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Interview Questions Answered – 1
“Tell me about yourself.”

SUMMARY OF TIPS:

Your Goal: To prove to the interviewer that you have the skills and experience to be the ideal or perfect candidate for the job

- Keep the answer short at about two minutes.
- Focus on work-related skills and accomplishments, not personal information.
- Tell the interviewer why you think your work-related skills and accomplishments would be an asset to the company.
- Describe your education or work history very briefly.
- Tell the interviewer about things you have done and jobs you have had related to the position you are interviewing for.
- Mention one or two personal characteristics that have helped you accomplish your goals, giving short examples to illustrate.

SAMPLE ANSWERS

Sample Answer 1:

I have always enjoyed working with computers, so it was an easy decision **to major in** computer science at California University with a plan **to enter the IT field**. In school, I **excelled** in my computer-related classes and during my college years, I became particularly interested in software development, especially software that would help consumers. That’s why I applied for and completed a one-year **internship** with Lotadoe Industries. At Lotadoe, I learned how **to formulate** new ideas for software and how to communicate those ideas **effectively** to the rest of the development team.

I am a very **focused** person and I tend to be **product-oriented**. At Lotadoe, I made sure that whatever projects I worked on, I **saw to completion**. For instance, I worked with a team that was developing a new version of a piece of popular software called Rototype. I asked to be part of every step of software development and at the end of the project, I was given the responsibility of getting final technical approval. I made sure that I **followed through** with the right departments, keeping my team informed of the progress. This is the type of work I enjoy and that’s why I applied for a position with your company.



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Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

Your company is a leader in software development and is in the **forefront** of new ideas in the field. I think that the products your company has developed in the past several years have been outstanding and are the best on the market. I want to work in a company where I can **be challenged** and where I can make a **contribution**. I would very much enjoy working in your company to develop new software and to improve existing ones.

Sample Answer 2:

I have worked successfully in sales for over 10 years. One of my first sales jobs was in college, where I majored in business. I worked for the college newspaper selling advertising space, and as an **extrovert** who likes interacting with people, I was very successful in the job. What also helped me sell more than any other salesperson was my **persistence**. I was willing to follow up with a potential client over weeks and even months, developing a relationship with them until they were ready to make a deal with us.

I'm currently working as a sales rep for the Michmuney Company. I have been their **top** salesperson for the past two years. Last year, I sold over \$3 million worth of products.

Now, I'm ready for a new challenge. I want to work in public relations because it is an area where I can use my **creativity** together with my knowledge of advertising and sales. I have a **proven** ability to work well with people and I can develop good long-term relationships with clients. I want to work for your company **in particular** because you work primarily with Internet-based companies, which is an area that is growing at the rate of 40% a year. This makes your company a leader in the industry and I'd like to be part of that.

GLOSSARY

to major in – to study something as one's main subject area in a college or university

* He's majoring in business and German because he wants to work for an international business based in Berlin.

to enter a field – to begin to work in a specific industry or field

* She wants to enter the field of medicine and is taking a lot of biology courses and volunteering at the hospital.



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Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

to excel – to do very well; to be very good; to receive excellent grades

* She excels in her foreign language courses and her professors have recommended that she become a translator.

internship – a short-term position with a company that allows a student to get work experience in his or her chosen field

* Jacob did so well in his internship that the company offered him a job when he graduated the following year.

to formulate – to think of something; to create something step by step

* Many organizations are trying to formulate a plan to reduce poverty in developing countries.

effectively – in a way that achieves a goal quickly and thoroughly, using the least amount of resources possible

* If we want to manage this business more effectively, we have to find a way to reduce our costs.

to be focused – to be concentrated; with clear goals; not easily distracted

* She is very focused on becoming an actress. She’s always taking acting classes and going to the theater.

product-oriented – thinking about products; focused on products; being most concerned about the results of the work

* Sometimes Henry gets so interested in the day-to-day work that he forgets what we are trying to create. I wish he were more product-oriented.

to see (something) to completion – to make sure that a project gets finished; to be involved in all stages of a project, from start to finish

* Even though Abdullah was excited about his promotion, he was disappointed because it meant that he wouldn’t be able to see his old project to completion.

to follow through – to finish what one has started

After sending my resume to a company, I always follow through by calling to request an interview.

forefront – the leading position in an industry or field

* His ideas are at the forefront of cancer research and many people believe he will find a cure soon.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

to be challenged – to be presented with difficult, interesting tasks that require using one’s skills and abilities

* I don’t like working as a receptionist. I want to be challenged, but all I do is answer the phones all day.

contribution – something that one does or gives to help a project, organization, or society

* He received an award in honor of his contributions to world peace.

extrovert – an outgoing person who enjoys spending time with other people; not shy

* My sister is an extrovert and is always going out with her friends, but I prefer to spend most of my time alone.

persistence – determination; willingness to continue trying to do something even when it is difficult; never giving up

* That author’s persistence is amazing. Even though 30 publishers have rejected her novel, she’s still trying to find a publisher.

top – best; highest-ranking

* Selecting the top five candidates for interviews was difficult, because they had received more than 100 applications for the position.

creativity – ability to think of new, unique ideas; ability to create something new

* The company wants to hire a graphic designer with a lot of creativity who can make its website better than it is now.

proven – tested; shown to be true; having evidence that something is real

* According to this article, it is a proven fact that people lose weight when they eat more fruits and vegetables.

in particular – especially; specifically; particularly

* I hope that all of my friends come to the party, but in particular, I hope that Jason comes because I haven’t seen him for months.



www.eslpod.com

English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

ESLPod.com presents "Interview Questions Answered," episode one.

Hello, I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This series is designed to teach you the English you need to know to have a successful interview. The questions from this series are the most common questions asked at US business interviews. Each episode has two parts. First, we give you some important tips on how to answer the interview question. Second, we provide you with two sample answers that use these tips in answering the question and that you might hear in a typical business interview.

You will hear each sample answer read slowly, then you will hear an explanation of the vocabulary and expressions we used in the answers. Finally, you'll hear the answers read at a normal speed.

All the episodes come with a written Learning Guide that contains all of the tips we discuss, definitions and sample sentences for each of the vocabulary words we use, and a complete transcript of the episode.

Let's begin with question number one: "Tell me about yourself?"

The question, "Tell me about yourself," is usually the first question that you will hear in a business interview. Your goal, in answering this question, is to prove to the interviewer - to show the interviewer - that you have the skills and experience to be the ideal or perfect candidate for the job.

Here are some tips in answering this question: Keep your answer short, at about two minutes. The person interviewing you wants you to give them an overview - a general idea of your skills and qualifications. You don't want to talk too much on this first question; two, maybe three minutes is all you will really need. Since you can expect that this question will be asked in the interview, you should prepare something that you can tell the person - the general qualifications that you have - in that short amount of time.

Our second tip is to focus on work-related skills and accomplishments, not personal information. When the interviewer asks you to tell him or her about yourself, they're interested in things that are related to the job. You may have some personal accomplishments or personal information, but what you want to



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Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

do mostly here is to talk about why you are good person for the job. So, don't talk about your family, or a good vacation you went on, or something that you have done that is not related to the job in some way.

Our third tip is to tell the interviewer why you think your work-related skills and accomplishments would be an asset to the company. An asset is a positive contribution to the company. You want to tell the person interviewing you not just what your skills are - the things that you can do, and the things that you have done - your accomplishments - you also want to tell them why these are related - why they are important for the company - why you would be able to give something to the company it doesn't have right now because of your skills and accomplishments.

Fourth, you want to describe your education or work history very briefly. Normally, if you're going on an interview, you would talk about, very briefly, what you studied in college, for example, what degrees you have. Do you have a bachelor's degree, do you have a master's degree, do you have a Ph.D., a doctorate? You want to tell them where you went to school, what you studied at the school, and then you want to say a little bit about companies you've worked with or worked for and what positions you have had in those companies. So, you want to give them some information so they know, in general, what you've been doing before you came to this interview. You don't normally want to talk about your high school or grade school; most employers are not interested in that, unless you only graduated from high school - that you haven't gone to college yet - then you might mention your high school degree - your high school diploma.

Fifth, you want to tell the interviewer about things you have done and jobs you have had that are related to the position you are interviewing for. You want to tell them about your skills and accomplishments, but you also want to tell the interviewer or interviewers about specific things you have done - specific jobs that you have had that are somehow related to the position that you are interviewing for now.

Finally, you want to mention one, maybe two personal characteristics that have helped you accomplish your goals, and give a short example to illustrate. We said earlier that you don't want to talk about your personal life in this question, but personal characteristics are a little different. Personal characteristics are things that you have that would be related to the job, things such as being able to get a job done on time, being able to focus and concentrate your attention on the job.



www.eslpod.com

English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

You might say, for example, that you have good attention to detail - you can look at all the little things in an issue or a project and make sure that you are taking care of them. That would be a personal characteristic, and then you could give an example of why that was important in a job that you've already done. You may say, "I had a project where I had many different parts that I had to take care of, and I was able to do them all." That way, you're showing the person - you're telling the interviewer how your personal characteristics will be able to help you do your job better.

An interview, in general, particularly for US businesses, is sort of like an opportunity to sell yourself. You have to be able to show to the person that you are the best man or woman for the job.

To summarize then: In answering the question, "Tell me about yourself," you want to keep the answer short, two to three minutes. You want to focus on work-related skills and accomplishments, not your personal information. You want to tell the interviewer why you think your work-related skills and accomplishments would be a positive thing for the company. You want to talk about your education and where you worked before you came to the interview. You also want to tell the interviewer the kinds of jobs you have done, and how they're related to the position you're interviewing for. Finally, you can mention some personal characteristics that would be important in doing the job that you are interviewing for.

Now let's listen to our first sample answer.

[Start of sample answer]

I have always enjoyed working with computers, so it was an easy decision to major in computer science at California University with a plan to enter the IT field. In school, I excelled in my computer-related classes and during my college years, I became particularly interested in software development, especially software that would help consumers. That's why I applied for and completed a one-year internship with Lotadoc Industries. At Lotadoc, I learned how to formulate new ideas for software and how to communicate those ideas effectively to the rest of the development team.

I am a very focused person and I tend to be product-oriented. At Lotadoc, I made sure that whatever projects I worked on, I saw to completion. For instance, I worked with a team that was developing a new version of a piece of popular software called Rototype. I asked to be part of every step of software



www.eslpod.com

English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

development and at the end of the project, I was given the responsibility of getting final technical approval. I made sure that I followed through with the right departments, keeping my team informed of the progress. This is the type of work I enjoy and that's why I applied for a position with your company.

Your company is a leader in software development and is in the forefront of new ideas in the field. I think that the products your company has developed in the past several years have been outstanding and are the best on the market. I want to work in a company where I can be challenged and where I can make a contribution. I would very much enjoy working in your company to develop new software and to improve existing ones.

[End of sample answer]

The first sample answer begins with the person telling the interviewer something about her education and what her plans are in terms of the area, or the field, that she's interested in.

She says, "I have always enjoyed working with computers, so it was an easy decision to major in computer science at California University." To major, "major," in something is to study something at the university. When you get your bachelor's degree from a four-year university, you have a specialization - something that you are studying. Psychology, or computer science, or business - that's your major. And so, you can say in your interview, "I majored in industrial engineering at Bob Smith University" - whatever the university is that you studied at - and that's what the interview question does here. She begins by saying what she majored in and where she studied.

She said that she had plans "to enter the IT field." To enter a field, "field," means to begin working in a particular area - a particular kind of job. It could be the medical field; it could be the insurance field. When you finish your college education or your high school education, you often are interested in having a particular kind of job, and that's what this expression means, to enter into the "blank" field, in this case, the IT field.

Then she talks a little bit about what she studied specifically at California University, and notice also that she tells us what she was good at. Again, this is important in a US interview, in particular, to be able to tell the person things that you are good at. She says in her sample answer, "In school, I excelled in my computer-related classes." To excel, "excel," means to do very well at something - to be excellent in something. It's a good verb to use in talking about your



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

qualifications - why you are good for the job. "I excelled in," and then you can talk about what you were good in. In this example, she was good in "computer-related classes." When I was in college, I excelled in watching television and not studying. That did not get me any good jobs however, so don't talk about that!

The person goes on and says that during her college years, she came "interested in software development, especially software that would help consumers." The people that buy the software are consumers. Notice here, she's giving a little more specific information about why she is interested in this particular specialization. She says, "That's why I applied for and completed a one-year internship at Lotadoe Industries."

Many times, in American colleges, people work while they're in college, often during the summertime but sometimes part-time during their last two years or one of their last two years in an internship, "internship." An internship is when you work for a company as a trainee - as someone who is learning how to do something. The internship is also an example of an accomplishment - something that the person did that shows that they are able to out and get things done.

"At Lotadoe" Industries, she says, she "learned how to formulate new ideas for software and how to communicate those ideas effectively to the rest of the development team." She doesn't just tell the person where she worked in this internship, she says what she did and, in particular, she gives them an example of an accomplishment at that job - things that she learned at that job.

The thing that she learned, in part, was "to formulate new ideas." To formulate, "formulate," means to come up with - to think of - to invent new ideas. So, she says she "learned how to formulate new ideas and how to communicate those" or tell those "effectively to the rest of the development team." Effectively, "effectively," means the same as quickly and thoroughly - to do something with the most amount of efficiency.

She goes on to say that she is "a very focused person" and tends to be "product-oriented." These are two personal characteristics that she has that are related to the job. Then, she's going to tell us how she used those personal characteristics or why those personal characteristics were important in the jobs that she's already done. She's still talking about her one-year internship at Lotadoe Industries. She says, "I'm a very focused person." To be focused, "focused," means to have a very clear idea about what you are doing - to have very good concentration on whatever it is that you are doing. That's a definite positive



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Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

personal quality; "I'm very focused" - I can ignore everything around me and do my job effectively.

She also says that she's "product-oriented." This is something that companies like from their employees. What she means by "product-oriented" is that she is concerned about the results that she gets - she wants to make sure that she gets the job done, she's "product-oriented." You could also say, "I am result-oriented" - I'm really trying to get the results that I'm supposed to get

She continues that "At Lotadoc" Industries, she "made sure that whatever projects" she worked on, she "saw to completion." To see something to completion means that you get the project finished - you get the project completed - you get it done. Again, that's something that companies will want from you, that you can actually get things accomplished - get things completed.

