

# SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*These questions are provided to give you samples of the kinds of questions generally used in interviewing. They are intended to make the job of question development easier and more uniform. Modify them to the particular position you are interviewing for.*

- ❖ *Before you use any of the following questions consider if there is a job- or business-related reason for doing so.*
- ❖ *Not every question is appropriate to every situation; choose questions that fit the position.*
- ❖ *When interviewing multiple candidates for a position, it is important to use the same criteria for evaluating each candidate so as to avoid legal problems.*
- ❖ *Use an interviewing guideline of core criteria/qualifications that is applicable to all candidates for the position.*
- ❖ *The key is to be consistent and fair with all candidates.*

*After you have selected the questions that are appropriate to use, give some thought to the answer(s) that make sense given our organization, culture and the priorities of the position. The applicant's reasoning abilities and the thought process that leads to the answer is often as important as the answer itself.*

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## **General Questions**

- Could you share a recent accomplishment of which you are most proud?
- What would you have liked to do more of in your last position? What held you back?
- Tell us a bit about your work background, and then give us a description of how you think it relates to our current opening.

- What are your qualifications in your area of expertise? Include any special training you have had.
- Why have you applied for this position?
- What skill set do you think you would bring to this position?
- Tell me about your present or last job. Why did you choose it? Why did you/do you want to leave?
- What was your primary contribution/achievement? Biggest challenge?
- What are your short-term and long-term goals?
- In what areas would you like to develop further? What are your plans to do that?
- What are your career path interests?
- What do you know about the Exploratorium?
- Why should we hire YOU?
- If the position required it, would you be willing to travel?
- If you were offered this position, when would you be available to start?
- After learning about this opportunity, what made you take the next step and apply for the job?
- If you are the successful applicant, how would you expect to be different after a year in this position?
- What hesitation or reluctance would you have in accepting this job if we offer it to you?
- Tell me anything else you would like us to know about you that will aid us in making our decision.
- What questions would you like to ask me?

#### **Initial Questions**

- Is the salary range we have set for this position within your acceptable range?
- Why are you currently searching for a new position?
- What are the top three duties in the job you now have or in your most recent job?
- What are some typical decisions that you make and how do you make them? Give me some examples.
- What do you think you would do for this organization that someone else wouldn't?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- Describe for me your ideal workplace.

#### **Behavioral Questions**

- Describe what you would say if asked to talk about yourself in a group of 15 people.
- If someone told you that you had made an error, describe how you would react and what you would say in your defense.
- If someone asked you for assistance with a matter that is outside the parameters of your job description, what would you do?
- You are a committee member and disagree with a point or decision. How will you respond?
- Describe what you would classify as a crisis.
- You are angry about an unfair decision. How do you react?
- Suppose you are in a situation where deadlines and priorities change frequently and rapidly. How would you handle it?
- How do you know when you are stressed? What do you do to de-stress?
- Tell me about a time when you were a part of a great team. What was your part in making the team effective?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult co-worker. How did you handle the situation?
- Can you tell me about a time during your previous employment when you suggested a better way to perform a process?
- Tell me about a personal or career goal that you have accomplished and why that was important to you.

- Give an example of a time when you were trying to meet a deadline, you were interrupted, and did not make the deadline. How did you respond?
- What strengths did you rely on in your last position to make you successful in your work?
- What do you do when you know you are right and your boss disagrees with you? Give me an example of when this has happened in your career.
- Tell me about a situation you wish that you had handled differently based on the outcome. What was the situation?
- What would you change (or will you change) when faced with a similar situation?
- Suppose your supervisor asked you to get information for them that you know is confidential and he/she should not have access to. What would you do?
- Describe a time when you performed a task outside your perceived responsibilities. What was the task? Why did you perceive it to be outside your responsibilities? What was the outcome?
- If you observed a co-worker who made inappropriate sexual or racial remarks to another employee, and it was obvious to you that the situation was creating an uncomfortable environment, what would you do?

### **Interpersonal Skills Questions**

- What are your strengths?
- What would your last boss say about you?
- Describe how you like to be managed, and the best relationship you've had with a previous boss.
- If I asked your previous/current co-workers about you what would they say?
- Describe what you see as your strengths related to this job/position. Describe what you see as your weaknesses related to this job/position.
- Explain the phrase "work ethic" and describe yours.
- What kind of people do you find it most difficult to work with? For example, assume you are in a situation where you have to deal with a person very different from yourself and you are finding it difficult. What would you do?
- What methods do you use to make decisions? When do you find it most difficult to make a decision?
- Describe a difficult time you have had dealing with an employee, customer, or co-worker. Why was it difficult?
- How did you handle it? What was the outcome?
- What do you do when others resist or reject your ideas or actions?
- What do you think are the best and worst parts of working in a team environment? How do you handle it?
- Under what kinds of conditions do you learn best?
- How would your past employers describe your response to hectic or stressful situations?
- How would your co-workers describe your work style or work habits?
- If I asked several of your co-workers about your greatest strength as a team member, what would they tell me?

