

STRATEGIES FOR ANSWERING THE DIRTY DOZEN QUESTIONS

1. *Tell me about yourself:*

This is not an invitation to ramble on. Qualify the question first. Ask something like, "What area of my background would be most relevant to you?" That enables the interviewer to help you with the appropriate focus, so you can avoid discussing irrelevancies. Never answer this question without qualifying whether the interviewer wishes to hear about your business or personal life.

2. *What is your greatest strength/ weakness?*

Strength: Isolate high points from your background and build in a couple of the key value profiles from different categories. You will want to demonstrate pride, reliability, and the ability to stick with a difficult task yet change course rapidly when required. You can rearrange the previous answer here. Your answer in part might be: "I believe in planning and proper management of my time. And yet I can still work under pressure."

Weakness: This is a direct invitation to put your head in a noose. Decline the invitation. If there is a minor part of the job at hand where you lack knowledge but knowledge you will obviously pick up quickly — use that. For instance: "I haven't worked with this type of spreadsheet program before, but given my experience with six other types, I don't think it should take me more than a couple of days to pick it up." Here you remove the emphasis from weakness and put it onto a developmental problem that is easily overcome. Be careful, however: This very effective ploy must be used with discretion.

Another good option is to give a generalized answer that takes advantage of value keys. Design the answer so that your weakness is ultimately a positive characteristic. For example: "I enjoy my work and always give each project my best shot. So when sometimes I don't feel others are pulling their weight, I find it a little frustrating. I am aware of that weakness, and in those situations I try to overcome it with a positive attitude that I hope

will catch on."

Also consider the technique of putting it in the past. Here you take a weakness from way back when, and show how you overcome it. It answers the question but ends on a positive note. An illustration: "When I first got into this field, I always had problems with my paperwork — you know, leaving an adequate paper trail. And to be honest, I let it slip once or twice. My manager sat me down and explained the potential troubles such behavior could cause. I really took it to heart, and I think you will find my paper trails some of the best around today. You only have to tell me something once." With that kind of answer, you also get the added bonus of showing that you accept and act on criticism.

Congratulations! You have just turned a bear of a questions into an opportunity to sell yourself with your professional profile. In deciding on the particular answer you will give, remember that the interviewer isn't really concerned about your general weaknesses — none of us are saints outside of the interview room. He or she is simply concerned about any red flags that might signal your inability to perform the job or be manageable in the performance of your duties.

3. *Why did you leave your old job?*

This is a common trick question. You should have an acceptable reason for leaving every job you have held, but if you don't, pick one of the six acceptable reasons from the employment industry formula, the acronym for which is CLAMPS:

Challenge: You weren't able to grow professionally in that position.

Location: The commute was unreasonably long.

Advancement: There was nowhere for you to go. You had the talent, but there were too many people ahead of you.

Money: You were underpaid for your skills and contributions. (Be careful how you answer this.)

Pride or prestige: You wanted to be with a better company.

Security: The company was not stable. For example, "My last company was a family-owned affair. I had gone as far as I was able. It just seemed time for me to join a more prestigious company and accept greater challenges."

4. Why do you want to work for us?

To answer this question, you must have researched the company and built a dossier. Reply with the company's attributes as you see them. (You must have done your homework on the company.) Cap your answer with reference to your belief that the company can provide you with a stable and happy work environment — the company has that reputation — and that such an atmosphere would encourage your best work.

"I'm not looking for just another paycheck. I enjoy my work and am proud of my profession. Your company produces a superior product/provides a superior service. I share the values that make this possible, which should enable me to fit in and complement the team."

5. Why did you like your old job?

Always answer positively. Keep your real feelings to yourself, if they're negative. There is a strong belief among the management fraternity that people who complain about past employers will cause problems for new ones. Your answer is, "Very good" or, "Excellent." Then smile and wait for the next question.

6. What kind of salary are you looking for?

You are being asked to name a figure here. Give the wrong answer and you can get eliminated. It is always a temptation to ask for the moon, knowing you can come down later, but there are better approaches. It is wise to confirm your understanding of the job and its importance before you start throwing numbers around, because you will have to live with the consequences. You need the best possible offer

without pricing yourself out of the market, so it's time to dance with one of the following responses:

"Well, let's see if I understand the responsibilities fully..." You then proceed to itemize exactly what you will be doing on a daily basis and the parameters of your responsibilities and authority. Once that is done you will seek agreement: "Is this the job as I see it or have I missed anything?"

Remember to describe the job in its most flattering and challenging light, paying special attention to the way you see it fitting into the overall picture and contributing to the success of the department, workgroup, and company. You can then finish your response with a question of your own: "What figure did you have in mind for someone with my track record?" or, "What range has been authorized for this position?" Your answer will include, in part, something along the lines of, "I believe my skills and experience will warrant a starting salary between _____ and _____."