Then, she gives a specific example. She says, "For instance, I worked with a team that was developing a new version of a piece of popular software called Rototype. I asked to be part of every step of software development and at the end of the project, I was given the responsibility of getting final technical approval" from the boss. So, she not only says that she is "focused" and "product-oriented," she gives a specific example at her job of how she did this - an instance or an example. "When I worked on this project, I was part of the entire project and I saw it to completion" - I was part of the team that finished the project.

She says, "I made sure that I followed through with the right departments, keeping my team informed of the progress." To follow through means to finish what you have started. This is, again, a positive quality that businesses are looking for - someone who will follow through on things, or, we may even say, someone who has "good follow through." Using it as a noun, it means to be able to finish what you are starting, and in this example, she uses this as a piece of evidence - as a sample of her personal qualities.

"This is the type of work I enjoy," she says, "and that's why I applied for a position" in "your company." Once again, she's connecting what she's done in the past with the company she's interviewing with right now. She's showing them why she would be a good person for their company.

At the end of the interview answer, she says, "Your company is a leader in software development and is in the forefront of new ideas in the field." Everybody likes compliments. Everybody likes to know that they work for a good



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

company, so it's very important in the interview to, at some time, say, "Well, I want to work for your company because you're a great company" - you're a good company. You don't have to do this too much, but this is a good example of the person saying, "I want to work at your company because it's a good company."

She says, "Your company is a leader in software development and is in the forefront of new ideas." The forefront, "forefront," means to be in the leading position - in first position - someone who is a leader in their area.

She says, "that the products" the "company has developed have been outstanding" - they've been excellent - "and are the best" in "the market. I want to work in a company where I can be challenged and where I can make a contribution." Here is the reason why she wants to work in this company. She says they're a good company, and she wants to work in a company she "can be challenged." To be challenged means that someone gives you a problem that you can solve. Someone gives you something difficult or interesting to do, that's a challenge. So, she's saying that she likes to be challenged and she wants to "make a contribution." A contribution "contribution," is something that you give to someone else. It's something positive that you are able to give, usually, a company or an organization. In this case, she says she wants to "make a contribution" to the company - she wants to help the company do what they do.

She ends this answer by saying, " I would very much enjoy working in your company to develop new software and to improve existing ones."

Now let's listen to the interview answer, this time at a native rate of speech.

[Start of sample answer]

I have always enjoyed working with computers, so it was an easy decision to major in computer science at California University with a plan to enter the IT field. In school, I excelled in my computer-related classes and during my college years, I became particularly interested in software development, especially software that would help consumers. That's why I applied for and completed a one-year internship with Lotadoc Industries. At Lotadoc, I learned how to formulate new ideas for software and how to communicate those ideas effectively to the rest of the development team.

I am a very focused person and I tend to be product-oriented. At Lotadoc, I made sure that whatever projects I worked on, I saw to completion. For instance, I worked with a team that was developing a new version of a piece of popular



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

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Your company is a leader in software development and is in the forefront of new ideas in the field. I think that the products your company has developed in the past several years have been outstanding and are the best on the market. I want to work in a company where I can be challenged and where I can make a contribution. I would very much enjoy working in your company to develop new software and to improve existing ones.

[End of sample answer]

Sample answer number two:

[Start of sample answer]

I have worked successfully in sales for over 10 years. One of my first sales jobs was in college, where I majored in business. I worked for the college newspaper selling advertising space, and as an extrovert who likes interacting with people, I was very successful in the job. What also helped me sell more than any other salesperson was my persistence. I was willing to follow up with a potential client over weeks and even months, developing a relationship with them until they were ready to make a deal with us.

I'm currently working as a sales rep for the Michmuney Company. I have been their top salesperson for the past two years. Last year, I sold over \$3 million worth of products.

Now, I'm ready for a new challenge. I want to work in public relations because it is an area where I can use my creativity together with my knowledge of advertising and sales. I have a proven ability to work well with people and I can develop good long-term relationships with clients. I want to work for your company in particular because you work primarily with Internet-based companies, which is an area that is growing at the rate of 40% a year. This makes your company a leader in the industry and I'd like to be part of that.

[End of sample answer]



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

Like our first sample answer, the second sample answer follows the tips that we discussed at the beginning of this episode. It focuses on work-related skills and accomplishments. It tells the interviewer why the skills that this person has are important for the company. It also talks about education and work history, and it gives personal characteristics that the person believes will help them in their job as well as specific examples of that in the jobs that they have held.

This sample answer begins by person saying that he has "worked successfully in sales for over 10 years. One of my first sales jobs was in college, where I majored in business." He doesn't say what college he came from, but he does say what he majored in, so the person knows he went to college and he majored in business. Of course, that information will also be on your resume that you give the person that has a list of where you went to school - the college you went to school.

He said that he worked for a "college newspaper selling advertising space." He's giving an example of his sales job experiences. Now, he might have had other jobs in college, but he doesn't talk about those because they're probably not related to the job he's applying for or his general work experience. So, if he worked as a waiter in a restaurant, well that's not something that is going to help him in this job so he doesn't talk about it.

He says he worked "selling advertising space" - ads in a newspaper - and then he mentions one of his personal characteristics, he's "an extrovert." An extrovert, "extrovert," is the same as someone who is outgoing - someone who's very friendly, who likes to talk to people. In a sales position, being an extrovert would be considered a good personal characteristic because you need to be friendly and outgoing in order to get people to buy something from you. The opposite of extrovert is introvert, "introvert." That's probably not something you want to mention, if you're an introvert. But, if you're an extrovert, then that's a good thing to mention for most kinds of jobs.

He says he likes to interact with people - he likes to talk to other people - and that was one of the reasons why he was successful. So, he connects this personal characteristic to the reason for his success at his job.

He also says that he has a lot of "persistence." Persistence, "persistence," is the same as determination. When you are persistent, you are willing to continue going, even if it's difficult. You don't give up; you don't stop. In a salesperson, being persistent is important. So, he says that "I have a lot of persistence," and then he gives an example of that. He says, "I was willing to follow up," or to



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

“Tell me about yourself.”

follow thorough, "with a potential client over weeks" or "even months, developing a relationship with them until they were ready to" buy something from us - "to make a deal with us."

Now he talks about where he works right now. He says, "I'm currently working as a sales rep," or sales representative, "for the Michmuney Company." He's "been their top salesperson for the past two years." To be the top, "top," means to be the best - to be the highest ranking. This is an accomplishment; this is something that he has accomplished - he has done in his previous job, and so he tells the interviewer about it. "I've been their top sales person," and he tells them specifically how much he sold, "I sold over \$3 million worth of products." Depending on the job you're interviewing for, you want to be able to give specific information about how you did a good job in your previous positions.

"Now," he says, "I'm ready for a new challenge." He wants "to work in public relations because it's an area where" he can use his "creativity together with" his "knowledge of advertising and sales." Creativity is another personal characteristic. Creativity, "creativity," is the ability to think of new ideas - to think of something completely new, and this is something that would be important in his particular job. So, he mentions this personal characteristic because it's related to the job he is interviewing for.

Then he says, "I have a proven ability to work well with people." When we say something is proven, "proven," we mean it's tested - it has been shown to be true. Proven is the past participle of prove.

Finally, at the end of his answer, he says why he wants to work for this company. He says, "I want to work for your company in particular." When we say, "in particular," we mean specifically or especially for your company.

He says that this company works with "Internet-based companies," and that these companies are growing very fast, "40% a year." Notice also that he has done his homework - he has done some research into the company. It's very important that the company knows that you know their company - that you've actually looked at their website and read some of their things and looked at what they do. So, he mentions that he wants to work with this company because they're a leader - they are working with the future of this particular field. He ends by saying that "This makes your company a leader in the industry"- a leader in this area - this type of work - "and I'd like to be part of that" I want to be part of that team that works on those things.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 1

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Now let's listen to the sample answer, this time at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

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Now, I'm ready for a new challenge. I want to work in public relations because it is an area where I can use my creativity together with my knowledge of advertising and sales. I have a proven ability to work well with people and I can develop good long-term relationships with clients. I want to work for your company in particular because you work primarily with Internet-based companies, which is an area that is growing at the rate of 40% a year. This makes your company a leader in the industry and I'd like to be part of that.

[End of sample answer]

That concludes episode one of "Interview Questions Answered."

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Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

SUMMARY OF TIPS:

Your Goal: To minimize any problems and to show that you had positive reasons for leaving previous positions

- Mention positive reasons for leaving.
- Never criticize supervisors, co-workers, or the company/organization.
- Don't mention major problems with management.
- Tell the interviewer about any neutral reasons for leaving.
- Stay positive no matter how bad the situation you are leaving may be.
- Use the right words so you don't sound self-serving. Instead of saying “I left to seek better opportunities” say “I'm looking for a situation which will use more of my skills and experience.”
- Avoid sounding like a “job hopper.”
- Turn this into an opportunity to tell the interviewer about your skills and abilities, if possible.
- Keep your explanation short or the interviewer may think you're making excuses.

SAMPLE ANSWERS

Sample Answer 1:

I've been with Lotadoc for over five years and I've enjoyed working there. I learned a lot about software development and how to work effectively with my **colleagues**.

About two years ago, I began getting interested in other aspects of design and started learning about new ways that the field is creating and developing new designs. I completed **training** that **qualifies** me **to oversee** other types of projects than the ones I work on now at Lotadoc. That's why I'm now looking for a company that will allow me **to more fully utilize** my new skills and where I can take on new challenges. What I see in this position is also the opportunity for **growth** and **advancement**. I think that my current skills and abilities are **a good match** with the current **needs** of this company.



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Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

Sample Answer 2:

The primary reason I left Michmuney Company was because the company went through a **restructuring** and my position was **eliminated**. **Up to that point**, however, I had a very good **track record** and received positive **employee evaluations** each of the three years I worked there.

Leaving Michmuney actually allowed me to make a **career change** that I had been thinking about for some time and that is more **aligned** with my **career goals**. Although I've worked successfully in sales for the past several years, my education and my interests are more closely related to marketing. I'd like to find a position that would allow me to use my knowledge and skills to do challenging work. This position would also give me more **responsibility** than I had at my last company and more **promotion opportunities**. I think that my skills and abilities are a good match for this job.

GLOSSARY

colleague – co-worker; the people one works with

* Tam often brings home-baked cookies to work to share with his colleagues.

training – opportunities to learn new skills or improve old skills to do one's job better.

* Susan has excellent spreadsheet skills, so her boss asked her to organize a training to teach the other people in the office.

to qualify – to meet a minimum level of skills or abilities to a job

* Jack is the most qualified to do the job, because he has 15 years of experience in this area.

to oversee – to supervise; to have responsibility for a project or for someone else's work

* Nobu is overseeing textbook sales to high schools in the western region of the United States.

to more fully – to better; to more thoroughly

* Roger speaks four languages, but in his current job he only needs to know English. He'd like to find a new job that would more fully use his talents.



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Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

to utilize – to use

* We didn't utilize all the funds that were available for the project, so now we have extra money for the next project.

growth – personal or professional development; becoming better

* Her plans for professional growth this year include taking a computer class and learning how to type more quickly.

advancement – promotion; working in higher-ranking positions

* Her advancement through the company was incredible! She began as a mail clerk, but just two years later, she's the vice-president of sales.

a good match – complementary; suitable; something that combines well

* Juan and Marita are a good match. They go to the same church, they like the same kinds of activities, and they both want to have a lot of children.

needs – the things that a person or a company requires; the things that a person or company doesn't have right now

* Parents know that teenagers have different needs for privacy than younger children do.

restructuring – a period of time when a company is reorganizing within the company, usually to become more efficient

* When the employees heard that their company was going to go through a restructuring, they all became very worried about keeping their jobs.

to eliminate – to get rid of; to remove; to destroy

* I've heard that eating nothing but fruit for three days will eliminate bad chemicals from the human body, but I'm not sure I believe it.

up to that point – until then; prior to that moment; before that point in time

* When Kathy's father died, she became very depressed. Up to that point, however, she had always been a very happy child.

track record – one's history of doing something well or poorly

* He has an excellent track record for getting his projects done on time.

employee evaluation – a written assessment or official opinion of an employee's performance in a job

* Employee evaluations are often used to determine whether employees should receive raises.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

career change – to switch from a career in one field to a career in another field

* After years of working as an economic analyst, Greg decided that he would like to make a career change and become an economics professor at the university.

to be aligned – to be in line with; to be in a correct position in relation to something else

* These products weren't aligned with what customers were looking for, so the company stopped making it.

career goals – what one wants to do professionally; what one wants to do professionally in the future

* I know you want to be a doctor, but what are your specific career goals? Do you want to have your own office, work for a hospital, or do medical research?

responsibility – the duty and expectation to take care of someone or something

* Mailing the invitations was *your* responsibility. I can't believe you forgo to take them to the post office.

promotion opportunity – opportunity for advancement; opportunity to begin working in a higher-ranking position

* Five managers quit in one week, and suddenly, there were a lot of promotion opportunities for everyone who had been working under them.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

ESLPod.com presents "Interview Questions Answered," episode two.

Hello, I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This series is designed to teach you the English you need to know to have a successful interview. We'll first listen to some tips on how to answer these questions, and then we'll listen to and explain two sample answers for the question.

Our question in this episode is: "Why did you leave your last job, and why are you looking for a new job?" Let's start with some tips on answering this question.

Your goal in answering this question is to show the interviewer that you had good reasons for leaving your last job - your previous position. You want to minimize any problems that you had; that is you don't want them to think that you were a bad employee or that your old boss hated you. That would not be a good reason for leaving your job because it may indicate to them that you will not be a good worker for them. So, the important point here is to look for the positive reasons for you wanting to leave your job right now and look for a new job.

So, the first tip is to mention the positive reasons. These could be things like "I want a new challenge," "I want to use my skills in a different way," "I want to have more responsibility," things that indicate that you are, perhaps, ambitious - that you want to get ahead - that you want to be successful.