### **Creative Thinking Questions**

- What was the most creative thing you did in your last job?
- What is your interpretation of "success?"
- Describe an ideal work environment or "the perfect job."
- In what way(s) do you express your personality in the workplace?

### **Managerial Questions**

- Define professional behavior and/or conduct appropriate in the workplace.
- Why do you think a team of people – sports team, work team, may not work well together?
- Tell us about your management style - people, teamwork, direction?
- Describe an ideal supervisor.

- What is your own philosophy of management?
- Is it more important to be a detail oriented person, or a big picture person? Explain.
- What was the most challenging personnel issue you've had to deal with and how did you handle it?
- Describe for me a time when you have come across questionable business practices; how did you handle the situation?
- A new policy is to be implemented organization-wide. You do not agree with this new policy. How do you discuss this policy with your staff?
- Describe for me a decision you made which would normally have been made by your supervisor? What was the outcome?
- Discuss and differentiate between remediation, corrective action, and discipline.
- Explain, step by step, how you have handled an employee who had performance problems.
- Why should employees seek to improve their knowledge and skill base?
- How would you motivate them to do so?
- What coaching or mentoring experience have you had? With groups or one-on-one? How did you determine the appropriate way to coach/mentor and what were the results?
- Management requires both good writing and verbal skills for good communication. When it comes to giving information to employees that can be done either way, do you prefer to write a memo OR talk to the employee?
- Managing requires motivating employees as well as accomplishing tasks. Do you find it more natural to point out what's wrong so employees can accomplish tasks competently OR to praise employees for their work and then point out what may need correcting?
- What is the largest number of employees you have supervised and what were their job functions?
- Are you best at dealing with details and day-to-day operations OR with concepts, envisioning and future planning? Give me an example.

### **Diversity Questions**

- Provide the mission statement with value on diversity. How has your experience and background prepared you to be effective in this environment with this diversity value/initiative?
- What do you see as the most challenging aspect of a diverse working environment?
- What steps have you taken to meet this challenge?
- What kinds of experiences have you had working with others with different backgrounds than your own?
- Tell me about a time you had to alter your work style to meet a diversity need or challenge?
- How have you handled a situation when a colleague was not accepting of others' diversity?
- What does it mean to have a commitment to diversity and how would you develop and apply your commitment at this company?
- What was/is the diversity value at your current/former employer? What impact did you make on this value?
- What efforts have you made, or been involved with, to foster diversity competence and understanding?
- What have you done to further your knowledge about diversity?
- Have you included diversity in your professional development? How have you demonstrated what you have learned?
- What kind of leadership efforts would you make to ensure a commitment to the diversity initiative or value?
- What strategies have you used to address diversity challenges? What were the positives and negatives?

### **Time Management Questions**

- When you have a lot of work to do, how do you get it all done? Give me an example.
- Have you ever done a cost-benefit analysis? Tell me about it.

- Describe a time you identified a barrier to your (and or others') productivity and what you did about it.
- Describe a time you recommended a change to procedure. What were the cost and/or productivity savings?
- Tell me about your productivity and time management skills?
- What do you do when someone else is late and preventing you from accomplishing your tasks?
- How do you determine what amount of time is reasonable for a task?

### **Quality Control Questions**

- Tell me the steps you take to monitor the quality of your work.
- Have you ever contacted a customer with the sole purpose of to seeking feedback about a product or service you delivered?
- What did you learn? What did you change?
- Describe a time you received unsolicited feedback from a customer about your work. What did you do?
- What improvements/changes were suggested or made?
- Tell me how the quality of your work impacts others around you.
- How do you decide when something is "good enough" or when it needs to be as close to perfect as possible?

