resign?

When someone is asked to resign, it is a gesture on the part of the employer: "You can quit, or we will terminate you, so which do you want it to be?" Because you were given the option, though, that employer cannot later say, "I had to ask him to resign." That is tantamount to firing and could lead to legal problems. If you answer, "Yes," it's a mark against you and can derail your candidacy, so in the final analysis, it is safe to answer, "No."

Were you ever dismissed from your job for a reason that seemed unjustified?

This examines your professional awareness and *emotional intelligence*. The sympathetic phrasing is geared toward getting you to reveal all the sordid details. The cold hard fact is that hardly anyone is ever fired without cause, and you're kidding yourself if you think otherwise. With this in mind, you can quite honestly say, "No," and move on to the next topic. If you have been fired you need to read *KED* for its coverage on how to clean up the past and how to move forward on a more positive footing.

Tell me about a directive that really challenged you.

Recall a tough project from your *TJD* exercise (*KED* Ch. 2). Your answer, as you tell the story, lightly touches on how you used your *critical thinking* and *creativity skills* to determine the right approach to the task, how your *multitasking skills* helped you get the job done without dropping the ball in your other areas of responsibility, and how the support of your colleagues (*teamwork*) really helped; all these plus *determination* were needed to see it through to a successful conclusion.



Would you like to have your boss's job?

Some managers might feel threatened, while others realize they cannot advance without someone to fill their current job. Either way, you might want to qualify the question: “Are you looking for someone capable of stepping up, as part of succession planning for your promotion?”

“Yes” is an acceptable answer only when you can prove the *technical skills* demanded for success in that next step. If the right answer is “No,” follow by explaining why this is not your career track, or how, why, and when you will be ready. You’ll need to know the skills demanded by that job.

Would you accept stock options as part of your remuneration package?

Qualify, “What percentage of the package?” Options aren’t the same as money in your pocket and can be extremely valuable or completely worthless. You are likely to be offered “incentive stock options,” on which you only have to pay taxes on gains when you sell them. You aren’t really expected to have a firm response, so if pressed say you can’t answer properly until you see the paperwork. Before accepting options, check their worth by studying the stock’s performance. Stock options are a gamble, especially when the company offering them has yet to go public.

Before starting a salary negotiation, what steps should you take?

1. Determine the minimum amount you need to live.
2. Determine what is reasonable by finding out what your skills are worth on the current market.
3. Come up with your dream salary that is both audacious and realistic.
4. Come up with a range that extends from your midpoint (#2) to your dream salary (#3).

4, which requires that you first take steps 1 through 3 to determine your negotiating range. By using a range in your initial negotiations, you minimize the chances of coming up with a single figure that is too low or too high.

What is your salary history?

The interviewer is looking for the frequency, percentage, and dollar range of your raises. This will profile your salary growth and expectations and therefore the relative viability of the offer that is about to be made. You want to avoid offering salary history unless you are specifically asked, when you will have to be strictly honest. If a noncompetitive salary was part of your reason for changing jobs, make this clear when you answer the question; it might avoid the offer being based entirely on your current salary.



What were you making on your last job?

A reasonable question that usually means you are in serious consideration, because your current, or last, salary has impact on what the likely offer will be. Your salary will most likely be verified so don't fudge on your answer. If your research shows (*KED* Ch. 19) that you are significantly underpaid and this is a reason for making the move, you might say, "I am earning \$X, and as I am currently underpaid for my skills, experience, and capabilities a major reason for making a strategic career move is to significantly increase my remuneration."

What are the last two questions you should ask at an interview?

This is your last chance to seize the initiative and move your candidacy forward. Ask what the next step will be. If the answer is that there will be another round of interviews, say that you are interested, explain why you are interested, and ask if you can schedule that interview now. If there are no more interviews, say you want the job, why you are qualified, why you are excited by the opportunity, and finish by saying with a smile, "I want this job, I want to join your team. What do I have to do to get it?" You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by showing your *intelligent enthusiasm*.

Do you think people in your occupation should be paid more?

