Example Interview Questions

This appendix contains sample interview questions which you may find helpful when preparing your interview questions. The questions you ask candidates should be tailored to the job requirements of the position. The same general outline of questions should be asked all candidates interviewed in a particular search so that each candidate is evaluated on the same general criteria.

Education/Training

1. Tell us the three most important things that you got out of your military/college/work experience.
2. In what way do you believe your education and training has prepared you for this position?
3. Is there an area you fell you need more training in, or an area you’ve had an interest in taking additional training for?
4. How do you think your college experience contributed to your overall development?
5. What special training do you have that is relevant to this position?
6. What professional affiliations do you have that are relevant to this position?
7. How did you go about acquiring the technical knowledge needed in your position? How long did it take?

Current/Past Work Experience

1. When did you begin the job you now hold? To whom do you report (name and title)? How many employees report to you, if any?
2. What aspects of your most current position appeal to you the most?
3. What would you like to do more of in your current position? Less of?
4. What aspects of your most current position are the most frustrating to you? How do you deal with them?
5. What were some of the setbacks or disappointments you experienced in the positions you have held?
6. Why did you leave your last employer?
7. What is the most difficult part of your current job?
8. Why do you wish to leave your present employer? What factors have led to this decision?
9. Describe a project that you have completed alone – be specific.
10. Of the employers you’ve had, which did you like most? Why? Least? Why?
11. Of the positions you’ve had, which did you like most? Why? Least? Why?
12. Which of your past positions has best prepared you for this job? In what ways has it prepared you?
13. When I speak of your previous supervisor, what will he/she tell me about your work? What will he/she tell me that you need to do better?
14. What specific skills acquired or used in previous positions do you believe relate to this position?
15. What policies and/or procedures have you developed and implemented?
16. Describe for us a recent work situation that required a good deal of planning and/or coordination and how you approached the situation. What was the outcome?
17. What computer software have you worked with? In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
18. What types of reports have you developed, created, or produced?
19. What have you done in your current position to make your work more effective and efficient? What prompted you to make those changes?
20. What do you consider to be your most important accomplishments to date?
21. What would your present/last supervisor tell us about what kind of worker you are? What would he/she say about your attendance record? How about your safety record? What about your organizational skills?
22. Does your current employer have any policies that you consider unfair? What are they? Why do you feel they are unfair?

**Motivational Factors**

1. What have you done that shows initiative and a willingness to work?
2. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
3. Who or what has had the greatest influence on your life to date?
4. How would you describe yourself?
5. Describe the kind of work environment in which you prefer to work.
6. What are the three most important things to you in a position?

**Communication, Skills, and Abilities**

1. Give us an example of a task you performed that required attention to detail and what you did to ensure accuracy.
2. Describe those personal characteristics and job skills that you think would be most important to succeed in the position for which you are applying.
3. What do you do when you have multiple tasks to complete within a limited timeframe? Give us examples of how you’ve handled such situations.
4. Please discuss some of your past leadership roles and your accomplishments in them.
5. What do you consider to be your major strengths and weaknesses?
6. Describe for us how you organize your workday.
7. Do you prefer working independently or as part of a team? Why?
8. What organizational techniques do you use on a daily basis to accomplish your academic, work, and social goals?
9. Please describe your leadership style.
10. What are some areas that you would like to improve upon or develop?
11. Describe how you learn a new skill or task and give a specific example.
12. What skill or knowledge will you need to develop to enhance your ability to perform this position?
13. What skills and/or special qualities do you possess for this position that would make you stand out from other candidates?
14. If you were hired for this position, in what areas could you contribute immediately? In what areas would you need additional training?
15. Can you perform all the essential functions of this position, with or without reasonable accommodation?
16. Give us an example of a time when you questioned a policy or procedure when it might have been easier to go along with it. What was the policy/procedure, and what did you do? What was the end result?
17. Have you had experience giving presentations? If so, who was the audience, and what was the purpose?
18. Describe a time when you went “beyond the call of duty” to accomplish a task.
19. What kinds of work pressures do you find the most difficult to deal with?
20. Describe the processes that you have implemented to ensure effective mutual communication and understanding with your co-workers.
21. What steps have you taken to enable you to become more effective in your current position? Why did you feel that you should take these steps?
22. Describe a situation in which you got people to change from the way they were doing something to the way you had suggested. How did you accomplish this?
23. Frequently, in organizations there are so-called “communication problems” such as misinterpretation, misunderstanding, rumors, etc. Amongst the communication problems that you may have experienced, what was the most difficult one? What did you do? How have you tried to minimize communication problems within the organization?
24. Tell us about a time when you had a conflict with your supervisor. What was the conflict? How did you handle it?