The second tip in answering this question is to never criticize supervisors, coworkers or the company. It's not a good idea to say, "Well, I'm leaving my job because my boss is an idiot." Your boss might be an idiot; that might be true, I know mine is, but that's not a very good reason to give the employer that you are interviewing with because they will think negatively of you. So, don't say anything bad about the people you worked for or the people you worked with - the other employees. You also want to avoid saying negative things about the company that you work for. Again, you need to be positive. You don't want to mention any problems with the management, or the supervisors, or the bosses of your company right now.

You could also tell the interviewer what we call "neutral reasons" for leaving. For example, your wife got a new job in a different city, and so now you need to get a



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

job in that city. Or, there maybe some other personal or professional reason why you need to move from one job to another or from one part of the country to another. These aren't necessarily things that are going to help you get the job, but they explained why you are getting a new job - why you are looking for a new job. Maybe your company is closing its office in the city where you live and you have to find a new job. Those would be neutral reasons, not positive, not negative, but neutral.

The next tip is to always stay positive no matter how bad the situation you are leaving. Once again, don't be negative about your current position.

You want to use the right words in your answer to this question so that you don't sound too self-serving. In other words, you don't want it to be that you are doing this change in jobs just for you. So, instead of saying, "I'm seeking better opportunities," you might say, "I'm looking for a situation that will use more of my skills and experiences," so that company sees that you are trying to offer something to them.

Another thing to avoid - to not do - is to sound like a job hopper. Someone who is a job hopper, "hopper," is someone who moves jobs frequently. Every year, every two years, they have a new job. You want to show your employer that you have some commitment to your job; you're not going to leave your job in a year or two years. Employers usually don't want to hire people who are going to leave them in a short amount of time. So, don't talk about the ten jobs that you had in the last year; that would not make you look very good.

Use the opportunity of this question to tell the interviewer more about your skills and abilities. Even though the question is "Why did you leave your last job," you can include in your answer more information about why you are a good person for this job. As always, you want to keep your explanation fairly short, otherwise the interviewer might think that you are making excuses. You don't want to give a long list of reasons why you left your last job; you want to be honest, positive and brief in your answer.

Let's listen to a sample answer now, then we will discuss the answer and listen to it again at a normal speed. Here we go.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

[Start of sample answer]

I've been with Lotadoc for over five years and I've enjoyed working there. I learned a lot about software development and how to work effectively with my colleagues.

About two years ago, I began getting interested in other aspects of design and started learning about new ways that the field is creating and developing new designs. I completed training that qualifies me to oversee other types of projects than the ones I work on now at Lotadoc. That's why I'm now looking for a company that will allow me to more fully utilize my new skills and where I can take on new challenges. What I see in this position is also the opportunity for growth and advancement. I think that my current skills and abilities are a good match with the current needs of this company.

[End of sample answer]

In answering the question "Why did you leave your last job, and why are you looking for a new job," our first sample answer begins by the woman saying that she has worked that she has worked for her current company, Lotadoc, "for over five years, and I've enjoyed working there." Notice that she's positive right away. "I've worked here for x number of years" - two years, five years, ten years - "and I enjoyed it" - it was a good job. So, she starts by saying something positive.

She also says that "I learned a lot about software development and how to work effectively with my colleagues." Notice that she uses this answer to give more information about her skills and qualifications. She says, "Well, I worked at this company for five years, and I learned a lot about software development, and I also learned how to work effectively with my colleagues." A colleague, "colleague," is the same as a coworker - a fellow employee - someone else who works with you at your company.

So, she give an answer here that says how long she's worked at the company, that she's enjoyed it, and that she has learned these new, important things. She then goes on to say that "About two years ago, I began getting interested in other aspects," or other parts, "of design and started learning about new ways that the field is creating and developing new designs." She's saying here that "I got interested in other things," and again, this shows creativity - this shows initiative - this shows ambition - that she wants to get better - that she wants to improve her skills.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

She then says that she "completed training that qualifies me to oversee other types of projects." Training is the same as education. She maybe took a course, or read some books, or went online and got training. She learned new information, and that information qualifies her "to oversee other types of projects." To qualify, "qualify," means that it gives you the ability to - it gives you the skills to. So, she did this training, and that training gave her the ability "to oversee other types of projects." To oversee, "oversee," (one word) means the same as to supervise - to have responsibility for someone else's work.

Once again, she's giving the reason why she left her last job and she's saying that "Well, now I have these new skills" - I have these new qualifications because I studied, and this is a reason why she's "looking for a company that will allow" her "to more fully utilized my new skills and where I can take on new challenges." So, now that she has these skills - these new skills - that she can't really use at her current job at Lotadoe Industries, she says, "Well, now I'm looking for another company that will allow me to use," or utilize. The verb, to utilize, "utilize," is the same as to use. So, she wants to "more fully utilize," meaning she wants to use them completely - she wants to use all of the skills that she has.

She finishes her answer - and remember you want to keep the answer short for this question - by saying "What I see in this" company "is also the opportunity for growth and advancement." Here she's complimenting the company. She's saying, "Well, I like this company. I want to leave my job because this is a good company." She uses two words that would be common in describing a company that you might want to work for. One is that there is opportunity for growth, "growth." The word growth comes from the verb to grow, "grow," which normally means to get bigger or to get older. In this case, the noun, growth, is really talking about becoming better - becoming better at something, either personally or professionally.

So, she says she's looking for "the opportunity for growth" - the possibility that she can get better at what she does. She's also looking for "advancement." This is an important word, advancement, "advancement." Advancement is the same as promotion - getting a higher level job - getting a better job. If you're looking for opportunities for advancement, you're looking for a company that can give you a better job - a higher level job. This shows the employer that you are ambitious - that you want to succeed; you want to be successful.

She ends her answer by saying, "I think that my current skills and abilities are a good match with the current needs of this company." When she says her "skills are a good match," "match," she means that they're a good connection - a good



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /

“Why are you looking for a new job?”

fit between her skills and what the company needs so that they complement each other - they combine well. She says they're a good match with the current needs of the company. The needs are the things the company requires. It's a noun; it can also be a verb, to need something. Here it means this is what the company needs - this is what they don't have now, and I have some of those things.

Now let's listen to the sample answer, this time at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

I've been with Lotadoc for over five years and I've enjoyed working there. I learned a lot about software development and how to work effectively with my colleagues.

About two years ago, I began getting interested in other aspects of design and started learning about new ways that the field is creating and developing new designs. I completed training that qualifies me to oversee other types of projects than the ones I work on now at Lotadoc. That's why I'm now looking for a company that will allow me to more fully utilize my new skills and where I can take on new challenges. What I see in this position is also the opportunity for growth and advancement. I think that my current skills and abilities are a good match with the current needs of this company.

[End of sample answer]

Now we're going to listen to another sample answer to the question: "Why did you leave your last job, and why are you looking for a new job?" First, we'll listen to this at a slow speed, followed by an explanation of the answer and the vocabulary, and then again, at a normal speed. Let's get started.

[Start of sample answer]

The primary reason I left Michmuney Company was because the company went through a restructuring and my position was eliminated. Up to that point, however, I had a very good track record and received positive employee evaluations each of the three years I worked there.

Leaving Michmuney actually allowed me to make a career change that I had been thinking about for some time and that is more aligned with my career goals. Although I've worked successfully in sales for the past several years, my education and my interests are more closely related to marketing. I'd like to find



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

a position that would allow me to use my knowledge and skills to do challenging work. This position would also give me more responsibility than I had at my last company and more promotion opportunities. I think that my skills and abilities are a good match for this job.

[End of sample answer]

In our second sample answer, we have a slightly different situation. In our first answer, the person was leaving their job because they wanted a better job. Here, the main reason this person is leaving his job is because his company had decided to eliminate, or fire, or get rid of, some of their employees.

He says, "The primary reason I left" the company "was because the company went through a restructuring." The word restructuring, "restructuring," is a popular word in American businesses that means that the company decided to reorganize - to become more efficient. Usually this means that they fire or get rid of some of their people. In this answer, the person says that his "position" - his job - "was eliminated," meaning they no longer were going to have his job at the company - they got rid of it.

So, this is a polite way - a nice way of saying that I was fired. However, you can be fired - you can be removed from your job because you do a bad job or, in this case, because the company changed itself and got rid of your job. So, this person is saying, "Well, I didn't do a bad job. The company restructured and they eliminated" - got rid of - "my job."

He then continues by saying the good things that he did at his job - why he did a good job, or evidence that he did a good job. He says, "Up to that point," meaning before the company restructured and eliminated his position - that point in time, or up to that time, he "had a very good track record." A track record, "track record," (two words) is your history of what you did on a job. It's how well you did something or how badly you did something. So, if you say, "I have a good track record at sales," or "I have a good track record in selling things," that means that I have a good history - I have done it successfully for a certain amount of time.

He also said that he "received positive employee evaluations each of the three years" he "worked there." Notice that he also says how long he worked there: three years. Employee evaluations are when your boss usually writes a paper - a report - on how good of a job you've been doing, or what his or her opinion is of



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

how you have performed at your job - how you have done your job. And, he says I "received positive employee evaluations," meaning my bosses liked my work.

He then, instead of stopping there, he then gives other reasons why he's looking for a new job that are more positive. The fact that his job was restructured and eliminated, that is a neutral reason; not positive, not negative. This, now, is a positive reason for him looking for a new job, he says leaving his company allowed him "to make a career change that" he "had been thinking about for some time," or for a long time. A career change is the same as taking a new kind of job. Your career, "career," is the kind of work that you do. You could be a university professor. You could be an auto mechanic. You could be a lawyer. All of these are different careers.

So, he's saying that he wants to have a different, or new, career and he's looking for something "that is more aligned with" his "career goals." Your goals, "goals," are your objectives - what you are trying to accomplish. Your career goals are what you want to do with your work life - what you want to do in terms of the work that you do.

When he says that he's looking for a job "that is more aligned" his "career goals," he means he's looking for something that is closer to what he wants to do. The verb to align, "align," means to put things together - to combine things so that there's a good match.

So, he's looking for a different career that is better matched to what his goals are. He says, "Although I've worked successfully in sales for the past several years, my education and my interests are more closely related to marketing." So he's saying, "Well, I know I've worked in sales, and this is a different job," a different kind of job, "however, I have education in this area and I'm interested in this area." This is an especially good way to answer this question if you're moving to a different kind of job - from a software engineer to a manager position. When you are changing your career, you want to say that you still have experience or education related to this new job.

He says he'd "like to find a position that would allow" him to have "more responsibility than" he had at his last position. Once again, he's showing his ambition - he's showing his desire to succeed - to do better. He's looking for "more responsibility." Usually, when we talk about responsibility at a job, we mean the person is looking to be a boss - is looking to be a manager or a supervisor, or someone who has more important work to do.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 2

“Why did you leave your last job?” /
“Why are you looking for a new job?”

He's also looking for "promotion opportunities." Promotion opportunities are the same as advancement opportunities. Remember, advancement is when you want a better job - a higher level job. This is what this person is also looking for, and again, American businesses like that. You say that because it shows that you have energy - that you have ambition - that you want to do better, and that's an important characteristic - an important personal quality that many US businesses look for in their employees.

Now let's listen to the sample answer at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

The primary reason I left Michmuney Company was because the company went through a restructuring and my position was eliminated. Up to that point, however, I had a very good track record and received positive employee evaluations each of the three years I worked there.

Leaving Michmuney actually allowed me to make a career change that I had been thinking about for some time and that is more aligned with my career goals. Although I've worked successfully in sales for the past several years, my education and my interests are more closely related to marketing. I'd like to find a position that would allow me to use my knowledge and skills to do challenging work. This position would also give me more responsibility than I had at my last company and more promotion opportunities. I think that my skills and abilities are a good match for this job.

[End of sample answer]

That concludes episode two of "Interview Questions Answered."

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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

SUMMARY OF TIPS:

Your Goal: To show that you know a lot about the company and that your qualifications match the company’s needs

- Find out all you can about the company, including the department where you would work and the people you would work for.
- Research the company’s products or services and the positive things it has done for the community or society.
- Be familiar with the company’s mission statement and core values.
- For large U.S. companies, look for information about the company through the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission or the Better Business Bureau, in addition to the “About Us” section on the company’s own website.
- Don’t make the answer all about you. Focus on the positive things about the company, including its reputation in the industry.
- Tell the interviewer how your qualifications meets a need in their company.
- Show the interviewer that you are being selective about where you want to work and are not willing to take just any job offered to you.

Sample Answer 1:

This company is an **industry leader** and is **at the forefront of** exciting new developments in this field. Its **mission** to change the way consumers get and send information is, I believe, where the biggest areas of **growth** are in the industry. Based on the company’s **financials** and its general **performance** in the past year, Lotadoc is **poised to** take over as one of the top suppliers of online service in the world. I have read about the company’s many future projects that are designed to move the company forward toward achieving its mission. I want to be part of this company because I believe I can be part of that growth.

In the past several years, I have led a number of **innovative** projects **along the same lines as** the current direction of this company. By doing this, I was able to help my current company get a **foothold** in the market. I’m confident that I can bring my proven skills in management, development, and technology to succeed in your organization.



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

Sample Answer 2:

There are several reasons why I want to work for this company. First, I was **impressed** with the backgrounds of the **founders** and their **vision** for this company. Their innovative thinking is, I believe, **in line with** the best thinking in the field right now. Your company also has one of the best **reputations** in the industry for innovative thinking and taking serious **corporate responsibility** for making a difference in the local communities.

As I learned more about the company and its **growth potential**, it became clear to me that I may be able to make a significant contribution to its goals. Since I have been working for the past five years as a successful marketing strategist, I believe I can bring those skills and the knowledge I’ve gained to help the organization reach its mission to become an industry leader.

I am now looking for a new challenge where I can take my proven skills and apply them to new situations, as well as learning new techniques to continue my own development. This is the company I've been looking for, a place where my background, experience, and skills can be **put to use** to make things happen.

GLOSSARY

industry leader – a company that is the best (strongest and wealthiest) in its industry

* Do you think that Microsoft will still be the industry leader for computer software 20 years from now?

at the forefront of – in the leading or first position in an industry or field

* This medical research company is at the forefront of the race to find a cure for AIDS.

mission – purpose; one sentence that summarizes why a company or organization exists.

* The mission of this organization is to make low-cost housing available for the largest number of people in the country.

growth – increase or expansion

* Recently, there has been a large growth in the world’s demand for oil.