### **Learning Questions**

- Describe a time when you took a new job that required a much different set of skills.
- Have you had an occasion when a prior strength actually turned out to be a weakness in another setting? How did you cope?
- What are your major professional reading sources?
- What sorts of things have you done to become better qualified for your career?
- Careers grow and develop just like people do. Where do you see your career now? Why? What are you doing to sustain it?
- What's the most valuable thing you've learned in the past year? Why?
- Do you feel you are knowledgeable about current industry related legislation or trends? Why or why not?
- What was the last work-related educational seminar or class you attended?
- Why did you attend this course? How have you transferred the knowledge gained in the course to your work?
- Through your career have you learned more about your profession through coursework or through on the job experience?
- Explain. What is more important to your profession, experience or continued education?
- What area of your last job was most challenging for you?
- Why was this specific part of the position difficult? Is this still challenging? Why or why not?
- Tell me about the one person who has influenced you the most within your career?
- Were they a manager or mentor? What did you learn from them? Why do you think you learned so much from them?

### **Teamwork Questions**

- When groups work together, conflict often erupts. Tell me about a time that conflict occurred in one of your work groups and what you did about it.
- Tell me what role you play within work groups and why.
- How would people you work with describe you?
- Tell me about the most effective contribution you have made as part of a task group or special project team.
- Tell me about a time you pitched in to help someone finish a project even though it "wasn't your job." What was the result?

- Have you ever been in a position where you had to lead a group of peers? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about problems you had and how you handled them.
- What is essential for a team to be successful?
- Tell me about a time you worked in a cross functional team?
- Were there different challenges compared to a departmental task team?
- Have you ever worked in a virtual team?
- If so, tell me about this experience. What were the team dynamics? Was the team successful? What would you do differently?
- If not, what do you perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of this type of team?
- How would you suggest creating team cohesiveness in a virtual setting?
- Tell me about a situation where political power plays affected team dynamics.
- How did you or could the team have overcome or avoided this situation?

### **Managing Change Questions**

- People react differently when job demands are constantly changing. How do you react to this?
- What kinds of events cause you stress on the job?
- Have you ever had to persuade a peer or superior to accept an idea that you know they would not like? Tell me about the resistance you met and how you overcame it.
- Have you ever had to persuade a group to accept a proposal or idea? How did you go about doing it?
- What was the result and how did you feel about it?
- Have you ever been caught unaware by a problem or obstacle that you had not foreseen? What happened?
- How comfortable are you with change? Give me an example?

### **Problem Analysis/Solving Questions**

- Have you ever solved a problem others around you couldn't?
- Tell me about it.
- What was one of the toughest problems you ever solved? What process did you go through to solve it?
- Do people ever come to you for help in solving problems? Why?
- How do you begin to solve a problem that initially seems insurmountable?
- What do you do when you are faced with an obstacle to an important project? Give me an example.
- How do you analyze different options to determine which is the best alternative?

### **Communication Skills**

- Give an example of how you carefully consider your audience prior to communicating with them.
- What factors influence your communication?
- When do you think it is best to communicate in writing? When do you think it and when do you handle it face-to-face?
- Describe a time you used your communication skills to negotiate with an angry person.
- Tell me about a time when effective listening skills helped you in a problematic situation.
- What do you do when you think someone is not listening to you?
- Have you ever given a presentation to a group? How did you prepare for it? What would you do differently?
- Describe a time when you were able to overcome a communication barrier(s).

### **Functional Questions**

The following questions are function-specific:

### **Accounting**

Describe some recent projects you were involved in to improve Accounting's efficiency/effectiveness. What did you do?

Describe for me a time when you have come across questionable accounting practices. How did you handle the situation?

Have you completed month end/year end closing? How much experience do you have with this?

Describe your most challenging encounter with month end/year end closing. How did you resolve the problem?

Describe your PL (profit/loss) experience.

What type of inventory audits have you been involved in? Describe challenges you've faced.

Tell me about your knowledge of commissions accounting.

What experience have you had with tax accounting?

### **Administrative**

What do you like about working with customers/clients? Dislike?

Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult boss, co-worker or customer. How did you handle the situation?

Give us an example of how you stay organized when juggling multiple tasks.

Have you worked with under time constraints before? Can you give us an example?

Was there a time when you struggled to meet a deadline?

What is unique about your work style?

What do you know about the company?

Describe a time when you made a mistake at work? How did you deal with this situation and what was the outcome?

What do you think of your last boss?

What do you think your last boss would say about you and your work?

Describe your previous experience with travel planning and reservations.

What experience do you have scheduling meetings, conferences and ordering food and materials for meetings?

How would you describe your skills in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access (relevant software used in the job)?

Beginner, intermediate, or advanced?

How many words per minute can you type?

### **Customer Service #1**

What do you like about being in Customer Service? What do you find is the most difficult part of being in Customer Service?

