

What Are They Really Asking?

Get the Job in the Entertainment Industry by Kristina Tollefson

To know you are telling the best story to address an interview question, you must know what the interviewer is actually asking with each question and what kind of information is going to satisfy and impress them. Most people who conduct interviews do not actually have any training in interviewing people and just make it up based on their own past interview experiences so they don't always ask questions that will get them the information they are really looking for. It is important for you to figure out the question behind the question. Remain focused on giving your potential employer information that will be helpful to them.

- So, tell me a little about yourself.
 - This will likely be the first question in 90% of your interviews. The biggest thing the interviewer wants to do is just start the conversation, but, your answer provides a first impression of sorts and sets the tone for the rest of the interview. They don't want to hear about being a tree in the 3rd grade school play. They are evaluating what you emphasize and find important enough to include in your introduction. You can use a version of your elevator pitch to answer this question.
- What do you like to do in your free time?
 - This question is trying to find out if you have activities and interests outside of work both in terms of personality, and also in terms of stress relief and self-care activities.
- What do you see yourself doing 5 years from now?
 - The subtext of this question is, have you thought about how you want your career to progress? Does this job make sense for you based on your longer term goals? Are you likely to lose interest in this job or move on quickly?
- Why are you interested in this position?
 - Is this really a job you are interested in or was this one of the dozens of applications you sent out just fishing for anything? What do you think you would like about working at this company?
- What do you like the most about your current position?
 - This answer can be used to evaluate if the things you are currently loving will also be part of this job. If so then you are likely to be happy in this position. If not it gives the employer the opportunity to find ways to insert more of what you love into the position if you are offered the job.
- What is the most challenging aspect of your current position? Or What do you hate about your current position?
 - This question is getting at a few different pieces of information. First, what do you consider challenging and how do you handle those challenges? If what you highlight as a challenge is something rather inconsequential the employer will question your skill level. If the way you describe how you handle that challenge does not meet with their standards or expectations then that could raise a concern as well. Another aspect to this question is finding out if you will be appropriately challenged by the job they have available and if you would even end up enjoying it.
- What aspect of (insert what you do) do you hate/What aspect of this job appeals to you least?

- The employer knows what the job entails. If you hate the very thing they know you are going to have to spend a lot of time doing, they may decide that you aren't going to be happy with the position or you won't do it very well. . That doesn't mean you should be vague or wishy washy about the things you don't like to do. Remember that not getting a job is sometimes a gift especially if it would have made you miserable.
- How do you work under pressure?
 - Ultimately, the employer wants to know how you handle stress and what they can expect from you when you encounter a stressful situation. Offer an example of how you handled a high pressure situation. This can also be used to evaluate what you consider high stress. If you struggle with the little things, what is going to happen when you face a larger challenge?
- What do you consider your strengths for the kind of position you are looking for?
 - First: what do you consider your strengths and are those the types of strengths they are looking for. They are also evaluating whether you have an understanding of the position and what the appropriate strengths are for the position. If you are applying for a stitcher position and you name one of your strengths as pattern making, or if you are applying as a moving light technician and you mention your sound design work as a strength, the employer may question if you have a good understanding and the right experience for the position.
- What do you think your weaknesses would be for this position / the kind of position you are looking for?
 - The employer wants to know if you can be honest about what your weaknesses are and how you handle your weaknesses on the job. They aren't just interested in a list. They want you to put your weaknesses in context. So be straightforward with what you think your weaknesses are and then be sure to talk about how you compensate for these weaknesses and end your answer on a positive note.
- Describe a situation where you made a big mistake on the job.?
 - Everyone makes mistakes, including the person interviewing you! Do not pretend to be perfect. That's a sure way for the interviewer to begin to question your honesty. You want to tell a story about a mistake but end on a positive note about how you fixed it and how you have changed your process so that you don't make that same mistake again.
- Tell me about the last time you lost your cool.
 - Just because they asked about the last time does not mean you are obligated to use the actual last time in your answer. Just as everyone makes mistakes, everyone has to deal with powerful emotions that can impact their behavior. What do you do to make sure that you don't behave in a way that is inappropriate in the workplace? What are your coping mechanisms? Remember to end on a positive note.
- Describe the worst boss you have ever worked with.
 - NEVER put anyone down in an interview—or ever. Some people will test you even harder on this point and mention someone you have worked with and say something negative about them trying to see if you will take the bait. Don't do it. Use this as an opportunity to talk about challenges you have faced with supervisors (generically) in the past and how you appropriately handled