You could also ask, "What would be the salary range for someone with my experience and skills?" or, "I naturally want to make as much as my background and skills will allow. If I am right for the job, and I think my credentials demonstrate that I am, I am sure you will make me a fair offer. What figure do you have in mind?"

Another good response is: "I would expect a salary appropriate to my experience and ability to do the job successfully. What range do you have in mind?"

Such questions will get the interviewer to reveal the salary range, and concentrate his or her attention on the challenges of the job and your ability to accept and work with those challenges.

When you are given a range, you can adjust your money requirements appropriately, latching on to the upper part of the range. For example, if the range is \$30,000-\$35,000 a year, you can come back with a range of \$34,000-\$37,000.

Consequently, your response will include: "That certainly means we have something to talk about. While your range is \$30,000 to \$35,000, I am looking for a minimum of \$34,000 with an ideal of \$37,000. Tell me, what flexibility is there at the top of your salary range?" You need to know how to put yourself in the strongest negotiating position, and this is the perfect time and opportunity to gain the information and the advantage.

All this fencing is aimed at getting the interviewer to show his or her hand first. Ask for too much, and it's "Oh, dear, I'm afraid you're overqualified" — to which you can reply, "So overpay me." (Actually, that works when you can carry it off with an ingratiating smile.) If your request is too low, you are likely to be ruled out as lacking the appropriate experience.

When you have tried to get the interviewer to name a range and failed, you must come up with specific dollars and cents. At this point, the key is to understand that all jobs have salary ranges attached to them. Consequently, the last thing you will ever do is come back with a specific dollar figure — that traps you. Instead, you will mention your own range, which will not be from your minimum to your maximum but rather from your midpoint to your maximum. Remember, you can always negotiate down, but can rarely negotiate up.

7. What do you know about our company/firm?

You can't answer this question unless you have enough interest to research the company/firm thoroughly. If you don't have the interest, you should expect someone who has made the effort to get the job.

8. Why should we hire you?

Your answer will be short and to the point. It will highlight areas from your background that relate to current needs and problems. Recap your interviewer's description of the job, meeting it point by point with your skills. Finish your answer with: "I have the qualifications you need (itemize them), I'm a team player, I take direction, and I have the desire to be a complete success."

9. What did you think of your old boss

Be short, sweet, then shut up. People who complain about their employers are recognized to be the same people who cause the most disruption in a department. This question means the interviewer has no desire to hire trouble. "I liked her as a person, respected her professionally, and appreciated her guidance."

10. What are your long-range goals?

The safest answer contains a desire to be regarded as a true professional and team player. As far as promotion, that depends on finding a manager with whom you can grow. Of course, you will ask what opportunities exist within the company before being any more specific: "From my research and what you have told me about the growth here, it seems operations is where the heavy emphasis is going to be. It seems that's where you need the effort and where I could contribute toward the company's goal." Or, "I have always felt that first-hand knowledge and experience open up opportunities that one might never have considered, so while at this point in time I plan to be a part of (e.g.) operations, it is reasonable to expect that other exciting opportunities will crop up in the meantime."

11. Do you like to work overtime?

You'll want to stress that you pride yourself on your ability to manage your time and that you believe one should usually be able to get the job done within an 8 our day schedule. However, you will do whatever it takes to meet a deadline.

12. You seem over-qualified (or under-qualified)

Ask what they mean in order to better understand the objection. Then state your reasons for wanting to work there (with enthusiasm) and show how you will be a valuable employee. For under-qualified, stress the personality characteristics you have that will make you a valuable employee and meet the job requirements point-by-point with the qualifications you do have.

Taken from *Knock 'Em Dead*.

STICKY ISSUES

You need to be prepared to answer what we call the “sticky issues” questions. These types of questions generally fall into several areas: academic record, current unemployment, time gaps, lack of relevant experience, discrimination, salary, and long-term goals. The following questions are a sample of what you might expect to be asked in an interview:

What kind of salary do you expect?

Discrimination question (female): Are you planning to continue working after you have your family? What does your husband do?

What do you do when you have an offer from your second choice position and you need to buy time until you hear from your first choice position?

What is your ability to bring clients into the firm?

What are your geographic ties to the area?

Why are you still in the job market?

Why are you interested in working for our firm/agency/organization?

Why haven't you done better in law school? (considering that you had such a strong undergraduate record--if that's applicable)

What kind of time are you prepared to put into this job?

Did you get an offer from the firm/agency/organization you worked for last summer? If not, why not?

What are your long-term career objectives?

Why did you choose law as a career?

What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in law?

How has your law school experience prepared you for the actual practice of law?

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?

Why did you select Gonzaga University School of Law?

In which part-time and/or summer jobs have you been most interested? Why?

