

Fifty Common Behavioral Interview Questions and Practical Tips to Survive them

Introduction

Paul See, a Portland Oregon private vocational rehabilitation counselor first collected these questions from numerous sources. [www.paulsee.com]. The trick to mastering the real job interview is to practice and "develop your act" with a trusted companion, friend, or professional. You don't need an expert to rehearse your answers. Do not choose people who walk on eggshells around you or who are overly concerned about hurting your feelings. You want honest, clear feedback, not a patronizing pat on the back for a bad performance. **Sometimes honesty hurts. Learn how to deal with it** before you go into an interview unprepared to face the consequences of a bad impression. I have expanded and edited some answers. At the back of this article, there are observations I make about some of these questions, especially as they apply to persons on the autistic spectrum [RNM].

1. Tell me about yourself.

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

2. Why did you leave your last job?

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

3. What experience do you have in this field?

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

4. Do you consider yourself successful?

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

5. What do co-workers say about you?

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

6. What do you know about this organization?

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

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

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

8. Are you applying for other jobs?

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

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

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

10. Do you know anyone who works for us?

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

11. What kind of salary do you need?

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

12. Are you a team player?

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

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

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

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

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

15. What is your philosophy towards work?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

19. Why should we hire you?

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

20. Tell me about a suggestion you have made.

Have a good one ready. Be sure and *use a suggestion that was accepted* and was then considered successful; one related to the type of work you're applying for is a real plus.

21. What irritates you about co-workers?

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

22. What is your greatest strength?

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

23. Tell me about your dream job.

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

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

Give several reasons and *include specific skills, examples of your experience and interest in the general field of work involved.* Remember that once hired, some job requirements change, so be ready with answers that show you have the capacity to navigate in those changed conditions.

25. What are you looking for in a job?

See answer # 23

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

Be extremely careful with your answer. Do not be trivial. It would take disloyalty to the organization, violence or lawbreaking to get you to object. **Minor objections will label you as a whiner.** If you have *known* problems being around certain kinds of persons, your research about this particular employer or industry sector should alert you to the likelihood of more or fewer people of the kind you can't work with being present at this job site.

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

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

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

Do not fabricate or exaggerate, as you may be asked a follow up question to give an example. There are numerous good possibilities: Loyalty, Energy, Positive attitude, Leadership, Team player, Expertise, Initiative, Patience, Persistence when faced by Challenges, Hard work, Creativity, Problem solver.

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

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

30. What has disappointed you about a job?

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

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

You may say that you thrive under certain types of pressure. Give an example that relates to the type of position applied for. Here's where your research comes in handy.

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

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

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

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

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

This is up to you. Be totally honest.

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

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

36. Would you be willing to relocate if required?

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

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

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

38. Describe your management style.

Try to avoid labels. Some of the more common labels, like progressive, salesman or consensus, can have several meanings or descriptions depending on which management expert you listen to. The *situational style* is safe, because it says *you will manage according to the situation, instead of one size fits all*.

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

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

40. Do you have any blind spots?

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

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

Be careful to mention *traits that are needed and that you have*. Here is where your research about the employer and knowledge of the job description really helps out.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

47. Describe your work ethic.

Emphasize habits and attitudes of benefit to the organization. Examples can include determination to get the job done and working hard but enjoying your work.

48. What has been your biggest professional disappointment?

Be sure that you refer to something that was beyond your control. Show acceptance and no negative feelings. You must *be objective about what that something was* and demonstrate your objectivity by showing how others said it was beyond their control as well as agreeing with you that the circumstances and environment were beyond your responsibility and control.

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

Talk about having fun by accomplishing something for the organization, *not just for you*.

50. Do you have any questions for me?

Always have some questions prepared. Questions prepared where you will be an asset to the organization are good. Examples are, "How soon will I be able to be productive?" and "What type of projects will I be able to assist on?"

General Observations about these Questions and ASD

I. Behavioral interviews are **not** designed to trip you up. They are a part of the current job search scene and as such, test your critical thinking skills and your willingness to adapt to change. There is a difference between thinking skills and "cognition." By definition, a person diagnosed with ASD has cognitive challenges. No amount of "wishing it away" rids you of your raw cognitive challenges, but a good amount of training and rehearsal in advance of an actual interview can prepare you by addressing your processing delays as well as impulsive verbal and nonverbal responses.

II. You may think that "rehearsing" or learning scripts is intellectually dishonest and that "I'm not a dishonest person." What you object to in these questions and some of their answers are "**white lies**," as well as "**redirection of the conversation**." You must consciously and conscientiously learn to tell and do both if you wish to master your fear of interviews as well as address anxiety in everyday conversation with co-workers and supervisors.

