

How to Answer “Bad” Interview Questions With “Good” Answers

by Carole Martin | September 30, 2012

If you've prepared for the interview you more than likely spent all of your time preparing to answer “positive questions” – demonstrating how good you are and what you can offer this position. You are not prepared to talk about your failures or times when you were challenged by difficult situations. So what do you do when you encounter a “curve ball?”

You deal with it in a positive manner.

Here is an example of a question that could be asked by an interviewer who is seeking negative information and how to deal with it.

Question – “Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with someone at work and how you resolved it.”

Answer – “I usually get along very well with everyone.”

Wrong Answer – The most important reason that this is a “poor answer” is that it doesn't answer the question: “Tell me about a time when....” The interviewer is seeking an example of a time when you had a dealt with a difficult situation or person and how you handled yourself. (communication/relating to others)

Here is a good example of how to answer the question in a more confident and informative manner:

There was an incident that happened with a person who was not pulling his weight on the team and it was affecting morale. All the team members were getting disgruntled but nobody was doing anything about it. His name was “Todd” and he was an older worker who had been with the company for many years.

I took it upon myself to have a talk with Todd when the opportunity presented itself. It didn't start out smoothly – he was defensive at first and resented my speaking to him about his work behavior. He started telling me I should mind my own business. I stayed very calm and spoke in a moderate voice. I was careful to let him know that I wasn't judging him but rather was concerned about the team and the ability for everyone to get along. He began to calm down and started telling me about the challenges he was facing.

He confided in me that he had some family problems at home that were affecting his energy level and patience. I listened attentively while he told me about his problems.

Once he became aware that his behavior was affecting other's work he made a special effort to be more open and receptive. The team spirit improved greatly after that – as well as the productivity.

My boss made a point to tell me how much she appreciated my intervention before she had to step in to take disciplinary action. Todd also thanked me for speaking to him.

This answer deals with the question in a positive, assertive manner. Taking the initiative is a good trait to demonstrate with your stories – “I took it upon myself....”

You can see that there is a good deal of positive information that can be emphasized in an answer – even if it is an example of a time when things were negative.

You have shown the interviewer how you resolve an issue with another person.

Turning negatives into positives is an important skill to learn. When you are asked a “bad” or negative question, take a minute to turn the answer around refocusing the answer to include some positive qualities.

The Interview Coach, Carole Martin, is a celebrated author, job coach, and speaker on the subject of interviewing and recruiting. A contributing writer at Monster.com and featured on talk radio, Carole is using her proven methods for coaching job-seekers on competitive interviewing skills in technical and non-technical industries. Visit the Interview Coach site at www.interviewcoach.com, and follow The Interview Coach on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn by visiting her blog to learn about current workshops and seminars Carole is offering.

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