

How Do You Answer Difficult Questions in an Interview?

You have held 5 jobs in the last 10 years and now you are looking for a job again. How do I know you will stay with our company if I hired you?

When do you plan on getting married?

How old are you?

There are **legal**, **improper**, and **illegal** questions that may be asked during an interview. The first example is a fair question and employer might ask during an interview based on the information you provided in a resume. The second question is an improper question that is too personal and borders on illegal. The third question is illegal. If you are not prepared to deal with all three varieties of questions with confidence, then you stand a good chance you may not be ready for the job-winning interview that you are hoping for.

When preparing for an interview, it's important to be ready to answer queries that may be inappropriate or illegal as well as uncomfortable. Most of the time it is small business interviewers who inadvertently ask personal or nosy questions or violate the law by asking about:

- Race
- Sex
- Religion
- Disability
- Marital status
- Children
- Religion
- Age

Large companies with professional practiced interviewers are usually better trained in the law and know what can and cannot be fairly asked during an interview.

On the other hand, a practiced interviewer can look at your resume and find the **employment gaps, layoffs, job turnovers, lack of job experience** as new college graduate and so on. The interviewer can also guess your age based on your employment history. So you need to be ready to gracefully and confidently address any and all questions that may come up so you don't feel unsure and wish afterwards that you had answered the question differently.

Staying in Bounds

Before heading for your interview, it's important to consider how you will respond if asked a question that is clearly out of bounds. Many times the improper question actually border on illegal. For example, it is against the law to discriminate based on religion. An employer may not ask you what religion you practice but might ask, *"What religious holidays do you celebrate?"*

An employer cannot ask you what year you graduated from high school, where you were born, if you are pregnant, if you are gay, if you have ever been arrested, what politics you follow, or if you have a disability. Questions phrased in any way that will provide this type of information is illegal because it can be used in a discriminatory manner.

So how do you deflect these types of questions? You should always couch your answers in terms of the job. For example, you might say, “*Mr. Interviewer, if you are concerned that my personal issues may prevent me from doing my job then I want to reassure you that I am a committed employee who will do what is necessary to get the work completed professionally and accurately. Let me tell you about my skills and abilities.*” This response alerts the interviewer to the fact questions that are too personal have been asked and you would like to focus on the position and your qualifications that make you uniquely suitable for the job.

Fair Game Questions

Of course, difficult questions that can be asked in an interview may be legitimate. For example, you have been laid off three times through no fault of your own, but the information looks awful on your resume. If you prepared your resume correctly, each layoff circumstance is briefly explained. But the interviewer may ask you why you are continually chosen to be one of the employees laid off.

You should be prepared to explain the circumstances in more detail while pointing to any positives that you gained from the jobs. You can steer the conversation toward work experience, perfect attendance, large severance package (indicating the company really was happy with your work), business connections made and specific achievements.

Stay in Control of Your Answers

It really doesn't matter if the question is illegal or uncomfortable. You must give some type of answer even if it is, “*I prefer not to discuss personal matters.*” To get past these difficult moments, keep the following in mind:

- Be prepared
- Always be tactful
- Avoid answering aggressively
- Give the interviewer the benefit of the doubt
- Don't overreact or get indignant
- Give professional sounding answers proving you can respond while under fire
- Turn the questions into opportunities to point out your competencies

It is important to keep in mind that you will have time to consider whether you even want to accept a job if offered one. Answer the questions you are comfortable answering and work to put yourself in a position where you are able to say **yes** or **no** to a job offer.

In the rare instance where an interviewer crosses the line and becomes offensive or doesn't seem to care if he or she is violating the **Affirmative Action Law**, you have a choice. You can simply finish the interview while remaining professional or you can end the interview and leave. No one has to sit through an interview he or she does not want to be in anymore.

Interviews seldom go perfectly. The key is to anticipate the reasonable questions and prepare for the difficult and even illegal ones. In this way you don't have to worry about being unpleasantly surprised.

Regal Resumes has services that can help you prepare for an interview whether it is in-person or on the telephone. See our services page for more information about how we can assist you in this process.