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?”

financials – a company’s financial statements or financial performance; the numbers showing what the company spends and earns

* She always studies an organization’s financials before she donates her money.

performance – how well or how poorly an organization, company, or person does something

* No one wants to invest in that company because of its poor performance last year.

to be poised to – to be in a position to do something; to be ready to do something

* The swimmer was poised to jump into the pool when those three children got in and started playing in the water.

innovative – new, unique, and creative

* They received the Nobel Prize in Mathematics for their innovative ideas.

along the same lines as – similar to; related to

* Her new book is along the same lines as her previous one. The characters are different, but they face the same problems.

foothold – a hold on something; a position in an industry or field; a place to enter something

* When the soccer team’s star player broke his leg, the team lost its foothold in the competition.

to be impressed – to have a favorable impression; to be pleasantly surprised

* Weren’t you impressed with his resume? He went to the best schools in the country and he has been published in ten academic journals.

founder – a person who starts something, usually an organization, school, or company

* The university’s library is named after the university’s founder.

vision – an idea or picture in one’s mind about what one wants for the future

* I think that we all agree on the organization’s vision: to create a world without hunger or poverty.

in line with – compatible with; similar to; the same as; like

* Their noisy conversations aren’t in line with what I would expect to hear from librarians during work hours.



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

reputation – how a company or a person is perceived (seen) by others

* The politician’s reputation was damaged when the newspapers announced that he had stolen money from the city.

corporate responsibility – a company’s duty to make positive contributions to the local community

* Shannon manages the company’s corporate responsibility programs, encouraging employees to volunteer and donating money to local schools.

growth potential – a company’s or a person’s opportunity or ability to expand and develop in the future

* The computer industry has huge growth potential because almost everyone wants to buy a newer, faster, and better computer every few years.

to put (something) to use – to use something; to be able to use something for a purpose

* She loves cooking, painting, and finance, and she would like to put her interests to use in one job, but she hasn’t found anything yet.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

ESLPod.com presents "Interview Questions Answered," episode three.

Hello, I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This series is designed to teach you the English you need to know to have a successful interview. We'll first listen to some tips on how to answer our question, and then we'll listen to and explain two sample answers for the question.

Our question in this episode is: "Why do you want to work here?" Let's begin with some tips on answering this question.

Your goal or objective in answering this question is to show the person interviewing you that you know a lot about this company and that what you have to offer - your skills and qualifications - match their needs - are the things that they are looking for in this job. So, it's very important, as our first tip, that you find out all you can about this company, including the specific department where you would work and the people you would work for.

Every company wants their employees to be knowledgeable about their company - to know about their company. And, if you do some research - if you do some looking to see what this company is and what you will be doing at this company, you will show the company that you are interested in their company. So, the first thing to do is to find out as much as you can about this company that you are interviewing for.

You want to research, or look at or investigate, the company's products or services and the positive things it has done for the community or the society. You want to know what this company does. What do they sell? What do they produce? What do they do? The more you know about that, the more you can show the person interviewing you that you are intelligent enough to know what this company is, and you are interested in it enough to know what the company does.

Most US businesses have something called a mission statement. A mission, "mission," statement. A mission statement is the same as the purpose. It's usually one sentence, maybe two sentences, that summarizes what the company is about - why the company exists - what it is trying to do. So, you want to find



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

that in the company's website or somewhere that tells you what their mission statement is, and you want to be familiar with it - you want to know what it is. You're not going to repeat it to the interviewer, you're not going to say, "I know what your mission statement is." Instead, you are going to try to use that information to help answer this question: "Why do you want to work here?" You need to know what the company has as its own mission in order to match that with your own ideas.

If you are interviewing with a large US company - a large American company - you can often find information about the company through something called the US Securities and Exchange Commission, especially if this is a what we would call public company that sell stocks in a stock market. If it's a large US company, and it's a public US company like Google or Apple or IBM or Microsoft - these are all large public companies - you can get information from the US government, from something called the Securities and Exchange Commission. And, if you look for that on a website, you can find information about a specific company. It will tell you how much money they make, the kinds of things they make and so forth.

There's also something in the United States and in other countries called the Better Business Bureau. The Better Business Bureau, "bureau." The Better Business Bureau is an organization that has information about different companies and problems they may have had or things that they have done, so you can also look for that on the web. Of course, the company will probably have its own website, and there will be information on that website about the company. So, you want to read everything you can, especially the "about us" section in the website.

The purpose of doing all this research - all this investigation - if so that you can answer this question with an intelligent answer. So, don't make the answer to this question just about you; you want to show the person you are interviewing with that you know about this company.

One of the things you try to do is focus on positive things about this company. Of course, if you say good or positive things about this company, that will make your interviewer feel better; they will feel better about their own company. You don't want to do this too much, but you want to do it enough so that the person interviewing you knows that you have a positive attitude about this company.



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

Tell the interviewer how your qualifications meet a need or needs in their company. Once again, you want to show that your skills and qualifications are a good match for the company.

You also want to show the interviewer that you are being selective about where you want to work, and are not willing to take any job that someone offers you. You have to have confidence in your own capabilities - your own skills. You don't want them to think you're applying to 100 companies, even if you are applying to 100 companies. This is because you want them to know that they are special - that you want to interview with them because you want to work for their company. So, don't talk about other companies that you have interviewed for. Make sure that they think that this is the most important job, and that you will want a specific kind of job - you don't want just any job; you want to accept the job that is good for you and good for the company.

Let's listen to, now, a sample answer to the question: "Why do you want to work here?"

[Start of sample answer]

This company is an industry leader and is at the forefront of exciting new developments in this field. Its mission to change the way consumers get and send information is, I believe, where the biggest areas of growth are in the industry. Based on the company's financials and its general performance in the past year, Lotadoc is poised to take over as one of the top suppliers of online service in the world. I have read about the company's many future projects that are designed to move the company forward toward achieving its mission. I want to be part of this company because I believe I can be part of that growth.

In the past several years, I have led a number of innovative projects along the same lines as the current direction of this company. By doing this, I was able to help my current company get a foothold in the market. I'm confident that I can bring my proven skills in management, development, and technology to succeed in your organization.

[End of sample answer]

The woman begins her answer to this question by saying something very positive about the company. She says, "This company is an industry leader and is at the forefront of exciting new developments in this field," or this area of work. To say that they are an industry leader, "industry," means that they are one of the



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?”

strongest or the best companies in this particular type of work. Industry is another word for field or area of work, so it could be the manufacturing industry - companies that make things; the automobile industry - companies that make cars; those are kinds of companies. So, what she is saying is that this company is one of the best - they're an industry leader. They're "at the forefront of exciting developments." When we say a company is at the forefront of something, again, this is another way of saying they are a leader - they are in the first or leading position in this industry or this field. So, she's saying things that are good about the company, and that is an important part of this answer. Make sure that you tell the company that you want to work for them because they are a leader - they are an important and leading company.

The mission of the company, she says, is "to change the way consumers get and send information." So, she's familiarized herself with their mission, and she's saying I know what your mission statement says - I know what your purpose is - what I want to do is related to that. She says the company's "mission to change the way consumers get and send information is, I believe, where the biggest areas of growth are in the industry." She's saying that she wants to work for this company because it's going to grow - it's going to continue to get bigger. Remember, growth is the same as getting larger, increasing, expanding - those are all related to this idea of growth. When we talk about growth in the company, we mean it's getting bigger or getting larger

So, she's interested in this company because it's in an area of high growth, we would say. Then she indicates or she shows the interviewer that she has done her research - she has looked at this company. She says, "Based on the company's financials and its general performance in the past year, Lotadoc is poised to take over as one of the top suppliers of online service in the world." She begins by saying that "Based on the company's financials," it will continue to grow. Financials for a company, and notice that the word is plural, are the financial statements - the information that says how much money the company made - how much their profit was, how much they earned, how much they got and how much they spent - those are financials.

So, she's looked at the company's financials and its general performance in the last year. Performance, "performance," is how well a person or an organization or a company does something. You can have employee performance; you can have company performance. Here, she's talking about how well the company has performed, to use the verb. Because of the company's performance - because of how it has done, she says it is "poised to take over as one of the top suppliers in the world." The verb, to be poised, "poised," to something - to do



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

something - means that they are in the position to - they are ready to. They haven't done it yet, but they are almost there. So, when a company is poised to do something, it's ready to do something. In this case, the company is poised to takeover or to become one of the best companies in its field.

She then answers the question by saying, "I have read about the company's many future projects that are designed to move the company forward" - to increase or grow the company - "toward achieving its mission. I want to be part of this company because I believe I can be part of that growth." Once again, she shows that she did her research; she knows what the company wants to do in the future. She's looked at the newspaper, she's looked at the company's website, and she says I want to be part of that increasing growth - I want to be part of the company's new projects.

She then talks a little bit about her own experience, and the reason you want to talk about your experience is you want to show the interviewer that your experience matches or is a good fit for what the company needs. She says, "In the past several years, I have led a number of innovative projects along the same lines as the current direction of this company." She says that she has led or been the leader of a number of innovative projects. Innovative, "innovative," is the same as new or unique or creative. American companies want people who can be creative, who can think of new things, and so she's saying that I have been part of these innovative or new creative projects along the same lines as the company's current direction - the way the company is moving. The expression along the same lines, "lines," as, means the same as similar to or related to. You may be talking to someone and you say, "Well, along these same lines, I want to mention something else," meaning this is related to the same topic.

In this interview answer, she's saying that her interests - her experience - are similar to the kinds of things the company will need in the future. She continues by saying that she was able to help her "current company get a foothold in the market." A foothold, "foothold," (all one word) is the same as a good position - a place where you enter - a place where you start. She is talking about her accomplishments here; she's talking about the things she has done at her current company, and one of those things was to get a foothold for the company in the larger market - in the larger field.

She ends her answer by saying that she's confident she can bring her "proven skills in management, development, and technology to succeed in your



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

organization.” So, she summarizes what her main qualifications are and emphasizes that they are a good match for this company.

Now let's listen to the answer, this time at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

This company is an industry leader and is at the forefront of exciting new developments in this field. Its mission to change the way consumers get and send information is, I believe, where the biggest areas of growth are in the industry. Based on the company's financials and its general performance in the past year, Lotadoc is poised to take over as one of the top suppliers of online service in the world. I have read about the company's many future projects that are designed to move the company forward toward achieving its mission. I want to be part of this company because I believe I can be part of that growth.

In the past several years, I have led a number of innovative projects along the same lines as the current direction of this company. By doing this, I was able to help my current company get a foothold in the market. I'm confident that I can bring my proven skills in management, development, and technology to succeed in your organization.

[End of sample answer]

Let's listen now to another answer for the question: "Why do you want to work here?"

[Start of sample answer]

There are several reasons why I want to work for this company. First, I was impressed with the backgrounds of the founders and their vision for this company. Their innovative thinking is, I believe, in line with the best thinking in the field right now. Your company also has one of the best reputations in the industry for innovative thinking and taking serious corporate responsibility for making a difference in the local communities.

As I learned more about the company and its growth potential, it became clear to me that I may be able to make a significant contribution to its goals. Since I have been working for the past five years as a successful marketing strategist, I believe I can bring those skills and the knowledge I've gained to help the organization reach its mission to become an industry leader.



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

I am now looking for a new challenge where I can take my proven skills and apply them to new situations, as well as learning new techniques to continue my own development. This is the company I've been looking for, a place where my background, experience, and skills can be put to use to make things happen.

[End of sample answer]

In our second sample answer, we see many of the same ideas as in the first sample answer following the tips that we began this episode with.

The person begins the answer to the question by saying that "There are several reasons why I want to work for this company." He says, "First, I was impressed with the backgrounds of the founders." To be impressed means to have a favorable or positive impression or positive opinion of someone. When you say, "I'm impressed," usually it means that you are even a little surprised. In general, it means that you have a very positive opinion. Once again, it's important to tell the interviewer that you have a very positive opinion - a very good impression - of their company.

He says he was "impressed with the backgrounds," or the experience, "of the founders" of the company. The founders, "founders," or founder (singular), is the person or are the persons that start an organization - that start the company. So, Bill Gates was the founder of Microsoft; he was the one who began the company - who started the company, or at least, one of those.

He goes on to say that he's impressed with the vision of the founders for this company. Vision, "vision," is your idea or your picture of what the future will be. It's similar to mission; it's usually related to your purpose - why you are doing something - what you see the future to be, and he's saying he's impressed with the founder's vision. So, he's done some research - he's looked at the company. He's seen what the company is doing and where they are going.

He continues to say positive things about the company. He says, "Their innovative thinking is in line with the best thinking in the field right now." Their innovative or creative or new thinking - their new ideas - are in line with the best thinking in the field or the industry right now. The expression in line, "line," with is similar to along the same lines as. It means related to, similar to, compared to, so the two things are in line means they are a good match in some ways.



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Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

He also says that the company "has one of the best reputations in the industry for innovative thinking." Your reputation, "reputation," is what people think of you. So, when he says the company has a good reputation, he's saying that people outside of the company think the company is a good company, they have a good impression or a good opinion of the company.

He also says that company takes seriously its "corporate responsibility for making a difference in local communities." Many US companies try to do positive things for the area - the city or town where they live - and this is part of a general idea that we would call corporate responsibility. Corporate refers to the company. So, the company is taking a responsibility for doing something good for the local community - the place where the company is located - where they have their offices.

He continues his answer by saying that "As I learned more about the company and its growth potential, it became clear," or obvious, "to me that I may be able to make a significant contribution" - I may be able to give the company something because of my experience. The expression growth potential is related to our previous discussion of this word, growth. Potential means the ability to or the possibility that something will happen, so growth potential is the opportunity or ability or possibility that the company will become bigger. He's saying as I learned about how the company might become bigger, I thought I would be a good person to help that company. He says I could "make a significant contribution to its goals," or objectives.

He then explains a little bit more about his experience and why his experience is a good match the company. That he says, "Since I have been working for the past five years as a successful market strategist," notice he says successful - he gives a positive evaluation of his own skills, "I believe I can bring those skills and knowledge I've gained to help the organization," or this company, "reach its mission to become an industry leader." Once again, you see that word mission - purpose. An industry leader is someone or some company who is in the leading position - one of the best companies.