Teamwork

1. What is your definition of teamwork?
2. How do/did you demonstrate teamwork in your present/last position?
3. What is your idea of good working relationship with co-workers? How do you develop that?
4. How do you go about motivating others in your team or group?
5. Is it important to you that your co-workers like you? If yes, why is it important to you?
6. Describe a committee, team, or task force you’ve been a part of and tell us what role you played.
7. Have you ever had to work as part of a team under a stressful situation or when other team members didn’t get along? Tell us about the situation. What did you do? What was the result?
8. Working in teams with people from various backgrounds and with various perspectives is common in today’s business environment. In your opinion, what are the advantages of forming teams to address specific organizational issues? What are the disadvantages? How can you overcome these advantages? Give examples.
9. Describe the type of person that has been most difficult for you to work with. Why? How did you address any problems?
10. Describe the type of person you have worked most effectively with.
11. How do you go about gaining team members’ participation and commitment with respect to the achievement of team objectives? Give an example.
12. From your prior school/work experience, can you describe a project/assignment where you acted as team leader? What did you find difficult about leading a team/group? How have you dealt with these difficulties in the past? What do you enjoy about working in teams?
13. How would your co-workers describe you?

Problem-solving and Decision-making

1. What was the most difficult problem or challenge you faced on your present/former position? How did you handle it?
2. Have you ever taken responsibility for solving a problem at work that you did not create? Describe the problem and what you did. What was the outcome?
3. Describe for us an instance where you had some type of conflict or disagreement with a supervisor or co-worker and how you handled the situation.
4. If an employee came to you with a serious complaint, how would you respond?
5. Describe the most difficult person you have ever worked with and how you handled him/her.

6. Describe a time when you had to deny or modify a request by someone else. How did you handle the situation? If you were confronted with a similar situation in the future, would you do anything differently? If so, explain.

7. What would you do if you had decision to make and no one to consult?

8. Give an example of a potentially volatile situation of individual that you successfully calmed down and how you went about it.

9. Describe a situation in which it was necessary for you to mediate or negotiate a solution or compromise. What was the result?

10. What are the most frequent and difficult problems you face in your current position? How do you handle them? How do you ensure that you address the root cause rather than just the symptoms?

11. Think of a time when you received information that you thought had been prepared carelessly and contained many errors. How did you handle the situation?

12. In your opinion, what are the components or elements of a “good” decision? How do you usually proceed in order to reach a decision based on those components? Give an example.

13. To what extent do you think the decisions of your department/unit can have an impact on other departments? Give us an example.

14. Give an example of a tough or unpopular decision that you had to make. What was your approach? What did you do to minimize the negative impact?

Management Experience

1. What was the level of your decision-making authority in past positions?

2. Describe a decision you made that had an unpopular result.

3. Give us an example of a decision you made that backfired and what you did about it.

4. Give an example of a decision you made that turned out better than you believed possible.

5. Describe a time when you made a decision in the absence of a clear policy regarding the issue. Did any problems result from the decision? If so, how did you address them?

6. Have you ever experienced political pressure that interfered with you getting the job done? Give an example. What factors do you take into consideration when maneuvering through a highly political situation?

7. Describe your experience in developing and monitoring budgets.

8. What fiscal authority have you had in past positions?

9. Give an example of a situation in which a budget overrun was necessary to accomplish a goal. What was the end result?

10. Describe the most challenging mandate or project that you have been responsible for, and tell us how you handled it. What were the major difficulties that you encountered? How did you deal with them? What were the results?

11. In your opinion, what are your department’s most important contributions to organizational objectives and results? What has been your role? Give examples.

12. Give an example of a situation when you obtained the desired results because you persisted despite resistance or obstacles. How did you deal with these obstacles?

