

The 10 Most Common Job Interview Questions And The Reasons You Should Not Use Them

By [Fernando M. Tarnogol](#)

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We've all employed them. Either because we were beginners and were accustomed to hearing them, so it was easy for us to use them in spite of a better technique to approach the interview. Or because that's the way we learned that a job interview must be conducted. Not only will they not help you make a decision, they can also hinder your ability to make it.

A job interview is like a first date.

The impression you make during the first 10 minutes will determine the rest of the night. The same thing happens when we interview candidates. This is the analogy made by Professor [Allen Huffcutt](#), who has studied job interviews for more than 20 years, when he was interviewed by Ori Brafman for his book "[Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior](#)".

First impressions are what matters. If the applicant fits a specific physical profile (which varies among cultures), if both parties can have a nice conversation, if we hear what we want or expect to hear; then we consider the interview a success and proceed to hiring the candidate. Malcolm Gladwell gives a perfect example of how we hire for reasons that have nothing to do with logic or reason in his bestseller book "[Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking](#)": Fortune 500 CEOs Are Mostly Tall People (check out [question](#) #4). Invisible, sometimes irrational behavior, often leads us to making regrettable decisions.

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» For boxed questions, boxed answers.

These are the 10 standard job interview questions compiled by Professor Huffcutt. They might have worked a couple of years ago. Nowadays they are just useless clichés.

1. Why should I hire you?
2. What do you see yourself doing 5 years from now?
3. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
4. How would you describe yourself?
5. What college subject did you like the best and least?
6. What do you know about our company?
7. Why did you decide to seek a job with our company?
8. Why did you leave your last job?
9. What do you want to earn five years from now?

10. What do you really want to do in life?

The questions center around specific themes.

First Group: 1, 3, 4

The first group of questions focuses on the applicant's self perception, in the most *naive* possible way. Would you answer "I usually get too drunk at night and end up being late for work" when asked about your weaknesses? No one mentally sane enough would.

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Let's continue. "How would you describe yourself?" **Let me guess, team player, proactive, goal oriented... we've all heard or said that before right?** What else do managers expect to hear after shooting that question? Answering "*I'm a professional slacker*" hasn't gotten anyone any jobs.

Why did you decide to seek a job with our company? "*Because I desperately need a job and anything that pays the bill will do*". I doubt you'd ever get that degree of honesty.

The same principle applies for question 1. These questions that aim to get [from the applicant] information about the applicant have no predictive value whatsoever. **It's the same as asking a salesman what they think of their product.**

Second Group: 2, 9, 10

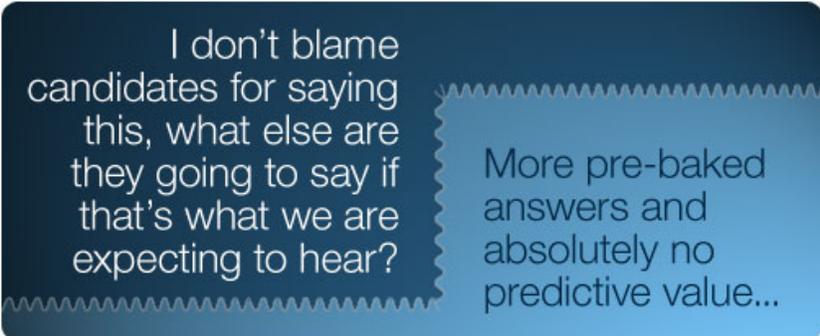
These questions are the ones commonly considered to have the most predictive value. For instance, let me predict the answer for question 9, how the candidate sees himself in 5 years: "*in 5 years I'd like to move up the chain,*" "*I want to become a valuable member of this organization,*" "*I want to help people,*" you get the picture.

I don't blame candidates for saying this, what else are they going to say if that's what we are expecting to hear? More pre-baked answers and absolutely no predictive value, even when these questions are aimed to predict future performance and aspirations.

The Odd One Out

Most managers make their decision, and tag candidates, during the first 10 minutes of the interview. The rest of it is just to confirm our first judgment, and unless the candidate drops a bomb that makes us open our eyes, both parties would have lost 40 minutes of their lives by the time the interview ends.

The question that still stands is number 6, "*what do you know about our company?*" since it probes the candidate's interest in the job and how much he has researched and taken the initiative. Still, it's not the best of the questions but could give you a nudge in the right direction.



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Difficulties Don't End Here

There's another drawback for hiring managers. Managers usually have very limited time to screen an applicant. So unless HR had previously done psych evaluations, that one interview is all you got.

Every one of us thinks that we are very capable to discern the perfect candidate from someone who does not fit the position at all, until one day we find ourselves asking *what were we thinking before we hired that person*. If you haven't gone through this stage, you definitely haven't interviewed enough people, so know this: it-will-happen.

We get swayed by factors usually beyond our rational control, and it's ok, we are entitled to errors. **The idea is to avoid those questions that throw us away from assessing the candidate objectively**, or as much as we can.

What to Do

Focus on situational questions that could enable the person to narrate a concrete event and describe his decision making process. Use hypothetical situations that would force the candidate to imagine that scenario and come up with a solution. Use behavioral interview questions tailored for the position you are hiring. Use some of [these unconventional interview questions](#) and avoid, at all costs, judging or labeling a candidate until the interview is over.

Wait for an hour until the first impression blends in with the rest of the interview and then start thinking what you want to do.

About the Author



Fernando Tarnogol is an Argentinean psychologist who lives in Pennsylvania, USA. His experience includes working for Microsoft, HSBC Bank Argentina in Human Resources and several mental health facilities performing clinical work . In 2008 he was recruited in Argentina by the Devereux Foundation, the biggest mental health care provider in the USA as a residential counselor and then subsequently changed positions into coordinating and managing some of the foundation's programs. Check out his site <http://fernandotarnogol.com/>.