"I am now looking for a new challenge," he says, "where I can take my proven skills and apply them to new situations." Notice the use of the word proven, it means that he has evidence - he has shown himself in the past to be successful in these areas. So, "my proven skills" - I have shown myself - I have demonstrated that I am good.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 3

““Why do you want to work here?””

He also wants to learn new techniques to continue his own development. Once again, say he wants to become a better employee - a better person in this industry. He says this company is what "I've been looking for, a place where my background, experience, and skills can be put to use to make things happen." The expression to put something to use means to use something - to be able to use something for a specific purpose. What he's saying here is that I have this experience and I want to be able to use it in a specific place like this company because I think I can make things happen. To make things happen means to do things - to accomplish things - to get results. And, this is something that a company, of course, wants from its workers - from its employees, to be able to actually do things - accomplish things - get results.

Now let's listen to this second sample answer at a native rate of speech.

[Start of sample answer]

There are several reasons why I want to work for this company. First, I was impressed with the backgrounds of the founders and their vision for this company. Their innovative thinking is, I believe, in line with the best thinking in the field right now. Your company also has one of the best reputations in the industry for innovative thinking and taking serious corporate responsibility for making a difference in the local communities.

As I learned more about the company and its growth potential, it became clear to me that I may be able to make a significant contribution to its goals. Since I have been working for the past five years as a successful marketing strategist, I believe I can bring those skills and the knowledge I've gained to help the organization reach its mission to become an industry leader.

I am now looking for a new challenge where I can take my proven skills and apply them to new situations, as well as learning new techniques to continue my own development. This is the company I've been looking for, a place where my background, experience, and skills can be put to use to make things happen.

[End of sample answer]

That concludes episode three of "Interview Questions Answered."

This course has been a production of the Center for Educational Development, in beautiful Los Angeles, California. Visit our website at eslpod.com.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 3

“Why do you want to work here?”

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Interview Questions Answered – 4
“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

SUMMARY OF TIPS:

Your Goal: To assure the interviewer that if the company hires you, you will continue working for them, and that you have given careful thought to your future career plans

- Reassure the interviewer that you are not a “job hopper” by telling the interviewer that you plan to stay and grow with the company.
- Research the company to find out the logical next positions to move up in the company.
- If there is more than one direction you can move in to move up in the organization, name these paths and talk about your options depending on your future interests and performance, and the company’s needs.
- Show that you are motivated and have definite plans about doing more in the company.
- Avoid naming a specific job or position or you will seem too narrow or inflexible.
- Do not talk about personal goals or plans.
- Questions about marriage, babies, and childcare are illegal, but if you don’t plan to make any big personal life changes soon, you can volunteer that information.

Sample Answer 1:

My goal is that in five years, I will be working in a **managerial** position in this company. I see the next few years here at Lotadoc as an opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge **to run** one of the departments in this company. One of the reasons I am applying for this position is that this is a large company with a lot of opportunities for advancement. If I continue working in the department where this position is, I hope to be a **senior** manager with a hand in **shaping** the **strategic** plans for development in this area of technology. Another possibility in five years is **to transfer** to one of the **regional** offices, where I would oversee local **operations**.

Ultimately, the direction I would take in this company depends on many factors, such as the changing **priorities** of the market, the **expertise** I will have gained at the end of the five years, and the changing needs of the company. I have **worn different hats** in the company I’m working for now, and my **flexibility** has



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Interview Questions Answered – 4
“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

allowed me fill the needs of that company. I hope to have even more opportunities to learn and advance here at Lotadoc, and to contribute to its future growth.

Sample Answer 2:

At the end of five years, I intend to be a **leading expert** in the field of marketing, working with some of the largest accounts in the country. That’s why I want to work for Michmuney. As a leader in the industry, Michmuney has the resources, talent, and the vision to be the best in the business.

Working for this company is an **ambition** for many people in this field, and I’m no different. If I’m hired, I plan **to cultivate** new accounts in industries that Michmuney has not yet explored, including the automotive and healthcare fields. By doing this, I hope **to break new ground** for this company and to expand its influence in the marketplace.

I see being here at this company **long term**, not only to continue to build my expertise, but to influence the direction that this company will take in the next ten years. I could do this in any number of official **roles** in the company, such as managing a region or heading one of the main offices.

I’ve had the opportunity to work all over the country, but I consider this city my home. Working with Michmuney would allow me to come back to my hometown, where I’d plan to stay for a long time. I can’t think of a better place to call my new professional home than Michmuney.

GLOSSARY

managerial – related to a manager or management; related to a high-ranking supervisory position within a company

* All of the managerial offices have windows, but the rest of us have to work in the central part of the building.

to run (something) – to manage something; to be in charge of something; to be responsible for a project or program

* Since Beatrice started running the department, sales have doubled.



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Interview Questions Answered – 4
“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

senior – high-ranking; superior; someone who has worked in an organization for a longer period of time than the other employees

* This company has seven senior vice-presidents and one president. That’s a lot of management staff!

to shape (something) – to develop something; to have influence over how something is made or done

* That company’s robots are shaping the future of how cars are made.

strategic – ideas and ways for achieving a long-term goal or purpose

* The board of directors is looking for strategic projects that will make the company better than its competitors.

to transfer – to begin working in a different office or department within the same company

* Timothy’s family was angry when his company transferred him to the office in Los Angeles because they didn’t want to move to California.

regional – relating to one place, area, or region of a company’s business; not national

* Denise is responsible for regional sales in the southern United States.

operations – the activity and work that is done in an office or by a company

* What do you think of the company’s decision to move its call center operations overseas, where labor is cheaper?

ultimately – in the end; eventually

* Whether I can afford to study for a master’s degree will depend ultimately on whether I receive a good scholarship.

priority – something that is more or less important than something else

* Lily’s top priority is to find an interesting job. In her opinion, the location and the salary are less important.

expertise – specialized knowledge and experience about something

* How did you gain your expertise in finance? Was it by studying finance at the university, or by reading articles and working in the finance industry?



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 4 “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

to wear different hats – to work in many different positions; to do different types of jobs; to have many different types of duties

* Melanie is a mother, a wife, a performer, and a volunteer. She wears so many different hats!

flexibility – willingness and ability to adapt to change

* His manager was impressed by his flexibility during the company’s recent reorganization. No matter what they asked him to do, he did it without complaining.

leading expert – the most knowledgeable person in a field or industry

* This textbook was written by the nation’s leading expert on chemistry.

ambition – a desire to achieve something; a professional desire for something; wanting to have or to be something

* Her greatest ambition is to write a best-selling book.

to cultivate – to care for something so that it develops and grows; to try to get someone to like you or to think of you favorably

* Finding new customers is important, but cultivating relationships with old customers is the key to maintaining high sales.

to break new ground – to expand into a new field or area; to try something new

* The company broke new ground when it developed a car that ran on solar energy.

long term – for a long time; not temporary

* In the short term, going to school at night while working full-time is very stressful, but in the long term, it’ll improve my chances of making more money.

role – position; function; job

* In his role as the committee chairman, Terry is responsible for coordinating meetings and leading the team’s discussions.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 4
“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

ESLPod.com presents "Interview Questions Answered," episode four.

Hello, I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This series is designed to teach you the English you need to know to have a successful interview. We'll first listen to some tips on how to answer the question, and then we'll listen to and explain two sample answers for the question.

Our question in this episode is: "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

There are two main reasons why companies ask this question, and it's a very common question. One reason is that they want to be sure that you are going to be continuing to work for them in the future. So, one of the goals that you have in answering the question is to make sure that they know that you want to continue working at the company in the future, in five years or in ten years or in fifteen years. You also want to show them that you have thought about your future - you've thought about your future career plans, what you plan on doing in the future. This shows that you are a person who thinks ahead - a person who plans, and companies want people who are thinking about the future, not just about what is happening right now.

So, the first tip we have in answering this question is reassure the interviewer that you are not a job hopper by telling them that you plan to stay with the company for a long time. To reassure means to make the person feel comfortable - to make them believe that everything is going to be okay. So, you're saying to the interviewer "I'm going to stay with this company." You want to give them information that shows that you will continue with the company. You don't want to be considered a job hopper, someone who moves to a different job every year. Companies, of course, don't want to hire someone who is going to leave in a short amount of time, especially if they have to train this person to do the job that they are going to do.

A good way to answer this question is to do some research in the company and find out what the next possible position - higher position - would be for the job that you are taking. If you want to be promoted - if you want to have more responsibility, what would that be? Perhaps it would be a manager or perhaps it would be a supervisor. You want to know that so that when you think about



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 4 “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

where you are going to be in five years, you can show that you want to do better - you want to be ambitious.

If there's more than one direction you can move in, in terms of getting a better job in the company, you should talk about the different possibilities. Let's say you find out that there are a couple of different ways that you can move up or get a higher position in the company. You can talk about what these possibilities are and that it will depend on your future interest and performance and what the company needs. So, you're showing that you're also a little flexible - you can do different things.

Show, also, that you are motivated and have definite plans about doing more in the company. In answering this question, you want to make sure that the company knows that you've thought about where you will be in five years, and that you want to be doing good things for the company. You are motivated and you have definite, or real, plans about things that you can do.

You want to avoid giving a specific job or position in the company. It may be better not to say, "I want to be supervisor of my department in five years." You don't want to seem too narrow. You don't want them to think that you can only do one or two things. Instead, you want to talk about the different possibilities where you could be in five years in the company.

This question is not about your personal goals or your personal plans. They're not asking you if you're going to get married or have children or take a nice vacation to Los Angeles; they're interested in what your plans are for the company - for your job.

In the United States, it is actually against the law - it is illegal - for a company to ask you if you are married or if you have any children or plan to have children, how you take care of, especially, your younger children. However, you can give that information if you want to, especially if you don't plan on having any important changes in the next five or ten years. It's probably better, however, not to talk too much about your personal life, and it, again, is not required that talk about whether you are married or single, whether you have children or want to have children. These are things that are probably not important, and it may hurt you. Some companies may think, "Well, if he's going to have a baby" - well, if his wife or if she is going have a baby - "then maybe they won't be a good person for this job." That's why it's illegal to ask questions like that. So, only give that information if you are comfortable volunteering that information.



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Interview Questions Answered – 4
“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

Now let's listen to a sample answer to the question: "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

[Start of sample answer]

My goal is that in five years, I will be working in a managerial position in this company. I see the next few years here at Lotadoc as an opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge to run one of the departments in this company. One of the reasons I am applying for this position is that this is a large company with a lot of opportunities for advancement. If I continue working in the department where this position is, I hope to be a senior manager with a hand in shaping the strategic plans for development in this area of technology. Another possibility in five years is to transfer to one of the regional offices, where I would oversee local operations.

Ultimately, the direction I would take in this company depends on many factors, such as the changing priorities of the market, the expertise I will have gained at the end of the five years, and the changing needs of the company. I have worn different hats in the company I'm working for now, and my flexibility has allowed me fill the needs of that company. I hope to have even more opportunities to learn and advance here at Lotadoc, and to contribute to its future growth.

[End of sample answer]

In our first sample answer, the woman said that her goal in five years is to "be working in a managerial position in this company." Notice she does two things with that first sentence. She gives a very direct answer - she says here is what I want to do in five years. She also says I want to work in this company - I want to continue to be here five years. She's reassuring the interviewer that she wants to stay with the company.

She also gives a general idea about what she wants to do, but not necessarily a specific job. She says she wants to be "in a managerial position." Managerial, "managerial," comes from the word manage or manager, someone who is a boss - a supervisor. Managerial is an adjective; it's the kind of position - the kind of job - that would be like a manager or a supervisor - a boss. It's not a specific job; there are lots of different kinds of managerial positions at different levels in the company. So, this is a good thing to say. It says I have ambition, I want to have more responsibility in five years, but I'm not sure exactly what - you're not giving the one job or one position that you want to have in five years.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 4 “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

She then continues to talk about how she is going to continue working at this company. She continues her answer by saying that she sees "the next few years here at Lotadoc" - at this company - "as an opportunity," or a way, "to gain," or get more "skills and knowledge to run one of the departments in this company." To run a department means to manage it - to be in charge of - to be responsible for that department. She doesn't say which department, but she does say that she wants to be in a manager or supervisor position. She emphasizes that she will continue to get this company after she has gained more skills and more knowledge, then she hopes to be in a managerial position.

"One of the reasons," she says that she is "applying for this position is that this is a large company with a lot of opportunities for advancement" or promotion. "If I continue working in the department where this position is," she says, "I hope to be a senior manager with a hand in shaping the strategic plans for development in this area of technology."

She's saying here that she wants to be involved in the management of the company, and she gives some specific things that she might do. She says, "If I continue working in" this "department," and maybe she will, maybe she won't, but if she does continue working, she hopes "to be a senior manager." A senior, "senior," manager is one of the higher level managers. The lower managers might be called junior managers. Senior means older, junior means younger. Here it means more experience and less experience. Higher level - senior; lower level - junior.

So, she says she wants to "be a senior," or a higher level "manager with a hand in," meaning with some participation in "shaping the strategic plans for development." To shape something means to change it - to somehow be involved in the way that it will be in the future. So, she wants to change or have an influence in the strategic plans of the company. Strategic, "strategic," means the important future plans of the company - the plans that will be most important in the long term for the company - the future of the company.

She continues by saying that "Another possibility" for her "in five years is to transfer to one of the regional offices, where I would oversee local operations." She's not saying there's only one job for me in five years, she's saying well, there are a couple of ways that I could be promoted - that I could advance in the company. Another way "is to transfer," or to move, "to one of the regional offices." Regional is related to the idea of a region, "region," which is a smaller area - part of a larger area. So, the opposite of regional may be national or international. National would be the whole country - the whole nation; regional



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 4 “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

would be just part of the country. So, if it's a big company - a national or international company - you could transfer to a specific area - a specific region in the country or, of course, to another country.

She says that she wants to "oversee," or be in charge of, "local operations." Operations refers to all of the work that a company or an office of the company or a department of the company does. Those are its operations, everything that it does - all the work.