This one can be used prior to serious salary negotiation to probe your awareness of how your job really contributes to the bottom line. Or, it can occur in the middle of salary negotiations to throw you off balance. The safe and correct answer is to straddle the fence. "Most jobs have salary ranges that reflect the job's relative importance and contribution to a company. Those salary ranges reflect the norm for the great majority of people within that profession. That does not mean, however, that the extraordinary people in such a group are not recognized for their extra performance and skills. There are always exceptions to the rule."

What is an “assignment of inventions” clause?

If you design or create anything in your work that is eligible for copyright, trademark, or patent, you can expect an assignment of inventions clause in your agreement. It will request as a condition of employment that you turn over anything you create during your employment with the company. This is very likely to include work you do on your own time if it in any way relates to your duties with the company. Companies do pursue this particular issue with some persistence, so you will need to address any personal projects in advance to get appropriate waivers into the employment agreement.



What is a nondisclosure clause?

A nondisclosure clause is intended to prevent your discussing company business with any outside source and blabbing the company's secrets to the competition. The wording is likely to be general and therefore more restrictive to you. The more specific the language about what you can and cannot say about your work, the better it is for you. You obviously don't object to protecting the *integrity* of your employer, but you would like to be able to talk intelligently about your responsibilities and achievements to a future potential employer.

What is a non-compete clause?

This clause restricts you from working for competitors for a specific period of time. Accepting this clause without negotiation could restrict your options for employment with another company, if you are laid off or your leave of your own volition. After all, the companies most likely to hire you are in the same line of business. By making this clause more specific, you will also make it less restrictive. Negotiate to specify by name the direct competitors, the time frame, and try to get the clause nullified in the event of a layoff.

What should you do if you get more than one offer?

- A. Take the first one; you never know if the others are going to work out.
- B. Pick the one that offers the highest salary.
- C. Compare the offers, including both salary and benefits, and choose the one that offers you the most.
- D. Call every company with whom you've interviewed and ask to meet again.

D. Call every company with whom you've interviewed and explain you have a firm offer from a direct competitor, but you'd hate to make the wrong decision, and could you talk again? See *KED* Ch. 19. Ultimately, choose the offer that is most inline with your career needs, taking into account the stability of each potential employer.

A job offer is final when:

- A. It's made to you over the phone by a member of HR.
- B. It's made to you in person by the hiring manager.
- C. It's made to you in writing by a representative of the company.

C. No offer is real until you have it in written form.



Do you have any questions?

This is a sign that the interview is drawing to a close. Take the opportunity to make a strong impression. Ask questions that will help you advance your candidacy:

- Who succeeds in this job and why?
- Who fails in this job and why?
- What are the major projects of the first six months?
- What will my first assignment be?

Do not waste time asking about money and benefits; they're nice to know, but the information doesn't help you get an offer extended.

Should you send a follow-up letter? Why or why not?

Always send a follow-up letter or e-mail. It refreshes the employer's memory when you are beginning to fade, so it keeps your candidacy alive. It allows you to cover points you forgot to make or covered badly: "We spoke about \_\_\_\_\_ and I forgot to mention my experience with . . ."; introduce new information that you now realize is relevant; and to enthusiastically ask for the next interview or the job. "I am excited. What do I have to do to get the job/next interview?" See *Knock 'em Dead Cover Letters*.

## Who wins the job offer?

- A. The candidate with good *technical skills* who answers all the questions well.
- B. The candidate with good *technical skills* who answers all the questions well and turns a one-sided examination of skills into a two-way conversation between professionals with a common interest.
- C. The candidate with the longest list of *technical skills* on her or his resume.

**B.** The candidate who asks questions that show real understanding of the job, and complete involvement with the work is always the preferred candidate.

When two candidates have equal skills, which one gets the offer?

The candidate who is most intelligently enthusiastic about the opportunity. This person is fully engaged in the conversation, smiles, and shows interest and excitement at what s/he hears. It's the candidate who itemizes why s/he is qualified for the job, and who asks for the next interview—and if there isn't a next interview, asks for the job in an enthusiastic manner. This candidate will be seen as more motivated, a better *team player*, and someone who will put in more effort and do better work.