13. What are your standards of success in your position? What have you done to meet or exceed these standards?

14. In your opinion, what is the best way to get your suggestions or points of view accepted by key decision makers in the organization? Give an example of where this has occurred in the past.
15. Give an example of a situation where you participated in the formulation and implementation of a new strategic direction. What was your role? What factors did you take into consideration? What were the results?

16. How do you match employee skills, knowledge, and abilities to the project requirements?

17. How would you describe yourself as a manager? What difficulties have you encountered in such a role? Give examples.

18. Give an example of a time when you used the informal network of the organization or department to get things done.

19. Describe how you see your role and the role of your department in your current position. How important would you describe your role as being to the department and corporate objectives?

20. What would you do if your department plan for this year includes measures that will have a strong negative impact on your employees, such as a major re-organization involving job cuts, transfers, etc.? How would you approach this with your employees?

21. Present a situation the person might expect to face on the job and ask them to describe the steps they would take, the problems they would anticipate, and their solutions.

Example: Suppose that you have been given the mandate to change a particular process within your function/department. You have completed an extensive analysis of the function’s operations and processes. You are now ready to present your recommendations to the function’s senior management team. The managers are impressed with your analysis and research, but feel that your recommended changes are too expensive, and they tell you that they can’t see correcting all the operational problems you’ve pointed out. You, however, still have your mandate to fulfill. What would you do?

Supervision

1. Describe the positions in which you have had supervisory responsibility. How many people have you supervised and in what kinds of positions? Did you have hiring/firing authority?

2. Give an example of a time when you were disappointed by an employee’s lack of accomplishment and what you did about it.

3. Based upon your experience, what kinds of things do you believe motivate an employee?

4. Describe a sticky situation with an employee and what you did about it.

5. What kinds of things can a supervisor do to create a positive working environment?

6. Describe an effective employee performance planning and review process.

7. What recognition and reward systems have you found most effective?

8. What is the role of a supervisor in your opinion?

9. Describe the most serious complaint an employee brought to your attention and what you did about it.

10. How would you describe your supervisory style?

11. How do you go about delegating work to employees? What criteria do you use? Give an example.

12. What difficulties have you encountered as a supervisor? Give examples.

13. You are the supervisor of an employee responsible for requisitioning materials/supplies for the department. Each month the employee is required to supply you with a summary report of all requisitions made for the month. The reports have been consistently late, and the data is incomplete. How would you address this situation?

14. How do you ensure that your employees are achieving their objectives? What system or process have you implemented?

15. What kind of decisions do you let your employees make, and what kinds of responsibility do you usually give to your employees? What kinds of decisions would you rather make by yourself?
16. Suppose you are working with an employee whom you know greatly dislikes performing a particular job task. You need this task to be completed, and the employee is the only one available to assist you. What would you do to motivate the employee to perform this task?

17. What process do you use to identify the developmental needs of your employees? Give examples.

18. Suppose that you have just presented a large developmental plan for your employees. Everyone seems to appreciate the plan except for one employee, who says that he/she doesn’t need to learn anything new and that anyway, he/she just does not have the time or energy to do it. How would you handle the situation? What would you say to the employee?

19. How do you encourage others to search for better ways of doing things? Give an example.

20. How would you handle someone who is always late, who never meets his/her deadlines?

21. How do you select the information you give to colleagues and employees? What are your criteria?

22. Describe an innovative way you handled a conflict involving two or more employees.

23. How do you motivate and support people, especially when the morale is low? How do you make everyone feel that their role and contribution is important?

Career Goals and Objectives

1. What immediate and long-term goals have you set for yourself? Why these goals? What are you doing to achieve them?

2. In what ways does this position meet your career goals and objectives?

3. What are your short-term and long-range goals and objectives? How are you preparing to achieve them?

4. How do you define job success?

5. Tell us about the career goals you have already achieved and what career goals you are currently working towards.

Miscellaneous Questions

1. What hours and days do you prefer to work? What hours and days are you available to work? What hours and days do you prefer not to work?

2. How many times have you been late to work in the past three months? What was the reason?

3. Have you ever been fired from a position? If yes, why?

4. Other than approved vacation, sick, or disability leave, how many days of work did you miss last year?

5. Does your current employer have a formal performance appraisal system? How does it work? What are the various rating levels? What was your most recent overall rating? What reasons were given for this rating? Do you feel the rating was fair or unfair? Why? In which areas of your performance was your supervisor the most complimentary? Why? In which areas was your supervisor the most critical? Why? What have you done to improve your performance in these areas? What have been the results of your efforts?