"Ultimately," she says, meaning in the end or eventually, "Ultimately, the direction I would like to take in this company depends on many factors, such as the changing priorities of the market." So, she's saying here well, here are some ideas about what I want to do, however, I need to know what is going to happen in the company, and the company may change its idea. It may change its priorities. A priority, "priority," is something that is more important or less important than something else. Your boss may say, "This has priority," that means this should be done before the other things. Priority comes from the word prior, which means before; in this case, before other things - more important than other things.

She goes on to say that it will also depend on "the expertise" she "will have gained at the end of the five years." Expertise, "expertise," is the experience or special knowledge that you have about a specific thing. The word expert, "expert," is a person who knows a lot about a specific topic. So, she's saying well, I want to work somewhere depending on my expertise - how much knowledge and skills I have.

She goes on then to talk about her own experience in her company where she works now, and how this will be something that will help her in her future. She says, "I have worn" many "different hats in the company I'm working for now." Hats, "hats," is what you put on your head, but the expression to wear different hats means to have different jobs - different responsibilities - different positions.

She says that her flexibility - her ability to change - to do different things - has allowed her to do the things that her company wants her to do. So, what she's saying is that she can be flexible - she can do different things.

She ends her answer by saying, "I hope to have even more opportunities to learn and advance here at Lotadoc, and to contribute to its future growth." She ends her answer by, once again, saying that she wants to continue working for this company; she's not going to leave the company in the next five years.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 4 “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

Now let's listen to this first sample answer at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

My goal is that in five years, I will be working in a managerial position in this company. I see the next few years here at Lotadoc as an opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge to run one of the departments in this company. One of the reasons I am applying for this position is that this is a large company with a lot of opportunities for advancement. If I continue working in the department where this position is, I hope to be a senior manager with a hand in shaping the strategic plans for development in this area of technology. Another possibility in five years is to transfer to one of the regional offices, where I would oversee local operations.

Ultimately, the direction I would take in this company depends on many factors, such as the changing priorities of the market, the expertise I will have gained at the end of the five years, and the changing needs of the company. I have worn different hats in the company I'm working for now, and my flexibility has allowed me fill the needs of that company. I hope to have even more opportunities to learn and advance here at Lotadoc, and to contribute to its future growth.

[End of sample answer]

Now we'll listen to another sample answer for the question: "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

[Start of sample answer]

At the end of five years, I intend to be a leading expert in the field of marketing, working with some of the largest accounts in the country. That's why I want to work for Michmuney. As a leader in the industry, Michmuney has the resources, talent, and the vision to be the best in the business.

Working for this company is an ambition for many people in this field, and I'm no different. If I'm hired, I plan to cultivate new accounts in industries that Michmuney has not yet explored, including the automotive and healthcare fields. By doing this, I hope to break new ground for this company and to expand its influence in the marketplace.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 4 “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

I see being here at this company long term, not only to continue to build my expertise, but to influence the direction that this company will take in the next ten years. I could do this in any number of official roles in the company, such as managing a region or heading one of the main offices.

I've had the opportunity to work all over the country, but I consider this city my home. Working with Michmuney would allow me to come back to my hometown, where I'd plan to stay for a long time. I can't think of a better place to call my new professional home than Michmuney.

[End of sample answer]

In the second sample answer, we see many of the same important parts of the answer that we saw in our first sample answer. The person here tries to tell the interviewer that he wants to continue working for the company, and gives some specific things that they might do or want to do in the future.

He begins by saying that "At the end of five years, I intend to be a leading expert in the field of marketing." An expert, we already know, is someone who knows a lot about something. To be the leading expert means to be one of the best people. So, he's showing his ambition - his desire to be successful. "That's why I want to work for Michmuney," he says, because he wants to work with some of the biggest accounts - some the biggest companies in the country, companies that Michmuney works with. He says they're "a leader in the industry," they're one of the best companies in this area.

He says, "Working for this company is an ambition for many people in this field." Ambition, "ambition," means a desire to achieve something. We've talked about people being ambitious. He says many people have an ambition to work in this company, and I am the same as them. He says, "I'm no different," meaning I'm just like them.

"If I'm hired," for this job, "I plan to cultivate new accounts in industries that Michmuney has not yet explored." To cultivate, "cultivate," here means to try to get other new business for the company - to care for something that it develops - so that it gets bigger. Cultivating new accounts means finding new business for the company. He's showing that he wants to contribute - he wants to give something to the company. He wants to make the company better, and he, personally, will try to get new business for the company. He mentions two areas, "the automotive and healthcare fields." Automotive is car, healthcare is hospitals, doctors, that sort of thing.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 4 “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

"By doing this," by getting these new accounts, he says, "I hope to break new ground for this company and to expand its influence in the marketplace." The expression to break new ground means to go into new areas - new things. So, if you've done research on your company, and you know that they are a company that likes to do different and new things, this would be a good thing to say, "I want to help the company break new ground" - do something different.

He then says again that he plans on being in this company for a long time. He says, "I see being here at this company long term." The expression long term means for a long time, the opposite of temporary. Short term would be temporary, long term means for a very long time. So, he wants to be with the company long term because he wants to continue his knowledge - continue his education - to build his expertise, but he also wants "to influence the direction that" the "company will take in the next ten years." Just like the first answer, he's showing here that he's interested not just in working at the company, but giving the company new ideas - being involved in how the company grows and where it grows.

Just like our first answer, he doesn't give a specific job; he says, "I could do any number of," meaning I could do many different "official roles in the company." A role, "role," here is the same as a position or a job or a function. So, he says I could do many different things, and then gives an example of a couple of possibilities: "managing a region" office - a regional office, "or heading" - being the leader "of one of the main offices."

He ends by saying that he has worked "all over the country," but he wants to come back to this city - to this town - because it's his hometown. This is an example of some personal information that he doesn't have to give the interviewer, but it helps him because it shows that he wants to stay in this city - he wants to stay living in this place, and that is going to be a positive thing for him in the interview because they'll think, "Oh, well, this person is serious. They want to stay here and that will make it more likely that they will stay in this company."

Now let's listen to this sample answer at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

At the end of five years, I intend to be a leading expert in the field of marketing, working with some of the largest accounts in the country. That's why I want to



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Interview Questions Answered – 4 “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

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I see being here at this company long term, not only to continue to build my expertise, but to influence the direction that this company will take in the next ten years. I could do this in any number of official roles in the company, such as managing a region or heading one of the main offices.

I've had the opportunity to work all over the country, but I consider this city my home. Working with Michmuney would allow me to come back to my hometown, where I'd plan to stay for a long time. I can't think of a better place to call my new professional home than Michmuney.

[End of sample answer]

That concludes episode four of "Interview Questions Answered."

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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

SUMMARY OF TIPS:

Your Goal: To show how your strengths match the needs of the job

- Know your strengths in three categories:
 - Knowledge-based skills – These are skills developed through education and experience, such as computer skills, university degrees, languages you speak, and technical ability.
 - Transferable Skills – These are skills that you can take from one job to another, such as being able to manage people well, being good at solving complex problems, being good at planning, and being a good communicator.
 - Personal Traits – These are qualities about you as a person, such as being dependable, being hard working, being flexible, and being outgoing.
- Review with the interviewer your strengths, which are already noted in your resume and cover letter.
- Give specific evidence or examples of how your strengths have helped you in the past.

Sample Answer 1:

As you can see from my resume, I've **taken advantage of** every opportunity to complete training to develop technical knowledge in this field. Now I'm considered an expert in the technologies that my current company is working on. Last year, when the company decided to expand in this area, the management selected me to head the new project.

To head this team effectively, I used my **planning skills** to make sure that the team was on task and on time, at all times. My **management skills** came in handy **to get the most** out of each person on the team. For instance, two of the team members came from competing departments. I work with both of them closely and entrusted them with the most important part of the project. This way, I was able to develop trust between these two team members. This resulted in producing excellent work, while forming one of the most **sought-after** partnerships in the company.



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

Because this was a new initiative, the nature of the job changed as the project developed. Another one of my strengths is that I’m flexible and I’m able to handle change in the company or in my job responsibilities. When I started on this project, we had four team members. By the end, we had 16. That means that I needed to go from working one-on-one with each team member to having **to delegate** responsibility as the project grew. This was possible because of the trust I had built up within the team and my ability **to shift gears** when the project changed over time.

Sample Answer 2:

One of my biggest strengths is my **communication skills**. In my current job, I work with people from all over the world and many different backgrounds. I’m able to understand that everyone has different perspectives about projects and work tasks.

One of our most recent hires comes from a developing country. It’s very tempting when talking about the latest technological developments to dismiss or at least ignore her perspective. However, as the head of the department, it was clear to me that this new employee brought a fresh perspective on why we needed to consider different options when deciding on the type of technology to adopt. Through **hard work** and **determination**, I was able to get the rest of the department to make important changes that moved us in the same direction as the project.

I was fortunate that I was able to develop these **analytical skills** when I was an undergraduate student at McQuillan University. The program I was in used case-based teaching so that we worked on solving real-life problems under real-life conditions. I graduated at the **top of my class**, and now, I make use of the skills I learned there everyday.

Other strengths:

- I have a positive **attitude**.
- I’m dependable and **punctual**.
- I’m able to **prioritize**.
- I believe in myself and have **self-confidence**.



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

- I’m able to handle failures and learn from my mistakes.
- I’m a **team player**.
- I have good **interpersonal skills**.

GLOSSARY

to take advantage of (something) – to use an opportunity as much as possible to one’s benefit

* Carlotta took advantage of the company’s free computer classes to train as a website designer.

planning skills – ability to plan; ability to make arrangements for events or projects in an organized way

* A wedding coordinator must have good planning skills to manage all of the small details for a successful event.

management skills – ability to manage; ability to control and guide a business, project, or team

* Thanks to his strong management skills, Jorge was able to save the project from failure.

to get the most – to get as much as possible; to get the maximum

* I think Michael got the most out of his study-abroad experience because he tried very hard to learn the language and to spend time with his host family.

sought-after – desired; wanted; something that others would like to have

* After many years of trying, he was finally able to get a bottle of the most sought-after wine from France.

to delegate – to give responsibility to someone else; to give someone else responsibility for something

* One person couldn’t do everything, so Yvonne delegated the sales calls to Roger and the billing to Nora.



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

to shift gears – to quickly and smoothly move from doing one thing to doing another

* They thought the investor wanted to hear about the company’s history, but when they realized that he wanted to hear about their current projects, they shifted gears and changed their presentation.

communication skills – ability to communicate; ability to write, speak, and present ideas clearly

* He is brilliant but his communication skills are horrible, so it is difficult for him to share his ideas with others.

hard work – strong physical or mental effort needed to do something

* Moving to a new house is hard work! It’s difficult to pack boxes and carry furniture all day.

determination – a mental decision to continue to do something that is difficult or frustrating

* We were amazed by the little boy’s determination to learn how to ride a bicycle. Even though he fell off of the bike over and over again, he never stopped trying.

analytical skills – ability to analyze something; ability to examine and understand something

* A financial analyst uses his or her analytical skills to understand a company’s past performance and likely future performance.

top of (one’s) class – the highest-ranking graduate of a school or program; the graduating student with the best grades

* Tracy received all A’s in high school and graduated at the top of her class. Naturally, she was accepted at several very good universities.

attitude – outlook; approach to life; the way that one thinks, feels, and behaves toward something else

* I don’t like spending time with Gina because her negative attitude about everything always makes me feel depressed.

punctual – on time; not late

* Why can’t you be more punctual? I have been waiting here for you for more than 40 minutes!



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

to prioritize – to put things in order of importance; to identify which things are more important than others

* Roland always prioritizes his wife and children over his work. He never works late at night because he wants to eat dinner with his family.

self-confidence – a belief in one’s own ability to succeed

* When I was at the school meeting, parents were told to praise their children to increase their self-confidence by saying, “Great work!” and “You’re a really good soccer player!”

team player – someone who works well with a group of people; someone good at sharing responsibility and work with others

* Tara is a good team player. She always supports the other people in her team and is willing to do extra work when needed.

interpersonal skills – ability to work well with other people; ability to interact well with other people

* Doctors need to have good interpersonal skills because it’s important that their patients feel comfortable talking to them.



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

ESLPod.com presents "Interview Questions Answered," episode five.

Hello, I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This series is designed to teach you the English you need to know to have a successful interview. We'll first listen to some tips on how to answer the question, and then we'll listen to and explain two sample answers for the question.

Our question in this episode is: "What are your strengths?" Let's begin by talking about some tips that will help you answer this question. Once again, this is a very typical question in a business interview, especially for a US business. They are going to ask you to tell them what your strengths are - what are some good things that you have.

Your goal, in answering the question, it is to try to emphasize strengths that you think are important for this particular job. So, you want to show that the good things that you have are matching the needs the company.

There are three kinds of strengths that you can talk about in this answer. One is what we would call knowledge-based skills, or specific skills that you've learned either in school or by working, through experience. This could include things such as computer skills, a university degree, being able to speak different languages, having some technical ability. This is all knowledge that you got from somewhere and that may be useful for this job for this new company.

A second kind of skills is more general, is what we would call transferable skills. Transferable comes from the word transfer, to move or to change from one situation to another. Transferable skills are skills that you can take with you to different jobs, things such as being able to manage people well, being a good leader - that's not something you study, but that is a skill that you can use in many different kinds of jobs - being able to solve difficult problems, perhaps being good at planning projects, being a good communicator - someone who can communicate or tell someone their ideas in a clear manner. All of these are what we would call transferable skills.

A third kind of strength you could have are personal strengths, or personal traits. A trait, "trait," is a characteristic - a quality of someone. Personal traits are



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

qualities about you, as a person. For example, you are dependable and reliable; if you say you're going to do something, you always do it. That's a personal trait. It isn't a skill, like learning how to program a computer or managing people in your job, it's something about you. But, it is important to be a good employee; it is an important skill to be a good employee. Another personal trait might be being flexible or being outgoing - someone who's an extrovert, who likes to talk to other people. These are all personal qualities. You have to think about all three of these areas: your knowledge-based skills, transferable skills and personal traits in thinking about how to answer this question.

A couple of other things that you want to do in this answer: one is to review, or go over again, some of your strengths that may be already in your resume and in your cover letter. A cover letter is a letter that you write to a company to say that you want to apply for a job. Your resume, of course, is a list of your experiences, your education and so forth. Even though you've mentioned things in your resume or in your cover letter, this is a good time to remind the interviewer or tell the interviewer about those strengths.

