The Top 10 Things Interviewers Are Looking For
June 05, 2019

Gary Burnison is CEO of Korn Ferry and author of Lose the Resume, Land the Job. For more information, see KFAdvance.com.



In almost any interview, you can count on answering some version of the following: *Tell me about yourself. What's your greatest career accomplishment? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Why do you want to work here? What major problem, challenge, or failure have you had to overcome, and how did you do it?*

And then there are the unexpected questions, such as:

- What's the last book you read?
- Who's your favorite musician?
- What do you think about when you're driving?
- Who's your role model?
- Have you ever stolen anything from a hotel room? If so, what? (Is taking a pen from the nightstand considered stealing?)

As part of the interview process, I've asked some of these questions myself. I'm not looking for the correct answer. Instead, I want to see how people adapt to the unexpected.

I'm often surprised by the reactions. I've seen everything. Some people take out a piece of paper and start sweating over calculations like it's ninth-grade algebra homework all over again. Others puzzle it out, muttering to themselves, then make an educated guess.

Some candidates respond to a quirky question—"If you wrote a song, what would the title be?" or "How do you make a tuna fish sandwich?"—by telling a little story about themselves. I've seen a few freeze up—absolutely nothing. The worst, though, is when some don't even try. They just stare or even complain, "You're kidding, right? Why would you ask me that?" They've completely missed the point: these oddball questions are about thinking creatively and adjusting in the moment—two things that just about every employer is looking for.

And that's what makes these off-the-wall questions so impactful. Along with your responses to the more standard questions, the random Q&A presents a real opportunity to showcase yourself.

(cont'd)

The Top 10 Things Interviewers Are Looking For:

1. **Culture fit.** The sense that you would work well with others in the company, department, or team.
2. **Motivation.** What drives you to succeed.
3. **Skills.** Mostly technical skills for junior positions; management and leadership skills for more experienced executives.
4. **Leadership potential.** How you lead yourself and others; your ability to be groomed for a leadership position one day.
5. **Communication skills.** Your speaking and listening abilities.
6. **Poise and appearance.** How you present yourself; how customers or clients will perceive you.
7. **Problem-solving skills.** How adept you are at finding a solution by looking beyond the obvious or what's already being done.



8. **Interpersonal skills.** How you interact with others; how you make them feel.
9. **Willingness to accept responsibility.** How you respond when you're tasked with trying to create the "new and different" and when "failing fast" is to be expected.
10. **Working well under pressure.** Being able to handle workplace stress without losing your cool.

So, whether you're answering the old standard of "where do you see yourself in five years?" or spit-balling a response to "how many basketballs would it take to fill this room?" it's all about how you respond. Beyond the resume, that's really what any interviewer is looking for.