Tell me about a time when you went out of your way to give great service to a customer.

Describe a process or system that you improved so customers would be better served.

Tell me about a time when you asked for feedback on your customer service skills from your manager or co-worker and then used that response to improve your work.

Tell me about a time when you knew that your customer might not get what he or she needed on time. How did you handle this?

Tell me about a time when you had to say "No" to a customer because it was against company policy.

Tell me about a time when you had trouble working with a difficult or demanding customer. How did you handle this?

Tell me about a situation in which you "lost it" or did not do your best with a customer. What did you do about this?

### **Customer Service #2**

How do you establish rapport with a customer? Give an example.

Describe a time when you exceeded a customer's expectations?

Describe a time when you lost a customer. What would you do differently?

When are policy exceptions to customers warranted? Not warranted?  
How do you go about deciding what strategy to employ when dealing with a difficult customer?  
We all have customers or clients – who are your clients and how do you identify them?  
What have you done to improve relations with your customers?

### **Hospitality**

How would you define guest satisfaction?  
Describe a time when someone failed to provide satisfactory service to you. How could that person improve his/ her performance in that particular situation?  
Give an example of one thing that is important in building repeat-customer business.  
What types of behaviors do you find most annoying or frustrating in a guest? How do you handle those behaviors?  
What specific process do you go through when a guest is dissatisfied?  
Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult guest-relations problem.  
Tell me about a time when you needed to work as part of a team to satisfy a guest.  
“Yes” is the word guests like to hear. However, if you had to say “no,” how would you do it?  
How well do you communicate with others? What communication techniques do you use?  
10. How do you think our guests would describe you and your work?

### **Marketing**

- Why did you choose a career in marketing? Alternatively, what interests you in marketing?
- What qualities and skills do you think a successful marketing professional should have?
- What non-marketing skills should a successful marketing professional have?
- Tell me what type of relationship ought to exist between marketing and sales?
- How about the relationship between marketing and sales and service?
- Tell me about your experience in marketing research.
- Which of the qualities and skills you named for a successful marketing professional do you have?
- Tell me about a marketing nightmare you were involved in. If you have had none, describe what you would consider a marketing nightmare.
- What kind of marketing do you have experience in and which do you prefer using (direct mail, telephone, television, radio, web-based, combination of any of these)?
- Tell me about two marketing accomplishments that were very successful or that you are the most proud of.
- What college courses or experience have prepared you for the marketing position you are applying for with us?
- What kind of training have you had in web-based marketing?
- What does a good marketer know how to do.
- Are there any types of marketing that you consider unethical?
- Tell me about a marketing position you have held where part of your pay was based on your own marketing results.
- What three things are most important to you in a marketing position?
- Several of the clients this position services use direct mail marketing. Suppose that you just received a supply of the final conference brochures that you developed, proofed and sent to the printers for one of these clients. The deadline for mailing the 10,000 brochures is tomorrow.
- You notice that there is an error in the date of one of the conference sessions. What would you do?
- Having read about our company and met with several marketing heads here, what ideas do you have on how we can improve our marketing efforts?

### **Sales**

- In what sales venues have you been involved?
- Describe the sales activities in which you were engaged in your last job.
- As a sales rep, what support, either administrative or sales assistance, did you receive?



- Have you ever been engaged in team sales?
- How were your incentives structured in your last job?
- Did you have assigned quotas or targets?
- How much of your time was devoted to sales vs. other assigned duties?
- What was the best sales training program you have participated in?
- Describe the ideal sales job from your perspective.
- How would your prior sales managers describe your sales capabilities?
- Describe the best sales incentive plan you have worked under.
- Describe the ideal sales support you would need to be most effective as a sales rep..
- What was the worst sales role you have been engaged in?
- What does customer mean to you?

### **Project Management Questions**

- What type of projects have you managed in the past?
- Have you had a non-productive team member on your project team?
- What happened and how did you handle this situation?
- What did you bring to the last position you were in?
- Describe how your strengths improved the team.
- What was the last big project you worked on:
- How did you start this project?
- What were the deliverables?
- What metrics did you use to measure ongoing project status?
- What, if any, cost overrun issues did you have? How did you handle these?
- What other obstacles did you overcome?
- Were the deadlines met? (Why or why not?)
- What would you have done differently?
- Describe specific project for this position:
- How would you start this project?
- Who should be on the project team? Why?
- What are the three biggest risks for this project?
- What control measures/techniques would you put in place to overcome these three risks?
- Have you worked in a situation where a vendor or supplier had a conflict of interest? How did you handle this?