Finally, you want to be able to give specific evidence or examples of how these strengths that you are talking about have helped you in your job in the past. So, you don't want to say just "I'm dependable. I'm reliable," you want to say, "I'm reliable, for example," and then give an example of how that has helped you in your jobs in the past.

Let's take a listen to a sample answer. First, we'll listen at a slow speed, followed by an explanation of this answer. Here we go.

[Start of sample answer]

As you can see from my resume, I've taken advantage of every opportunity to complete training to develop technical knowledge in this field. Now I'm considered an expert in the technologies that my current company is working on. Last year, when the company decided to expand in this area, the management selected me to head the new project.

To head this team effectively, I used my planning skills to make sure that the team was on task and on time, at all times. My management skills came in handy to get the most out of each person on the team. For instance, two of the team members came from competing departments. I worked with both of them closely and entrusted them with the most important part of the project. This way, I was able to develop trust between these two team members. This resulted in



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

producing excellent work, while forming one of the most sought-after partnerships in the company.

Because this was a new initiative, the nature of the job changed as the project developed. Another one of my strengths is that I’m flexible and I’m able to handle change in the company or in my job responsibilities. When I started on this project, we had four team members. By the end, we had 16. That means that I needed to go from working one-on-one with each team member to having to delegate responsibility as the project grew. This was possible because of the trust I had built up within the team and my ability to shift gears when the project changed over time.

[End of sample answer]

Our first sample answer begins by the person saying, "As you can see from my resume," meaning if you look at what I have given you already, my list of qualifications, you can see that "I’ve taken advantage of every opportunity to complete training to develop technical knowledge in the field." She begins her answer by talking about her knowledge-based skills - the things that she has learned - that she has received training on, technical things she says she has "taking advantage of." To take advantage of something means to use an opportunity as much as possible - to get the maximum amount from an opportunity. In this case, the opportunity was to help her learn more about this particular type of job.

She says, "Now I’m considered an expert in the technologies that my current company is working on." She has special knowledge - special expertise for her job. Then she gives an example of how she has used this knowledge in her current job. She says, "Last year, when the company decided to expand in this area, the management selected me to head," or to lead, "the new project." So, she has knowledge and she’s used it in her job.

Then she goes on talk about some of her transferable skills, general skills that a good employee could use in a number of different jobs - in many different jobs. She says, "To head this team," or to lead this team, "effectively, I used my planning skills to make sure that the team was on task and on time, at all times." Planning skills are the ability to plan - to organize something. This is a transferable skill; you can say, "I have good planning skills" - I’m able to plan something.



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

She gave a specific example of how she used this skill in her job. She says she it's to keep her team - the group of people she was working with - "on task and on time." To be on task, "task," means to be doing what you are supposed to be doing. So, you'd be doing your job, not to listening to podcasts, but to do what the company pays you to do. So, remember that! On time means you are doing it before the deadline, during the time or by the time that you are supposed to have it completed.

She goes on to say that "My management skills came in handy to get the most out of each person on the team." Management skills are another kind of transferable skill that, in this case, means the ability to lead people - the ability to manage, the ability to organize and control and guide a team of people. She says they "came in handy," that's a expression which means they were convenient - they were useful to me, to come in handy, "handy." These "skills came in handy to get most out of each person." To get the most out of someone or something means to get the maximum benefit - to get as much as possible of something from someone or from a situation.

"For instance," and again, she gives a specific example, "two of the team members came from competing departments. I worked with both of them closely and entrusted them with the most important part of the project." So, she worked with these two people; she worked with them closely, meaning she worked with them very carefully over a long period of time - she was next to them or in communication with them for a lot of time - and she "entrusted them," meaning she gave them the responsibility for "the most important part of the project. This way," she says, "I was able to develop trust between these two team members." US companies are looking for people, often that can work together in a team and so this example is a very good one because she shows how she was able to help people work together in a team - she helped "develop trust." When you trust someone, you are confident in them - you believe them.

"This resulted," she says, "in producing excellent work, while forming one of the most sought-after partnerships in the company." When we say something is sought-after, "sought-after," we mean that it is very desirable - many people want it; it's something that other people want to have. The word sought is from the words seek, "seek," which means to look for or to search for something. Sought is the past participle of that verb, as well as the past tense of the verb.

The interviewee - the person being interviewed - continues by saying that "Because this was a new initiative," because what she is working on was something new for the company, "the nature of the job changed as the project



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

developed.” The nature of the job is what the job required - what you were supposed to do for the job.

The reason she mentions this is because she's going to now talk about another one of her strength; this time she's going to talk about a personal trait. She says, "Another one of my strengths is that I'm flexible and I'm able to handle change in the company or in my job responsibilities." To be flexible, you know, means to be able to adapt - to change yourself to a new situation. She's saying that she's flexible, and because of that - that personal trait - she's "able to handle," or take care of, "change in the company." It doesn't bother her. It doesn't create a problem for her; she's able to handle the change.

She said when they "started working on the project," they "had four team members" - four people working - "By the end," the project had 16 people. "That means," she says, that she "needed to go from working one-on-one with each team member" - individually - one-on-one - "to having to delegate responsibility as the project grew." To delegate, "delegate," means to give responsibility to someone else - to give someone else something to do. Because the team got so big, she had to, as the leader, "delegate responsibility." That "was possible," she says, "was possible because of the trust I had built up within the team." The trust that she built up means the trust that she developed - that she encouraged among the people on her team.

She also says that her "ability to shift gears when the project changed over time" also helped her. The expression to shift, "shift," gears, "gears," means to be able to change what you are doing, usually to change quickly and do something different. Maybe the project requires something different that you didn't expect; you need to change gears and do it differently - do something in a different way. This is a expression that, again, emphasizes her flexibility, one of her personal traits.

So, she gives knowledge, skills, transferable skills and personal traits, and examples of how all those strengths - those positive things - helped her in her job.

Now let's listen to this answer, this time at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

As you can see from my resume, I've taken advantage of every opportunity to complete training to develop technical knowledge in this field. Now I'm



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

considered an expert in the technologies that my current company is working on. Last year, when the company decided to expand in this area, the management selected me to head the new project.

To head this team effectively, I used my planning skills to make sure that the team was on task and on time, at all times. My management skills came in handy to get the most out of each person on the team. For instance, two of the team members came from competing departments. I worked with both of them closely and entrusted them with the most important part of the project. This way, I was able to develop trust between these two team members. This resulted in producing excellent work, while forming one of the most sought-after partnerships in the company.

Because this was a new initiative, the nature of the job changed as the project developed. Another one of my strengths is that I’m flexible and I’m able to handle change in the company or in my job responsibilities. When I started on this project, we had four team members. By the end, we had 16. That means that I needed to go from working one-on-one with each team member to having to delegate responsibility as the project grew. This was possible because of the trust I had built up within the team and my ability to shift gears when the project changed over time.

[End of sample answer]

Now we'll listened to another sample answer, followed by an explanation.

[Start of sample answer]

One of my biggest strengths is my communication skills. In my current job, I work with people from all over the world and many different backgrounds. I’m able to understand that everyone has different perspectives about projects and work tasks.

One of our most recent hires comes from a developing country. It’s very tempting when talking about the latest technological developments to dismiss or at least ignore her perspective. However, as the head of the department, it was clear to me that this new employee brought a fresh perspective on why we needed to consider different options when deciding on the type of technology to adopt. Through hard work and determination, I was able to get the rest of the department to make important changes that moved us in the same direction as the project.



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

I was fortunate that I was able to develop these analytical skills when I was an undergraduate student at McQuillan University. The program I was in used case-based teaching so that we worked on solving real-life problems under real-life conditions. I graduated at the top of my class, and now, I make use of the skills I learned there everyday.

[End of sample answer]

The second sample answer focuses mostly on transferable skills and personal characteristics. This is a good strategy - a good thing to do - if you are applying for a job where you don't have a lot of technical experience in that particular job, but you have transferable skills and personal traits that you think would help in that position.

He begins his answer by saying that one of his "biggest strengths is" his "communication skills." Someone who has good communication skills is good at talking with other people, of getting his ideas, or her ideas, across - being able to tell or communicate things to different kinds of people. So, he mentions that this is one of his strengths, that he's able to understand people with different perspectives - different ideas.

Then he gives an example of this. He is a type of manager - he's the head of department at the company where he works. This department got a new hire, or a new person that was hired to work at that company, "from a developing country," meaning a country that may not have a very big economy, or a very sophisticated or advanced economy. He says that it was "very tempting," or there was a possibility, that he would ignore the perspective or the ideas from this new person - from this new hire.

Instead however, he says that he understood "that this new employee" would bring "a fresh perspective." When we say someone will bring a fresh perspective, or a fresh idea, we mean that they're new - they're unique - they're creative. So, part of his communications skills was to talk to this person and understand that they had some good things - some new ideas - they could contribute.

He then mentions a couple of personal traits that helped him. He says, "Through hard work and determination, I was able to get the rest of the department to make important changes." Hard work is someone who is very serious about what they do, who make sure that they work a lot of hours or they work very



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Interview Questions Answered – 5
“What are your strengths?”

diligently - very seriously - on whatever it is that they are responsible for. So, hard work, or a lot of work, is one of his personal traits - it's something that he can do.

Determination is another personal trait. Determination, "determination," means to make a decision to continue doing something, even if it's difficult, even if it causes you problems. These are personal characteristics which he used to help change his department.

Finally, he says that he "was fortunate to be able to develop analytical skills when" he was a "student at McQuillan University," which of course, is one of the best universities in the United States. Analytical, "analytical," means the ability to analyze. Analytical come from analyze, meaning to examine - to understand something. This is, again, a transferable skill, although he talks about learning it at the University. He says, "The program" he "was in," that is the classes that he took that the University, use something called "case-based teaching," where they would work on real problems rather than just textbook problems.

He says that he "graduated at the top of" his "class, and now," he uses these skills - he makes use of them - in his everyday job. To graduate at the top of your class means to graduate as the best student - you were the best student in your school. Talking about your university performance is a kind of knowledge-based skill, and being at the top of the class, although it isn't a specific skill, shows that you have good training - you have good education.

Now let's listen to the answer again, this time read at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

One of my biggest strengths is my communication skills. In my current job, I work with people from all over the world and many different backgrounds. I'm able to understand that everyone has different perspectives about projects and work tasks.

One of our most recent hires comes from a developing country. It's very tempting when talking about the latest technological developments to dismiss or at least ignore her perspective. However, as the head of the department, it was clear to me that this new employee brought a fresh perspective on why we needed to consider different options when deciding on the type of technology to adopt. Through hard work and determination, I was able to get the rest of the



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Interview Questions Answered – 5 “What are your strengths?”

department to make important changes that moved us in the same direction as the project.

I was fortunate that I was able to develop these analytical skills when I was an undergraduate student at McQuillan University. The program I was in used case-based teaching so that we worked on solving real-life problems under real-life conditions. I graduated at the top of my class, and now, I make use of the skills I learned there everyday.

[End of sample answer]

That concludes "Interview Questions Answered," episode five.

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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

SUMMARY OF TIPS:

Your Goal: To name weaknesses that can be improved on and that may be an asset in the right circumstances

- Don't try to present a strength as a weakness, such as being a workaholic or being too detail-oriented.
- Keep the weakness a small one.
- Show how you are working to improve on your weakness.
- Give specific evidence or examples of how you're working to overcome your weakness.

Some options:

- Tell the interviewer about a weakness you have already overcome.
- Tell the interviewer about a mistake you made in the past to show that you can learn from your mistakes.
- Tell the interviewer about a weakness that does not relate to the duties of this job.

Sample Answer 1:

A weakness that I have is that I don't like to do **public speaking** and I get nervous when I have to give a presentation or a speech in front of other people. I realize that I won't need to do any public speaking in this job right now, but I want **to overcome** this fear so that **when the time comes**, I'll be prepared. It's important to me **to identify** any **shortcomings** that may affect my job performance or career advancement opportunities, and to do something about them.

To combat my fear of public speaking, I took a public speaking class at Litton College a few months ago, and after I finished the course, I joined a Toastmaster club. I have been going to the club meetings regularly where I give speeches in front of other members and I get **constructive criticism** about my performance.

I can say that in the past five months, I have become a better and more **confident** speaker. I think, however, I can be even better, and that's why I've continued to attend meetings and to look for opportunities **to put into practice** what I've learned. I'm confident that in a very short time, I'll be an even better and more effective speaker and presenter.



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

Sample Answer 2:

When I started my first job, I had trouble with **procrastination**. Even though I never missed a deadline, I found that procrastinating put me under unnecessary **stress**, and this hurt my enjoyment of the job. Fortunately, I realized the problem fairly quickly and did something about it.

The first thing I did was to talk to my colleagues about how they **managed their time** effectively. I learned that many of them used project management software, which I also began to use. This type of program allowed me to set deadlines and **benchmarks** for the different tasks I had to do, and gave me reminders about how far along I should be on a given task. This helped with my planning and has made me more organized overall. Now, I use this type of planning for all of my major job tasks, and procrastination is no longer a problem for me.

Other weaknesses and remedies:

- I sometimes **lose patience** when I attend long meetings. What I do now is I prepare myself mentally before each meeting to expect a certain amount of discussion. **Setting that expectation** in my mind helps me to be more patient and to be a better listener.
- Sometimes when I’m working on a big project, I focus too much on the details. So now, I always spend a few minutes at the end of each day sitting back and thinking about the general **scope** of my work. It forces me to keep priorities straight and helps me keep the right **mindset**.
- I used to have some problems with **organization**. Now, I keep a schedule book with me at all times throughout the day and that keeps me on track.

GLOSSARY

public speaking – speaking in front of an audience; giving a speech or a presentation

* When I was in college, I took a public speaking course so that I could learn to be more comfortable in front of an audience.



