

HOW TO RESPOND TO DIFFICULT QUESTIONS/CONCERNS RAISED IN INTERVIEWS

Gap in Resume

- If you left the workforce to raise children, care for an elderly family member or respond to a health issue, be sure to indicate family readiness and commitment or *resolution* of the eldercare or family health issue. Do not apologize for break or provide too many personal details. Acknowledge break but quickly move discussion to your skills and accomplishments. Reinforce eagerness to re-enter. In some instances, you may want to offer to complete an assignment or small project to prove yourself.

“I took time off to raise my children, but I am now excited to re-enter the workforce and have support in place at home to be able to do so smoothly. While at home, I have kept my marketing skills sharp by attending classes and keeping up with new trends and technologies, including social media platforms, digital marketing campaigns, and Adobe Creative Suite. I volunteer at a local homeless shelter, maintaining their website and social meeting as well as serving as editor of their on-line newsletter. I am confident that I am current on industry trends, and I see this opportunity as a way to put my marketing, writing, and creative skills to work in a new setting.”

“I took a break to deal with a family health issue, which is now resolved. I can’t wait to get back to work. The reason why I found this job so appealing is because . . . “

“I understand you may have difficulty convincing your colleagues about my candidacy because of my career break. I would be willing to take on a small project or assignment to demonstrate that I have the analytical skills, proficiency in MS Excel, and attention to detail that this position requires.”

Overqualified for Job

- Address the concern head-on and express excitement and interest, Shift focus to why you find the job appealing and identify the skills and traits you have to be successful and happy in the job.



"I intentionally sought this job out even though I may look overqualified for the position. I love the mission of your company, and my strong organizational, administrative, and project coordination skills are a good fit for the role as you have described it. Although I managed a large staff and budget in my previous job prior to my career break, it was also a high-stress position that required lots of travel and long hours. I am not looking for this level of responsibility right now, but I do want to contribute to a growing company that could benefit from my "jack of all trades" skillset. "

Weak Technology Skills

- Embrace and use new technology prior to the interview. When asked about technology, be specific about proficiency and give examples. Weave into the conversation stories and comments that reflect that you are up to date with technology. If you are a quick learner, say it but also give examples to prove it.

"I am proficient with the most recent version of MS Office, including MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint. In my previous jobs as a bookkeeper or accountant, I have always had to use MS Excel and consider myself an advanced user. I can import and export data; create formulas; link spreadsheets; use pivot tables; and create charts and graphs for presentations. I am currently taking a refresher course to learn how to use macros, which is considered a very advanced feature of Excel. I understand that many small businesses use Quickbooks, so I recently took a class and received my certification as a Quickbooks Pro Advisor. After mastering several customized and more robust accounting software tools over the years, I found Quickbooks to be very easy to learn and can't wait to use it in my next job."

Lack of Commitment to Company and Job

- Understand that flexibility works both ways. Don't start with your demands but show how you are willing to be flexible too.

"I would be thrilled to be a part of your marketing team, and I think my writing, social media, and creative skills would be a great fit. I am very eager to work, and I have made arrangements so that I can commit to the required 20-25 hours week. I can absolutely be available between 8:30am and 2:30pm, and I can commit to checking email/voicemail at some point that makes sense after 2:30pm so that I am responsive to the team and to client



needs. I understand that your annual conference is in May, and I do have the flexibility and am willing to work additional hours the week before and during the week of the conference.”

Reason for Leaving

- Be honest and forthcoming but limit the information to what the interviewer needs to know. Make every attempt to put the reasons why you want to leave or left a job in the best possible light so that the interviewer does not conclude that you job hopped. If you have a history of job hopping, you will need to honestly assess the situation and address it.

- If you are currently working and want to leave your job:

“I am very proud of my many accomplishments as Controller for XYZ Company. In 5 years, I have been promoted twice and have taken on increasing responsibility and several new initiatives, including successfully leading a time-sensitive conversion of our accounting system to a new, more robust software. I am now looking to put my strengths and experiences to work in a new setting. Specifically, I’d like to work for a mid-sized technology company with revenues in the \$50-100 million range.”

- If your job was eliminated:

“Like other technology companies in the region that are dependent on the federal government, XYZ company lost several key contracts during sequestration. This meant the elimination of many positions, including mine. I was lucky enough to survive three rounds of layoffs. After each layoff, I took on additional responsibilities due to an overall reduction in my department of 60%. I was laid off during the last round.”

What is Your Greatest Weakness?

- A common – but often less effective – response is to state a strength and then explain that it can also be a weakness.

“I am a perfectionist and insist that any work product of mine is 100% complete and accurate. Sometimes, though, I miss deadlines or spend too much time on a lesser priority task because of my perfectionism.”



- A better approach is to identify a weakness that hindered job performance and then to explain what you did to correct the weakness and what you learned from the experience. You should end by giving an example that demonstrates you overcame the weakness and seized the opportunity to improve. Note: Interviewers appreciate honesty, a good balance of humility and pride, and a logical thought process when taking action.

“In the past I had a history of being a micro-manager. During a review, my boss raised this issue with me and stated that it was negatively effecting my relationships with the staff I supervised. I took a valuable management training class, met individually with the staff I supervised, and came up with a plan to identify key priorities and actions needed as well as corresponding deadlines. We worked together to develop these so there was buy-in at all levels. I then left them alone, other than our scheduled check-ins, and made it known that I was available for support if they needed it. Although my team completed the work following a different process than I had envisioned, the end product was excellent and our working relationship much improved.”

- Another option is to identify a weakness that is totally not relevant to the job at hand.

“In my last job as VP at XYX Bank, I was a valued employee who had been with the bank for 17 years, but I consistently received poor marks during my annual reviews for my selling abilities. I am not good at sales, and the bank always wanted me to sell more products. In fact, that is why I am transitioning to a pure finance role. This job is appealing to me because I would be working with small businesses to support their bookkeeping needs, and this is really my sweet spot that utilizes my financial analysis as well as my client service skills.”