

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS MASTERY



THE FATEFUL 15

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LEARNING how to get just a little bit better at job interviews is one of the best - value things you can do for yourself - for the amount of time you have to invest in this key skill, it has a better payback than many other distractions that land up being just a waste of your time. Despite this, most people spend more time preparing their dinner than preparing for an interview. Maybe they are scared, knowing there is so much at risk. Fear often creeps in whenever the stakes are high, closely followed by procrastination, resulting in many candidates feeling about interview preparations, as people scared of a phobias feel. The truth is that almost everybody procrastinates about job interviews - which means less competition for you, looking at it strategically. Employers rarely complain about too many great-performing interviewees to choose from. So for those who push a little harder than the rest, success at interviews is there for the taking.

The best preparation consists of finding heartfelt and useful answers to certain key questions - and there aren't so many questions that they all cannot be mastered by the average person in a fairly brief time (a week at most).

I believe that even the most thorny and exotic interview questions are just permutations of a tiny superset of key questions. Get good at these key questions and all the other questions will take care of themselves.





I want you to understand that there are 6 main categories of interview questions, as presented below:

1. **FATEFUL QUESTIONS** - the most commonly asked questions, designed to get to know the real you.
2. **CAREER GOAL QUESTIONS** - used to determine fit with the organizations, & critically the desire to belong.
3. **CHARACTER QUESTIONS** - character is destiny, the single most important variable for success in life.
4. **COMPETENCY QUESTIONS** - utilized to determine if you are capable of performing in the job.
5. **CREATIVITY QUESTIONS** - the world of business is dynamic, can you keep up? This is what is tested here.
6. **SPIN-BALL QUESTIONS** - Often the journey is as important as the destination. Tests process.



Employers and recruiters do this for a living. They have mastered the art of finding out your underlying motivations such as what you are really after, what drives you, your mindset, your work ethic, your long term and leadership potential and much much more. The goal here is to help you decode their hidden perspective.

In this free guide I will help you understand the first category, which I call **THE FATEFUL 15 QUESTIONS.**

These are the questions that determine your fate in an interview and at the very least you must know how to answer these questions with sincerity, merit and balanced confidence. In this guide I will help you decode each question, i.e. tell you what is a real question behind the questions. For each question I will tell you what is really being asked, and more importantly what is not being asked, as well as, the direction your answer should take. Use this as a guide, and it will give you a good gist of how to answer the questions. Practice makes perfect, so spend some time at this skill - your answers must not seem rehearsed. They must come from a place of preparation that is second nature to you.

You need to prepare, practice and improve your answers to these questions. Like they say, if you can drive in a country like India where the roads are chaotic, driving in places where rules are followed is relatively easier. In addition, to ensure that your answers land for sincere impact, only practice will allow for the comfort you are expected to develop with the interview process as a whole. Everything you have done so far, has been gearing up for this one decisive moment. Learn to recognize your moment and you will be on the other side of the door. You would have unlocked the opportunity.



The basic ideology behind any interviewers approach is to determine “**Why they should hire you?**” And “**What does it cost them NOT to hire you?**”, the more compelling the value you bring to the table the more they cannot let you walk away; conversely, the basic thought an interviewee goes into the process with is “**Can I solve this person’s problems?**” And “**Do I want to solve this person’s problems?**” That depends on how well you fit into the organization on two fronts; one, do you have the competencies to do the job? And two, is the culture of the organization aligned with your value system?



The risk of time and effort is exhibited both ways. The interviewer is risking time and effort, not to mention the cost of falling behind on work to be done by the role they are hiring for, whereas; the interviewee is risking their time, and the missed earnings of not being in the job possibly.

Both the potential employer and the potential employee face short-term risk, as well as, long-term risk. Being able to appreciate both sides of the equation is important to coming across as an impactful and sincere candidate, who gives respect first, and expects respect by virtue of the that giving. Givers gain is a mantra that serves interviewees rather well.



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SO LET'S BEGIN!

#1 QUESTION: TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

The Real Question here is:
Who do you think you are?
And will you know what to leave in and what to leave out?

The top-line tactic for this question is:
Break it down, rehearse it, and breeze it.