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

to overcome – to deal with or control something so that it is no longer a problem
* Becky wants to start traveling for work, but first she will have to overcome her fear of flying.

when the time comes – when something happens; at the appropriate time; at the right time
* Rosie has been saving her money for years, so when the time comes to buy a house, she will have enough money in the bank.

to identify – to recognize something or someone; to select the right thing or person
* Chuck pays a lot of attention to detail and he’s very good at identifying small mistakes in other people’s writing.

shortcoming – something about oneself that isn’t as good as it should be; something that is lacking in one’s abilities or experience; a fault; a defect
* One of her greatest shortcoming is that she’s always late. I don’t understand why she can’t get to meetings on time.

to combat – to fight and win; to overcome
* The United Nations has programs that are working to combat world hunger.

constructive criticism – negative feedback (comments) about one’s performance that is intended to help someone improve
* Can you please give me some constructive criticism about this design? Please don’t just say that “it’s fine,” because I want to know your honest opinion.

confident – believing that one can do something; convinced that one can do something
* During an interview, it is very important to be confident and let the interviewer know that you are the best candidate for the job.

to put into practice – to use information or knowledge in a real-life situation
* Diana took a class to learn how to help someone who isn’t breathing, but she has never had to put her knowledge into practice. Do you think she could really save someone’s life during an emergency?

procrastination – a tendency to delay doing things until the last minute; waiting until close to the deadline to complete something
* She’s always saying that she’ll start on that new project tomorrow. Her procrastination is really becoming a problem.



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

stress – worry about one’s personal or professional problems

* Be nice to Alison. She’s under a lot of stress at home because her mother is sick.

to manage (one’s) time – to schedule one’s activities so that one can finish everything that needs to be done

* If I learned to manage my time better, I wouldn’t have to study all night before an exam.

benchmark – a goal; a standard; the time or place when one’s performance and progress can be measured and evaluated against what is expected

* The company tests all of its new employees and uses the results as a benchmark for their performance on the same test the next year.

to lose patience – to become frustrated and lose control because of a delay or because something is happening too slowly

* Damian isn’t a good teacher because he often loses patience when his students ask him to repeat an explanation.

to set an expectation – to establish the type of behavior or performance that is acceptable

* Their boss sets high expectations for all of the employees in the office and doesn’t accept any complaints about the work being too difficult.

scope – the full or large range of ideas and tasks involved in something

* The publisher and the photographer signed a detailed contract that described the full scope of the work they would be doing.

mindset – a combination of attitudes and opinions about something

* The reason Derrick and I don’t get along is because he has a very traditional mindset, believing that women shouldn’t work outside of the home.

organization – the neat and logical arrangement of ideas or things; good arrangement of ideas so that they can be understood by others.

* Creating an outline helps many students improve the organization of their writing.



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

ESLPod.com presents "Interview Questions Answered," episode six.

Hello, I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

This series is designed to teach you the English you need to know to have a successful interview. We'll first listen to some tips on how to answer the question, and then we'll listen to and explain two sample answers for the question.

Our question in this episode is: "What are your weaknesses?" This is one of the more difficult questions to answer in an interview, and many people don't know what they should say.

Your goal in answering this question is to name a weakness - something that causes you problems that can be improved - something that you can make better. You also want to mention something that could be a positive thing in different circumstances.

Now, you don't want to try to mention a strength and say that it's a weakness. For example, you can't say, "Well, one of my weaknesses is I work too hard. I'm a workaholic" - I work too much. That is a strength, and your employer - the interviewer - will see that you're not really answering the question. So, don't try to use things that are strengths and call them weaknesses.

Instead, you want to keep the weakness a minor one, or a small one. Don't mention a big problem you have, mention a smaller weakness - a smaller part of you that needs to be improved upon. So for example, if like to show up late - come to work late every day - you don't want to say that's one of your weaknesses. Or, you like to steal from the company, definitely not something you want to say as one of your weaknesses, even if it is! Instead, you want to pick some things that are less important.

You also want to say how you can improve in this area of weakness - how you can make yourself better. In fact, you want to show that you are already making yourself better in terms of this weakness.

Finally, you want to give some specific evidence or examples of how you are working to overcome or to improve upon your weakness. You want to give them



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

an example of what you're doing to improve yourself - to improve this weakness that you have.

Here are some options in answering this question. First, you can tell the interviewer about a weakness that you have already improved - you have already overcome - you have already made better. So, you used to, for example, get nervous when you had to call someone on the telephone, but then you did something - you practiced, you talked to someone, you got some training - and now you don't have that weakness any more. So, you're telling them about a weakness, but you're also telling them about how you made it better.

Another option is to tell the interviewer about some mistake - some error that you made in the past to show how you learned from that mistake - how you learned from that error. So, you can say that you did something wrong in one of your previous jobs, but that you learned from that and that you became stronger. So, the mistake is the weakness, but you also show how you became better.

Finally, you can tell the interviewer about a weakness that doesn't relate directly to what you are going to be doing on this job. It doesn't relate to the duties or the things that you have to do for the job. So, it may be a weakness that's not related to the things you are expected to do in the job.

Let's listen to a couple of sample answers, and I think you'll have a better idea about how to answer this question: "What are your weaknesses?"

[Start of sample answer]

A weakness that I have is that I don't like to do public speaking and I get nervous when I have to give a presentation or a speech in front of other people. I realize that I won't need to do any public speaking in this job right now, but I want to overcome this fear so that when the time comes, I'll be prepared. It's important to me to identify any shortcomings that may affect my job performance or career advancement opportunities, and to do something about them.

To combat my fear of public speaking, I took a public speaking class at Litton College a few months ago, and after I finished the course, I joined a Toastmaster club. I have been going to the club meetings regularly where I give speeches in front of other members and I get constructive criticism about my performance.

I can say that in the past five months, I have become a better and more confident speaker. I think, however, I can be even better, and that's why I've continued to



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

attend meetings and to look for opportunities to put into practice what I've learned. I'm confident that in a very short time, I'll be an even better and more effective speaker and presenter.

[End of sample answer]

In our first sample answer, the person began her answer by saying that "A weakness that I have is that I don't like to do public speaking." Public speaking means standing up in front of other people and giving a talk - giving a presentation. This can be a weakness in many jobs where you're expected to give presentations to other people in your company or to other companies.

So, this is a weakness that she says that she has. She says she gets nervous when she has "to give a presentation or speech in front of other people." This is very common; many people get nervous. It's not a serious problem. She doesn't pick a big problem. More importantly, she talks about how she made herself better. She says, "I realize that I won't need to do any public speaking in this job right now," so that she selected a weakness that is not related to this job, but it's a general weakness when it comes to some companies.

She goes on to say that "I want to overcome this fear so that when the time comes, I'll be prepared." She's doing a couple of things here; first, she's talking about how she wants to overcome her fear. To overcome, "overcome," (one word) means to get over a problem - to control something so that it is no longer a problem for you. "I overcame my fear" means I'm no longer have that fear.

So, she wants to overcome her fear of public speaking "so that when the time comes," meaning when something happens, "when the right time comes," when she needs, in this case, to do public speaking, she'll be able to do it. So, she shows here not only that she wants to improve on her weakness; she also shows that she wants to do better and wants to have more skills for a potential future job.

She says that "It's important to me to identify any shortcomings that may affect my job performance." To identify means to recognize - to know - to select. The shortcomings that you have are the problems that you have. Shortcomings, "shortcomings," (all one word) are things that aren't as good as they should be, problems that you have to work on - to improve. She says that she wants to be able to know - to identify - these problems, and do something about them.



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

Now she's going to say how she is working on this problem. "To combat my fear of public speaking," she says, "I took a public speaking class at Litton College a few months ago." To combat, "combat," means to fight and win. Here, it means the same as to overcome. So to overcome, or "combat my fear, I took a class at Litton College. After I finished" this class - this "course, I joined a Toastmaster club." Toastmasters are groups of people who practice public speaking. Often, they are the business people who are nervous when they give public presentations, and so they have meetings. This is not part of the company; this is an outside of the company organization. They have meetings which they use to learn how to speak better in front of other people.

So, she goes to this Toastmaster club regularly. She goes to their meetings and she gives "speeches in front of the other members." After she gives her speech, she gets "constructive criticism" on her performance. Criticism is when someone tells you did something wrong. Constructive criticism, "constructive," is criticism that helps you. So, you can have criticism that doesn't help you, someone says, "Oh, you're terrible," that's not helpful criticism. If they say, "You're doing this wrong, and here's how you can get better," if they give you a way of improving that's called constructive criticism. So, the woman giving this answer says she gets constructive criticism, which helps her improve on her public speaking.

She ends by talking about how she has now mostly overcome this weakness; it's no longer a problem for her, mostly. She says, "I can say that in the past five months, I have become a better and more confident" public "speaker." To be confident means that you believe that you can do something. She says, "I think, however, I can be even better, and that's why I continued to attend meetings and to look for opportunities to put into practice what I've learned." So even though she's gotten better, she shows that she continues to want to improve herself, and so she keeps going - she continues going to these meetings.

She also says she looks "for opportunities to put" it "into practice," or "to put into practice what" she "learned." The expression to put something into practice means to use what you have learned, perhaps at school or at a training, and use it in a real-life situation - an actual situation.

She says that "I'm confident that in a very short time, I will be an even better and more effective speaker and presenter." So, notice how she took this weakness - getting nervous about talking in front of other people - and she described how she made herself better - she already is making herself better, and that she will continue to improve. She also selected a weakness that that is not directly connected with what she has to do on this job, so that's another smart strategy.



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

Now let's listen to the sample answer, this time at a native rate of speech.

[Start of sample answer]

A weakness that I have is that I don't like to do public speaking and I get nervous when I have to give a presentation or a speech in front of other people. I realize that I won't need to do any public speaking in this job right now, but I want to overcome this fear so that when the time comes, I'll be prepared. It's important to me to identify any shortcomings that may affect my job performance or career advancement opportunities, and to do something about them.

To combat my fear of public speaking, I took a public speaking class at Litton College a few months ago, and after I finished the course, I joined a Toastmaster club. I have been going to the club meetings regularly where I give speeches in front of other members and I get constructive criticism about my performance.

I can say that in the past five months, I have become a better and more confident speaker. I think, however, I can be even better, and that's why I've continued to attend meetings and to look for opportunities to put into practice what I've learned. I'm confident that in a very short time, I'll be an even better and more effective speaker and presenter.

[End of sample answer]

Now let's listen to another sample answer to the question: "What are your weaknesses?"

[Start of sample answer]

When I started my first job, I had trouble with procrastination. Even though I never missed a deadline, I found that procrastinating put me under unnecessary stress, and this hurt my enjoyment of the job. Fortunately, I realized the problem fairly quickly and did something about it.

The first thing I did was to talk to my colleagues about how they managed their time effectively. I learned that many of them used project management software, which I also began to use. This type of program allowed me to set deadlines and benchmarks for the different tasks I had to do, and gave me reminders about how far along I should be on a given task. This helped with my planning and has



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

made me more organized overall. Now, I use this type of planning for all of my major job tasks, and procrastination is no longer a problem for me.

[End of sample answer]

In the second sample answer, we see that the person has identified a weakness. In this case, it is with procrastination. Procrastination, "procrastination," means to delay doing something - to wait until it's almost too late before beginning on something. To wait too long before you start something; this is procrastination.

Now, procrastination is definitely a weakness - definitely something that might hurt you - but this person answered the question by saying that "Even though I" procrastinated - even though I used to wait too long to begin my projects, "I never missed a deadline." So, it was never a serious problem. He says instead, that it put him "under unnecessary," or unneeded, "stress." Stress, "stress," is the anxiety that you feel - the worry that you feel about problems, personal problems or professional problems.

So, even though this is a weakness, it's not a weakness that has hurt him in his job. It is, however, something that he has tried to fix - he has tried to make better. He says, "Fortunately, I realized the problem fairly quickly," meaning pretty quickly or very quickly, and I "did something about it."

The second part of his answer explains exactly what he did to get over this weakness. He says that he talked to his colleagues and asked them "how they manage their time effectively." To manage your time means to schedule your activities so that you can finish everything you're supposed to do. You put things in the right priority, that's part of managing your time.

He learned that many of his colleagues used something called "project management software," a computer program that helped them get their time organized and manage their time effectively. He explains that this project management software helped him "set deadlines and benchmarks for different tasks" he had to do. A benchmark is like a goal or an objective. It's a certain point in a project where you've completed part of it. So, you have a big project that takes ten weeks, you can divide it into smaller parts, and when you finish a certain part, you've reached a benchmark - you've finished an important part of your task - an important part of what you have to do.

Well, this software program helped him do that, and also gave him "reminders about how far along" he "should be," meaning how much progress he should



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Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

have made in order to still be on time, or on schedule. He says, "This helped with" his "planning and has made" him "more organized. Now," he says, he uses this type of project management software - "this type of planning for all of" his "job tasks, and procrastination is no longer a problem for me." So, this is a problem that he says he doesn't have anymore because he did something about it and he improved himself.

There are lots of other types of weaknesses that you can talk about. You might talk about how you sometimes lose your patience; that when someone is talking to you or someone is doing something, you become frustrated. If that's your weakness, then you have to say how you are getting better. You are setting expectations, you are thinking about things and establishing a kind of behavior that is acceptable so that you don't lose your patience.

You might also say that you have problems with organization - that you used to have, in the past, problems with organization, but now you have a schedule and something that helps you organize yourself better, and you're no longer seriously affected by this problem.

Now let's listen to the sample answer number two, this time at a normal speed.

[Start of sample answer]

When I started my first job, I had trouble with procrastination. Even though I never missed a deadline, I found that procrastinating put me under unnecessary stress, and this hurt my enjoyment of the job. Fortunately, I realized the problem fairly quickly and did something about it.

The first thing I did was to talk to my colleagues about how they managed their time effectively. I learned that many of them used project management software, which I also began to use. This type of program allowed me to set deadlines and benchmarks for the different tasks I had to do, and gave me reminders about how far along I should be on a given task. This helped with my planning and has made me more organized overall. Now, I use this type of planning for all of my major job tasks, and procrastination is no longer a problem for me.

[End of sample answer]

That concludes "Interview Questions Answered," episode six. We hope you enjoyed this series. Remember that each of our episodes has a complete Learning Guide, which contains all of the vocabulary and definitions, along with



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English as a Second Language Podcast

Interview Questions Answered – 6
“What are your weaknesses?”

additional information about the questions and a complete transcript of the episode.

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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening.

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