

INTERVIEWS:

INTERVIEWING TIPS: WHAT HIRING MANAGERS REALLY WANT FROM YOU

Takeaway Points

- In an interview, the hiring manager wants to find out what makes you qualified to do the job.
- The most impressive thing you can do in an interview is to be prepared: Learn about the company and show how your skills have helped previous employers.
- Everyone has gaps in their resume. If you have one, give an honest answer if the interviewer asks about it.

By: Team Pongo

Ever wondered what goes through the hiring manager's head when you're being interviewed? We asked Michael Neece, interviewing expert, to shed some light on that question. Michael's 20 years conducting and analyzing some 3,000 job interviews at a wide range of companies. Read on to benefit from Michael's insider knowledge:

Q: What do hiring managers really want to hear when they use the standard line, "Tell me about yourself"?

A: Speaking for myself, I want a brief summary of your experience, highlighting the abilities that relate directly to the job. I want to hear that you know something about my company – that you've done your homework. I want to know what makes you a qualified candidate for this job.

What *I don't* want is a long, rambling answer that goes nowhere. I don't want to know personal information. I don't want your entire history starting with high school. And don't start from the beginning. Just like in the resume, tell me about your relevant experiences, starting with the most recent.

Q: What would you say is the single most impressive thing a job candidate can do in an interview?

A: Be prepared – be *very* prepared. By that, I mean, prepare questions that show you've taken the time to learn about my company and that you are interested in it. Don't just tell me your strengths; prepare stories that illustrate where you've used those strengths successfully in past work experiences. So many job candidates think they can just wing it in an interview. Be prepared!

Q: What are the "hidden hiring criteria" that can't be written in a job description?

A: Want to know a secret? The most *qualified* candidate never gets the job. You may match the job description perfectly, but that doesn't mean you're the best candidate or are entitled to the job. The job description is only a small part of the hiring decision. "Fit" is probably the most important hidden criterion.

An employer wants to know that you can do the job and do it well, but they've asked you in for an interview, so they probably already think you can do the job. What they don't know until they meet you is whether you'll be an effective addition to the organization.

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Did you know?

Pongo’s Interview Tips video program provides 12 how-to videos for every stage of the interview, plus printable checklists and interview guides.

Q: How do you determine “fit”?

A: Fit is a subjective measure that takes into account the candidate’s abilities, as well as innate qualities such as sense of humor, capacity to learn quickly, maturity, and confidence. It’s a combination of how the interviewer feels about you, and whether you seem like someone who will fit in well and complement the rest of the team.

Q: What’s the most memorable thing a candidate has ever done in an interview you conducted?

A: Silence. I purposely asked the guy a really tough question and he sat in silence for 15 or 20 seconds, thinking about it. I decided during those 15 seconds to hire him, because his silence indicated to me that he had the maturity, confidence, and comfort with conflict to handle the job.

Another candidate once brought a PowerPoint flipchart presentation to her interview. Each page highlighted how her experience related to the job. That told me she was extremely prepared, she really wanted the job, and she had the experience to do it. I hired her, too.

Q: What’s the most incredible blunder a candidate ever committed in an interview you were conducting?

A: One individual was continually checking his watch and looking at the door. Since he obviously needed to be somewhere else, I obliged and ended the interview.

Q: What’s the best way for a candidate to address employment gaps in their resume during an interview?

A: As we’ve discussed, what a hiring manager cares about is your ability to do the job, do it well, and fit into the organization. Everyone has gaps in their resume. Yes, I will question you about the gaps, but all I want is an honest answer.

Experienced interviewers have well-developed BS detectors. So don’t try to hide your employment gaps or pad the dates of other jobs. Just tell me the truth. You took time off to care for a child. You got laid off. You didn’t get along with your boss. I understand these things.

Here’s a secret that hiring managers will rarely tell you: If you get fired or laid off, especially after a short time on the job, it’s really not your fault. A “bad hire” is the hiring manager’s fault. After all, we pick you; you don’t pick us.

So when we ask about the gaps in your resume, it’s not because they’re unusual, rather it’s to cover our own backsides by minimizing the possibility of a bad hire.

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