What two or three things are most important to you in a job?

What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT/MATURITY

Tell me about yourself.

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

How do you think a friend or professor would describe you?

How do you determine or evaluate success?

What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

How do you work under pressure?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest efforts?

JOB MATCH

In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our firm/agency/company?

Why did you decide to seek a position with our firm/agency/company?

What criteria are you using to evaluate the firm/agency/company for which you hope to work?

Describe the ideal job.

JOB MOTIVATION/SATISFACTION

What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives? How have you prepared yourself to achieve them?

What are the most important rewards you expect from your business career?

Why did you choose law as a career?

What qualifications do you think you have that will make you successful in law?

Describe the ideal relationship that should exist between an associate and a partner (or supervisor/supervisee).

Why are you still in the job market?

How do you feel about overtime?

How would you feel about having the responsibility for bringing in clients?

What are your salary expectations?

EXPERIENCE

What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?

Give me an example of a project or area for which you had primary responsibility.

In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?

Which part-time and/or summer jobs have you enjoyed the most?

What have you gained from moot court/clinical/journal/writing experience?

Tell me about your volunteer experience.

How did you obtain each of your jobs?

What two or three things are most important to you in a job?

EDUCATION

Describe your most rewarding law school experience.

What do you think of Gonzaga University?

What courses did you like best/least? Why?

What courses have you taken this year?

Tell me about your undergraduate experiences.

How has your law school experience prepared you for the actual practice of law?

What do you do in your free time?

Do you think your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?

Interview Summary

Interviewers: Name _____
Name _____
Title _____
Organization _____
Division/Department _____
Address _____

Groundwork: Type of organization, size, etc. _____

Interviewer background, personal interests, etc. _____

Appointment: Date _____ Time _____ Length _____
Location _____ Type: Networking/, Screening/, In-Office/ Call-back/

Other

How I got this interview _____

S/he said (advice, needs, problems, plans, special interests, criticisms, etc.) _____

Reactions to what I said _____

Anything else I should remember about this interview _____

Critique: What did I do well? _____

What did I leave out and/or confused? _____

What should I do differently next time? _____

Thank you letter sent (date): _____

Next Step: _____

Employer Interviewing Checklist

Self-Assessment Scale

This checklist is a common guide that employers might use while interviewing a candidate. Rate yourself on the following:

	Rate Yourself:				
	(low)				(high)
Academic Preparation (Research, writing, advocacy, analytical skills)	1	2	3	4	5
Work Experience (Research, writing, advocacy, analytical skills)	1	2	3	4	5
Interview Preparation					
<u>Candidate's Knowledge of Him/Herself</u>					
Can articulate motivation to attend law school, become an attorney, interest in the law.	1	2	3	4	5
Has clear, realistic career goals and interest in this specific opportunity.	1	2	3	4	5
Has anticipated questions and prepared well-organized responses (no rambling/summarizes/absence of "full disclosure" problem).	1	2	3	4	5
<u>Knowledge of Opportunity</u>					
Has thoroughly researched organization and interviewer.	1	2	3	4	5
Has good questions to ask the interviewer.	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of the Interaction between Candidate and Interviewer					
<u>Ability to Develop Rapport</u>					
Good, firm handshake.	1	2	3	4	5
Good, appropriate eye contact.	1	2	3	4	5
Friendliness, interest in the interviewer, warmth.	1	2	3	4	5
Responsiveness to interviewer (sensitive to cues of boredom).	1	2	3	4	5
Exhibits appropriate deference to interviewer (does not interrupt, allows interviewer to take the lead).	1	2	3	4	5
<u>Ability to Create Friendly Dialogue/Conversation</u>					
Candidate and interviewer discover their common interest or experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate delivers answers in spontaneous, enthusiastic way (non-"canned" responses).	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate asks questions throughout interview rather than only at conclusion.	1	2	3	4	5
Candidate responds to information offered by interviewer.	1	2	3	4	5
<u>Candidate Exhibits Positive Traits</u>					
Professionalism/ "Executive Presence."	1	2	3	4	5
Poise (absence of nervous mannerisms).	1	2	3	4	5
Positive attitude ("glass is half full not half empty," have done/can do/will do attitude).	1	2	3	4	5
Self confidence (is not apologetic, handles "Achilles heel" non-defensively)	1	2	3	4	5
Assertiveness (brings up topics not covered by interviewer but important for consideration).	1	2	3	4	5
Loyalty ("team player," says good things about Gonzaga).	1	2	3	4	5
Maturity (absence of making excuses/blaming others).	1	2	3	4	5
Sincerity/integrity/honesty.	1	2	3	4	5
Enthusiasm.	1	2	3	4	5
Leadership qualities/organizational/managerial.	1	2	3	4	5