The best way to answer this questions is to structure it. It doesn't matter what structural typology you use, as long as it is well rehearsed and comes across as natural and sincere. The point here is to offer sufficient detail to start the conversation but not too much information so that your answer starts to drag. You can follow a chronological sequence of telling the interviewer about yourself starting with university, or you could go in reverse. With every role you describe make sure you offer all the information on your resume, plus one additional statement that is not on your resume. If the interviewer is good at what they do, this additional statement is what they will note down as it is extra insight that you have offered to them for the first time. It is most important to set a calm and confident tone with this answer. This answer should be no longer than 3 minutes.

#2 QUESTION: WHY ARE YOU APPLYING?

The Real Question here is:
What can you do that we need you to do?
Do you even know what we need you to do?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Reflect the job spec in every line of your answer if it is a published position. For an unpublished position this is the time to showcase the research you have conducted on them. Talk about their N.E.E.D.S. before talking of your own needs.



See for this answer if you are applying for a position where a detailed job description is available, then you already have a map of the answer in your hands. For such positions you have demonstrate that you have read and understood what is expected of you in the role. So every statement you make must use the an approach and answer that you are applying because you can solve their challenges and help them capitalize on their opportunities. For positions where a detailed job description is not available, you must also paint the rationale why you are the best fit for the role and that requires you to ask questions in return to learn more about the position and then present your experience in a manner which connects the challenges and opportunities that confront the company with your strengths, abilities and experiences. Your answer must tie together the symptoms of the pains they are experiencing or the opportunities that lie ahead of them and how you have walked that journey before and are uniquely suited to help them take advantage of the opportunity or solve the challenges, as the case may be.

#3 QUESTION: WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST STRENGTHS?

The Real Question here is:
Do you really know yourself - and
do you know what our problem is here?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Answer with the job description uppermost in mind. Go easy on the adjectives and heavy on the hard data.

This is another opportunity the interviewer is providing you to go deeper into connecting the features of your strengths, abilities & experiences with the symptoms or their challenges and opportunities. This question is a great chance to make yourself relevant to the organization. Please think about the solution to these situations. The more you talk about the solutions the longer you can keep talking. Remember companies relate with you for their needs, not for your needs. Connect every situation to your strengths, abilities and experience and the learnings you obtained to do it even better the next time around.

#4 QUESTION: WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESSES?

The Real Question here is:

Am I right in thinking “X” about you? And are you going to give me the same old evasive and lame answers that everybody else did, or

The top-line tactic for this question is:

If you have been invited for the interview, chances are that the interviewer is seeking affirmation of predicted weaknesses, and not information on new ones.

In reading your resume and cover letter or approach letter the interviewer has come to some judgments about you. What are the patterns that stand out on your resume? In this answer they are looking for an explanation of those patterns that seem realistic. So if you have been a job hopper in the early part of your career, then admit to it, own up to it. They are looking for someone who will give them a straight answer and not someone who is trying to justify their weaknesses. When I was asked this question, my answer was very straight forward... my biggest weakness at the time was being a hard task master with my team, I would come down on them hard, and that is not what a leader does. Leaders understand that you have to separate the issue from the person, leaders understand that to groom people, you have to fail forward.



Failing forward means it is ok to fail, just don't fail at the same thing repeatedly. So I was very straight forward in answering this question that my biggest weakness is learning how to lead teams, I can be harsh and that is something I am working on to address. This answer made a big difference - it made me appear sincere and real to them because I was not trying to hide, I was straight forward in owning up to the fact that I am yet learning this important skill. Please keep in mind here that I ended my answer with communicating to them that I understand this limitation and that I am working on developing this capability in myself. That is important, to communicate that I am doing something about my weakness.

#5 QUESTION: WHAT WILL YOUR SKILLS AND IDEAS BRING TO THIS COMPANY?

The Real Question here is:
What will we be buying from you?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

You can appear generous, or you can appear miserly - and no one wants a miser.



This question is an invitation. I say that because when you are asked this question, it is an opportunity to showcase your research. This is the time when you can detail the logic of the case you have built in examining the most pressing needs of the company. So state what you saw in your research, how you identified the issues and also give them the overview of a solution. This solution should be provided in an overview format that is in its highlights, with sufficient detail so that they can understand that you are on the right track and the solution you are presenting is worthy of their consideration, but you are not giving them the how to implement the solution - you are only giving them the what of the solution.

#6 QUESTION: WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED MANAGEMENT STYLE?

The Real Question here is:
Are you and I going to get along?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Aim to be the boss and the subordinate you always wanted for yourself, even if nobody is perfect.



