

“TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF”: HOW TO ANSWER THE HARDEST INTERVIEW QUESTION

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Regardless of what job you're interviewing for, you can expect it to start with this seemingly innocuous request from your potential future employer: "Tell me about yourself". Why is this common question so difficult to answer? Most of us don't have a lot of practice talking about ourselves in a professional context, so we aren't sure where to start or what to say. The best way to make a good first impression is to make sure you have a great answer prepared in advance, because your response will set the tone for the rest of the interview, and may very well be the reason you get hired.

What to say

An easy way to structure your answer is with a Present, Past, Future approach: explain what you're doing now, how you got here, and how these experiences will help you in your new role. Use keywords from the job posting to describe yourself and your achievements. Talk about how your values align with those of the company. Most importantly, try to evoke an emotional connection – your resume and cover letter helped you land the interview, but now you have to show your personality and demonstrate that you would be a productive and engaging colleague.

What not to say

Don't just repeat what's on your resume; the hiring manager wants to get a bigger picture of who you are as a person, and what you bring to the team. Also don't waste time telling him or her quirky personal details about your life, like your collections or hobbies; this is a chance to hammer home how your previous experiences have led you to this opportunity, and to engage them with how passionate and knowledgeable you are about the company.

Body language

In addition to what you say, the way you say it is incredibly important. Use body language to convey your confidence: smile, make eye contact, shake hands, and sit straight. As much as possible, avoid fidgeting, excessive nodding, and crossing your arms.

Doing your research

Hiring managers are often looking for someone who can solve a specific problem at their company, so it's important to do your research before the interview to understand the company and the position. Create an easy narrative for the hiring manager to follow when describing yourself: include what drew you to this line of work, or industry, such as a big event in your personal or professional life, and why that experience will bring you success in this new role. Make sure they see that you are forward-thinking and ready to hit the ground running. By the end, the employer should know why you applied, what you have to offer, what makes you different, why you're excited about it, and why they should hire you. Ask a friend or family member to give you feedback on your answer beforehand so that you come off as competent, enthusiastic, and memorable at your big interview!