

# Responses to Difficult "Can Do" Interview Questions (Meaning, "What can you do for the company?")

## 1. What can you offer us that other candidates cannot?

Respond by emphasizing your unique qualities and capabilities. Relate them to the position at hand whenever possible.

## 2. What are strengths?

You should be able to enumerate three or four of your key strengths (with examples) that are relevant to their needs based on your research and other data you have gathered about the company.

## 3. How successful have you been so far?

Be prepared to define success for yourself and then respond. Try to choose accomplishments that relate to the organization's needs and values if you have been able to determine that from your research.

## 4. What are your limitations? Tell me about a time your work was criticized. What was your biggest business mistake?

Responding with a strength, which if overdone could be considered a weakness, can be a problem. Professionals in most organizations are familiar with this technique and may consider it to be evasive. When discussing mistakes and criticism, emphasize what you learned and how your behavior is different as a result of the experience. Do not claim to be flawless.

## 5. What qualifications do you have that you feel would make you successful here?

If the question is asked early on, talk about two or three of your skills and, to the extent you can, relate them to the company. If this question is asked after you have sufficient information about the position, talk about two or three of your major problem-solving skills (supported by accomplishments) which you believe will be useful in the position.

## 6. How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?

More and more companies are looking for people who can "hit the ground running." They don't have time to bring people up to speed with on-the-job training. Again, the timing of the question is important. Do you know enough about the specific position to give a cogent response? If so, think about your accomplishments and select one that is indicative of the kind of work you can do.

## 7. What were some situations in which you worked under pressure or met deadlines?

Refer to your accomplishments. Discuss one or two in which you were especially effective in meeting deadlines or dealing with high-pressure situations.

## 8. Can you tell me about an objective in your last job that you failed to meet? Why?

This question assumes that you failed to meet some of your objectives. If you can honestly state that you met all your established objectives, say so. However, this is unlikely. If there was an objective that you were unable to meet for legitimate reasons, discuss it with an explanation of the obstacles over which you had no control. Even better, discuss an objective that you renegotiated when you realized it could not be met because of obstacles beyond your control. Above all, state what you learned as a result of the experience.

## 9. In your most recent position, what were some of your most significant accomplishments?

Since you have already selected the specific accomplishments you want to talk about, this question will be simple to answer. Be ready to describe three or four of them. When possible, try to relate your answer to the nature of the new challenges you might be facing.

## 10. If I spoke with your previous manager, what would he or she say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Be consistent with what you think he or she would say. Position any weakness in a positive way. Use examples, not just words. Your former manager will probably want to give you a good reference, so recount some of the positive things you did for him or her. Give one or two examples of your creativity. Refer to accomplishments that relate to the company and the position, if possible.

# Responses to Difficult "Will Do" Interview Questions (Meaning, "What will you do for the company?")

## 1. What are your ambitions for the future?

Indicate your desire to concentrate on doing the immediate work well- and your confidence that the future will be promising. You do not want to convey that you have no desire to progress, but you need to avoid statements that are unrealistic or that might threaten present incumbents.

## 2. What do you know about our company?

If you have done your homework, you can honestly say that you have studied all that is publicly available about the company you are interviewing with, and are thus aware of many published facts. However, you might also state that you would like to know more; then be prepared to ask intelligent questions.

## 3. What things are most important to you in a work situation?

Use information developed from your satisfiers/dissatisfiers and ideal work preferences, and relate your answer to what you know about the position.

## 4. Don't you feel you might be over-qualified or too experienced for the position we have in mind?

Sometimes this question means: "I am concerned that you are willing to take this position because you need to work and you will leave as soon as you get a better offer." Your answer must address this concern. "You could be right, but having taken a voluntary early retirement from XYZ Company, I am in the fortunate position of being able to do what gives me the greatest satisfaction. And what I enjoy doing most is- (describe the contents of the job)." It is also possible that you are getting the message, "Your salary may be too high for the salary range of this position." Respond by mentioning your ability to "hit the ground running," and be up to speed quickly.

## 5. What about a work situation that irritated you?

Talk about this type of situation in terms of the skills you used to manage and improve it. Avoid describing a work situation you know exists in your target company unless you want to emphasize that you can improve or eliminate it. Stress your ability to stay cool under pressure.

## 6. What trends do you see coming in our industry?

Choose two or three important development to discuss. This is an opportunity to show that you have thought about the future, the economics, the markets, and the technology of the industry and that you have done your research.

## 7. In your last position, what were the things that you liked most? Liked least?

Respond with care to this question. You will have the information from your satisfiers/ dissatisfiers, and you will want to emphasize the positives and de-emphasize the negatives.

## 8. What do you feel you should earn in the proposed position?

You may want to answer this with a question, such as, "What is the typical compensation for similar positions in your company?" Or, "I consider myself to be better than average, so I would expect to receive an offer that would be greater than the midpoint of the salary range for the position." If there is no range in the company, give the range that you had in mind. But qualify it by saying you hope to learn more about the job scope responsibilities.

## 9. What motivates you the most?

Use the results of your career assessments, and keep your answer fairly general; the satisfaction of meeting the challenges of the position, developing teams and individuals, meeting organizational goals. Only if you are in sales might you mention money as a motivator.

## 10. What are your long-range goals?

Relate your answer to the company you are interviewing with rather than give a very broad, general answer. Keep your ambitions realistic. Talk first about doing the work for which you are applying, and then talk about longer-range goals.