The real question here is trying to understand if you have the interpersonal skills to be able to fit into the organization. Will you be a pleasant person to have around or will people cringe every time they cross you in the hallway. Will there be a joy in running into you, or will people have to prepare themselves for maintaining artificial harmony with you. It does not matter what your management style is, you could be a hands-on manager or one who delegates and likes to look at the big picture only, or a mix of the two. What matters here is to show them that you will do what is needed to belong. Remember you are joining them, they are under no obligation to change their ways just because you have decided to join them. So aim to be a good leader and a good follower, but one that is based in sincerity and congruity. Show that you are flexible and willing to take on the dirty hard work, that you will step up to the plate and not let things fall through the cracks.

#7 QUESTION: WHAT DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 5 YEARS' TIME?

The Real Question here is:

Are you after this job or just any job? How soon will you need a new challenge? Do you have a realistic sense of what we can offer you?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

If you don't know, calmly say so, as if not knowing were the most natural thing in the world - because it is. What is being sought here is why are you choosing this company, and if they hire you will you be with them for a while?



This is another question that tests belonging. And it also tests your character. It is a fundamental questions that is asking why are you choosing this organization as a target. This is an opportunity to showcase the soft cultural research you have done. Talk about how your value system is in alignment with the company's value system, and that you see yourself growing with them. 5 years is a long period of time for anyone to forecast, so if you don't know where you will be in 5 years it is ok to say so. But then do follow up with where you will be in 3 years. It is important that they understand that you put in effort and thought before you approached them and the making this translation easy for them to understand is your responsibility.



#8 QUESTION: HOW WOULD YOU APPROACH THIS JOB?

The Real Question here is:

How well do you know us?

What is your take on our challenges & opportunities? What's your preferred style of working?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Talk about diplomacy before talking about your plans. The goal here is to demonstrate that if selected you will fit learn and fit in.

Answer this question carefully, even though you have learnt a lot about this company, this is not a question where you start building a case for the roadmap you will take if hired. You have to convey the sincere impression that you will be flexible in how you approach the position. You will learn about the ground level expectations as you start and will focus on developing the relationships above you, below you and horizontally so that working with you is perceived as a positive for everyone concerned. This answer requires diplomacy, meaning that you are clearly establishing that you don't know what you don't know (even though you have a far better idea than you are letting on). Appear human and humble and open minded in this answer.

#9 QUESTION: WHAT HAVE YOU ACHIEVED ELSEWHERE?

The Real Question here is:

What's the very best that we can expect from you?

Is it what we need?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Keep it recent, work-related
and well-rehearsed.
Permit yourself to sound
confident - they want you to be.



This answer focuses on not just the success you have achieved but also the manner in which you deal with success. So appear confident, take pride in what you got done but not so much as to convey that the success went to your head, or that without you the organization would have not been able to achieve that accolade. Success and failures, ups and downs are just as much a part of your career and employment as they are a part of life, so show that you know how to deal with the ups just as well. Do provide an example of your achievements and this is where a select achievement will come in handy. Take one or two of your top achievements and take the interviewer through the situation that was at play, the role that you had in the situation and the result that was the outcome of the situation.

#10 QUESTION: WHAT DID YOU LIKE AND DISLIKE ABOUT YOUR LAST JOB?

The Real Question here is:

What do you want from us that the last employer could not give you?

Can we give it to you?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Start with a long list of what makes you happy, then let them know that you don't expect perfection in any job.

This is a character question all the way, this question is trying to peel back the onion to determine how real you are... are you deep and do you carry a mature outlook towards your career, your employer and your life, or do you have a less than desirable attitude towards these important spheres of your life. This answer has to be treated with respect. See no one likes to hear someone moan and complain, especially about their employer. So keep that in mind, at the same time if you don't point out what you did not like about your last job, you will sound insincere and that is worse. So start this answer with what you liked about your last job and then mention a couple the drawbacks. And state that you are not looking for perfection, that you understand that at times doing things that one doesn't particularly enjoy is part of the game.

#11 QUESTION: TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU WORKED IN A TEAM.

The Real Question here is:

No one achieves anything on their own and you know that, right?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Find a recent real-world example where you have played successfully with others.



This questions deals with leadership and character more than it deals with capability. How do you get work out of others? How do you gel with someone's vision and follow through? These are the things that will make you stand out here. So this answer deserves a real world example when you along with others contributed to a success and that you recognize that the sum was greater than the individual parts and that you know how to give credit to others were it is due. Those are the signs that you have leadership potential. Leaders do not try to hog the limelight, at the same time they know how to accept a compliment. It comes from their confidence in their own abilities and it shows that they are secure individuals. And that should come across in your answer.