III. Not every position requires a behavioral interview of candidates. If you are a "*I can show you better than tell you*" kind of person, you may be able to sidestep an interview altogether by asking the employer whether you can *demonstrate* your skill or knowledge rather than just talk about it. You can also submit or bring examples of your work with you, but it's always wise to first ask whether you can do this. If you work with a job developer or a coach, such people may be allowed to help you in your work once you're employed, but they most likely will **not** be permitted to participate in an employment interview with you.

IV. *If you're used to having others help you* through stressful conversational settings, you must understand that you may not be permitted to have that kind of help with you in an employment interview. It's also very likely that you won't have that kind of help "on the job" unless you and your employer both recognize you need this kind of accommodation, and the employer is able and willing to provide it.

V. *Most people with ASD are not team players*, yet several of the questions focus on the issue of whether or if you are a team player, and ask for examples of how you work with others. The real fact about any work setting -- leaving self-employment aside for the moment -- is that most work involves social interaction and communication of one kind or another. Self-employment involves peddling your work to others or producing and selling a service or a product. Many self-employed persons use social or job networks to become better known to their customer/client base. Persons who work alone exclusively, such as web designers, indexers, some ghost writers, and field workers (line workers, communication tower workers, natural resource specialists and naturalists conducting extensive field work) use *social* means to communicate with employers, clients, supervisors, or project colleagues. You will have to do that as well.

It is not enough for you to know that you aren't a team player and stick to your guns about it. In your search for work, *employers are not interested in what you won't do to get along with them or your co-workers*. There's nothing special about earning money to eat, pay for shelter, and

have a minimally decent quality of life as an adult. Everyone does it, and *you can't realistically expect to be "granted a pass" from the human race.*

A growing number of speech/language pathologists, personal coaches and adult drama and acting coaches have begun to work with adults on the autistic spectrum, helping them develop routines and patterns of communication that are not only effective, but are also open-ended, preparing their clients/patients for "the unexpected" in the real world. If your communication skills are marginal, you might find working with some specialists to be *a necessary cost of being employed.* Diabetics rely on insulin. Many of us wear glasses. Many of us have conditions that benefit from medication. Without having these necessary aids, we wouldn't succeed in many adult functions. Accepting the fact that you need special help is an essential component of your understanding how ASD affects you personally. It is your job -- not the work of others -- to ask for or make accommodations for yourself that enable you to work.

VI. *Honesty, the Truth, and Things that Make People Uncomfortable.* Many ASD individuals don't know how to *shade the truth*, or be *less than totally honest and revealing*, or stifle their *impulse to say more than the situation demands.* Part of what's involved here is "disarming honesty." Most people are not comfortable with bluntness, or your expressing yourself too directly. Here is where practice as well as direct audio and video feedback in preparatory sessions before an interview will help you. Even if you can't see or hear yourself making communication gaffes, having another trusted person listen, act as a mock behavioral interviewer, and then review your conduct and words is absolutely essential. To put it simply, you may need others' help to show you how to watch what you say and do and learn when to shut up and consciously work on your physical behavior.

VII. Many unpaid positions including volunteer roles, participation in common activity interest groups, and community or special interest projects involve being screened by others allowing them to determine whether you would be a good fit and asset to their organization, event, or endeavor. More and more, whether the job you're looking for is paid or unpaid, you are likely to encounter questions similar to many of those found in this article. This is because people place value on their volunteer time and want to feel as though it is less like work and more like service or something done for the common good. These feelings are especially strong among older and retired volunteers.

FINAL COMMENTS

1. *The longer it takes you to "get" these concepts and gain control over inappropriate communication and behavior, the less likely it will be that you will be hired for complex, high-paying, work.* You may be hired, but for less responsible, less complex work.

2. While you may develop communication and social skills over time, you will probably not be first hired for what you know or have done. ***You will be hired based upon the first impressions you make on people.***

3. ***Even if you've done far more advanced work, there is no guarantee that similar work will come along now.*** Look for it, but don't expect to be offered this work "as a matter of right." If it's been some time since you worked in the field, your knowledge and skills may be rusty, or the work you did has changed, or has been outsourced, or broken apart and downskilled. If a

job is truly beneath your dignity, it may not be wise to apply for it. You will not be happy and your boss and co-workers may not be happy with you.

4. ***Change is inevitable.*** No job remains the same; no bosses are around forever, and, most importantly, *you* are also changing every day by getting older and becoming more experienced. Be prepared to do something different by giving up thinking about yourself as a person with limited potential or limited possibilities or a person who must have things "just so" in their life. ***You can't fight change; learn to deal with it.***

5. Bear in mind that ***employers make hiring mistakes too.*** They may be overly impressed with your verbal presentation or your resume or your curriculum vita or your work, but not comfortable with your work style or the way you relate to them, co-workers and customers/clients. Only by watching you at work and experiencing how you get along with others and solve problems on your own can they confirm whether they've made a good hire or not. All new employees go through a probation period, so even if you "hit the ground running" people will be assessing *how* you run.

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