6. How would you describe your present supervisor?

7. How would you describe your relationship with your supervisor?

8. Which aspects of your supervisor’s management style do you like most? Why? Least? Why?

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

10. How would you describe the ideal work environment?

11. What situations or working conditions would you like to avoid in future jobs?
12. If there were something you could change about the way your current/last employer does business or treats employees, what would it be? How would you change it?

13. Describe the working conditions you need in order to perform at your best.

14. What do you feel an employer owes an employee?

15. What do you feel an employee owes an employer?

16. What do you think is likely to make the difference between success and failure in this position?

17. What distinguishes a good employee from an average one?

18. What prevents you from doing a better job where you are now?

19. What could your previous employer have done to persuade you not to leave?

20. Tell us about some of the leadership experiences you have had and give examples that show what your leadership style is like.

21. How would you handle a customer who called and became very upset and angry because she was put on hold?

22. Could you give us an example of a time you had to persuade someone to do something they initially didn’t want to do? How did you go about convincing them? How did it work out?

23. What would you do if you suspected a co-worker was stealing from the university?

24. Tell me about a time you took it upon yourself to make an area safer for the people who worked or lived there. What was the situation? What did you do?

25. What aspects of your job do you consider most important?

26. Have you found any way to make your job easier or more rewarding?

27. What is your definition of “safety?” What does safety mean to you?

28. Why is it important to follow safety rules and regulations?

29. What are the most important safety issues facing your present workplace? What have you done with respect to these issues?

30. How can we achieve a safe work environment for everybody?

31. Imagine that you are working on a project with tight deadlines. You suddenly realize that some of your co-workers are not respecting safety rules and regulations during their activities. You know that if you start explaining how to work safely, you will not be able to complete your work on time. What would you do in this situation?

32. What do you consider to be good attendance?

33. What interests you about this position?

34. If this university hired you, how would you identify the major roles and responsibilities of your new position?

35. In your opinion, what important abilities/skills are required in order to deal effectively with customers? Give examples of situations in which you have used these skills to deal with customers.

36. What is the value of providing customer satisfaction? How do you ensure that your customers are satisfied? Give an example.

37. Recount a situation in which you were particularly effective at resolving a customer complaint. What did you do? What were the results?

38. In your opinion, what are some important considerations when dealing with customers?

39. How would you encourage an ongoing commitment to service quality? Give an example.

40. Explain how you’ve handled changing situations, when things don’t go as planned. How does the need to adapt to different situations affect your performance?

41. Your supervisor has just given you instructions on how to perform a job. You feel that you know of a better and more efficient method. What would you do?
42. Sometimes people have to make compromises in order to get results, achieve objectives, or meet deadlines. Give an example of a situation where you had to make compromises. What do you take into consideration when making a compromise? What do you do to minimize the impact of these compromises on the overall quality of your service?

43. What is the last new thing you learned? How have you applied this knowledge?

44. What kinds of situations or circumstances make you feel tense or nervous?

45. What do people most often criticize you for?

46. For what do you most often criticize yourself?

47. What is your standard for your own success?

48. How do you deal with people you don’t like?

49. What would you say to a co-worker who made a major mistake?

50. Tell us about an occasion when your performance didn’t live up to your expectations.

51. Tell us about a goal you set in the past and what you did to achieve it.

52. Tell us about a goal you set and weren’t able to achieve. Why do you think that happened?

53. What kinds of incentives or rewards get you excited about your work?

54. What do you do to reduce or eliminate stress?

55. What do you value in your position? How do you ensure that you act according to your values? Can you give an example of a situation where you were asked to act against what you believed? What did you do?

56. How do you maintain and ensure confidentiality of employee information?

57. Is there any information we have not already discussed that you would like us to know about you in order to make an appropriate decision?

58. When comparing one company offer to another, what factors will be important to you?

59. What are your salary expectations if offered this position?

60. Have any of your employers had award programs in place, such as for safety, attendance, etc.? Please describe the program. Did you receive any awards? If no, why not?