#12 QUESTION: WHAT DO YOUR CO-WORKERS SAY ABOUT YOU?

The Real Question here is:
Do you sound calm or wary about this question?
Are you self-aware or just self-conscious?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Testimonials, not adjectives.



Some people are better at interviews than they are at actually doing work. If that fact makes you despair, then you will be pleased to know that there is an antidote to such people. This question is that antidote. There is no question quite like this one for destabilizing people who have not been telling the whole truth about their talents and their personality. This makes it a popular question especially with recruiters, and it is definitely one you should include in your pre-interview training. This question will easily separate people who are yet to develop significant life experience from those who have. Simply because the younger candidates try to go for the balanced answer or an answer that finishes with more positives than it does negatives. I am not saying your answer should not have more positives, infact if that is true to you, then it must have greater positives - what I am saying is that your answer must be congruent. It must reflect your reality and the depth of your experience. Because as we gain experience in life, we realize that you cannot please everyone, so keep it honest but not overtly personal. Best is to bring along testimonials like the ones you have on LinkedIn in your profile, they tackle this question best, especially if those testimonials are from your co-workers. Body language is critical in answering this question

#13 QUESTION: HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH STRESS AND FAILURE?

The Real Question here is:

When the pressure increases, will you turn into a monster, a useless blob of jelly or someone who sets a good example?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Don't pretend you live in a stress free bubble. Instead give concrete examples of the steps you take to handle pressure.

The goal with this answer is to demonstrate that you know how to deal with stress and failure. That when the going gets tough you proactively address the build up of steam and stress. We all understand that if you don't address the situations that have hurt you, you will land up bleeding on people that did not cut you. And this is what the interviewer is trying to determine. So your answer should include practical things you do to unwind and release the stress, things such as exercise, analyzing the source of the stress, understanding that you prioritize your workload, that you delegate things that can be done by people reporting to you, that you take the right breaks and meditate or have practices that center you when you go off balance. And that you know how to laugh at your own self.

#14 QUESTION: HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU WANT?

The Real Question here is:
Can we afford you?
Are you value for money?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Avoid until as late as possible
in the interview process.



The best way to answer this question is to say that you expect your compensation to be commensurate with the value you bring to the company. This is a polite way of not giving a specific answer till you know there is an offer in the making. But please understand that companies know how to push a candidate on this answer. So if you are pushed then again respond saying that you expect to be paid based on the level of challenge and the difficulty of the position and that you are yet learning about the role. You can even turn it back into a question, saying that you don't have a magic number in mind, but now that it has been brought up what is the salary range?



You can even directly ask if they are making you an offer because you would be glad to consider it. And if still pressed, unless you are sure an offer is coming, it is best to state that “I am sure we can come to agreement when the time is right.”

Just realize that the pushing may not stop, you could yet be asked about your salary history like “what were you making at your previous firm? And the answer to such a question is that you are not at liberty to discuss that, but why is it being asked? See you have to have a lot of tact to deal with this question and turn the onus back onto the interviewer. Or you could say something like I am not sure how meaningful my past salary would be to our discussion but why do you ask? You could even state that it is not an apples to apples comparison. And you would be surprised that you are still being pushed for an answer... and if you are... then you can provide a range that in my previous job my total compensation was between 50 to 75 lakhs per annum.

#15 QUESTION:

SHOW ME YOUR CREATIVITY.

The Real Question here is:
No hidden agenda here - are you creative?

The top-line tactic for this question is:

Provide an example where an unconventional approach created a win-win situation.



What the interviewer is trying to ascertain here is that you know how to deal with uncertainty because the future has a lot of uncertainty for us all. Our jobs put us in difficult situations all the time and our ability to think of solutions that are not typical is a skill that is important to serving and thriving in the real world. So there is no hidden agenda here... the best answer is one where you did something that may have not conformed with the standard or the traditional approach and it got the results that were expected. Creativity means the ability to use your imagination to invent something new, and that is precisely what is being tested here.



If you master these questions then you will possess a huge advantage and it will increase your demand quotient. Just by being in your awareness these questions have lost their power over you. You now know what are the real questions being asked and the spirit and tone your answer needs to communicate. You will now look at these questions with a different mindset.