- them. Employers know that if you are willing to badmouth your previous employer then it is likely you will do the same to them when you move on to your next job.
- Describe the types of people you have trouble getting along with.
 - This information will help the interviewer know if you might have trouble with any of the people you would be working with in this position. You should also be sure you end on a positive note to demonstrate that you can build a positive working relationship with these people even though you find them difficult.
 - Tell me about your approach to organization and time management.
 - They don't actually care all that much how you keep organized and manage your tasks, but they do want to know that you have an actual plan and system in place. They also want to evaluate if the system you describe sounds like a good fit for the types of projects you will be taking on.
 - Tell me about the last time you made a good decision.
 - Remember, if they ask you a "last time" question you are not compelled to use the actual last time as your example. Choose something recent that is the best example that demonstrates your decision making skills. The employer will use this question to evaluate whether your perception of a good decision matches theirs and if the experience you decide to talk about is at the complexity level likely required for the job.
 - Have you ever missed a deadline or failed to complete a project on time? Tell me about a situation when you failed to complete a project on time/missed a deadline.
 - This has happened to everyone at least once. They want to know what they can expect from you if you are headed towards a missed deadline. Are you going to cover up your mistakes or are you going to provide them with open communication before the deadline is missed? They will want to know what you have changed in your process to be sure that you don't make the same mistakes that led to that missed deadline.
 - Have you ever gone over budget?
 - Ultimately what the employer wants to know is what you are going to do if you are managing a budget for them and you don't have enough to complete the work. Are you going to keep spending and let them know once you are already over budget or will you come to them early on to alert them of the problem? Do you go over budget regularly? What did you learn from going over budget? Do you have an established system in place for tracking your expenditures?
 - Why are you looking for a job / Why are you leaving your current position?
 - They want to figure out if you are escaping a bad work situation, have been fired, have reached your growth potential in your current position and want a challenge, are changing industries or career paths, want to make more money, are relocating, or have some other reason for looking for a new job. If there is something about the old job you don't like, they also want to make sure that you are not walking into the same things at this job because it would be less likely that you would stay in the position long term.
 - What unique experience or qualifications separate you from other candidates?
 - They are assuming that everyone they are interviewing has the same general skills. They are wondering what additional benefit they would have if they hired you over someone else. Do you have advanced training in something, do you use unique software, do you have a long work history doing this type of work, do you

- have certifications? They are also testing your level of understanding of the position. If you list things that are just part of the base level skills for this type of position that will tell them you may not be ready for this level of work.
- What would your former boss/colleagues say about you?
 - Are you self aware enough to know what the people you work with think of you and your work? What characteristics are you going to highlight? Will your references also highlight these same qualities? If any of the qualities are negative, how do you address them so that you can end on a positive note.
 - Describe a situation when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. Or, How do you handle stress?
 - They want to know if you get stressed out whether you already have established healthy coping mechanisms or if they need to be concerned that you will explode. Everyone experiences stress so don't pretend it doesn't happen to you or they will know you are not being honest.
 - Give an example of a situation when you had to be quick to come to a decision.
 - What are your decision making skills and have you had experience having to make important decisions? What is your train of thought when under pressure to make a decision and can they trust your decision making process?
 - Tell me about a time that you made a decision that you thought was a good decision at the time but turned out not to be.
 - Are you able to explain your thought process and decision making about why you made the decision you did and then reflect on why a different decision would have been better. Were you able to learn from this experience and not do it again?
 - Give me an example of a large project or task you had to complete and tell me about your progress completing it.
 - Do you have the ability to plan out large projects step by step and follow your plan through to completion? If you encountered trouble along the way, how did you resolve that so you could continue moving forward? Is the project you decide to talk about actually large?
 - Tell me about a time when you saw something that needed to be done and you stepped up and took responsibility for getting it done?
 - Are you paying attention to what is going on around you and able to see what needs to be done and, will you be a self starter who will step in and help when needed or do you need to always be told what to do?
 - What is your greatest achievement? Or What project or task would you consider your most significant accomplishment so far? This should be a work related example.
 - The employer is finding out what you think a great accomplishment is and evaluating your judgement. This also helps them to know the level of your experience. If your greatest achievement was stitching together a skirt then you might not be ready to work as a First Hand. On the other hand if your most significant accomplishment was calling a large musical with automated scenery and a cast of 40 then you might be a great candidate for a Production Stage Manager position.
 - Describe a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with someone at work who was very angry with you.

- How do you deal with conflict? Were you able to evaluate the situation and determine whether you were at fault? If you were at fault how did you resolve it so you could continue working together. If you were not at fault how did you handle it?
- What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives?
 - Does this job make sense as a step toward your goals? Do you have goals?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
 - Do you understand what the typical job ladder is for your career goal and how this job fits into your planned path? Do you have a workable plan for your career that makes sense and demonstrates a knowledge of the industry? If you think you are going to move from an entry level position right into a supervisory role, you may not actually understand how the industry works.
- Why should I hire you?
 - Do you have the self awareness and self confidence to make a pitch for why you are good at what you do and have you thought about what you would be able to contribute in this role?
- How do you deal with difficult people?
 - Describe a specific situation in which you had to work with a difficult person (another student, co-worker, customer, supervisor, etc.) and don't just generically describe how you deal with people.
- In what ways have your college experiences prepared you for a career?
 - Are you able to see the value in the classes you took? Are you able to synthesize what you learned and explain how you will apply your coursework to the job?
- Why are you interested in this segment of the entertainment industry?
 - Are you interested for the right reasons? Do you have reasonable expectations of what working in this part of the industry is like?
- Describe a contribution you have made to a project on which you worked.
 - Do you work well with a team? Are you a collaborator who can offer ideas and also work with other people's ideas? Are you passive in group activities? Do you lead, or do you follow?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
 - Have you researched or asked about our needs and what we need this person to be able to do for us? Have you listened closely and figured out other ways you can contribute other than the obvious? Do you have a special characteristic that the other applicants likely don't have?
- What qualities should a successful manager or leader possess?
 - Do you have reasonable expectations of those for whom you will work? Do you have a reasonable point of view regarding the role of a supervisor and do you say the right things to give confidence that you will either respect the leadership chain or, depending on the position, that you will lead in a way that is supportive of the company culture?
- Tell me about an occasion when you disagreed with a supervisor's decision or policy.
 - When you get mad at your boss, how are you going to handle it? Are you going to storm off? Are you going to backstab or gossip? Are you going to handle it professionally? Do you understand which decisions would necessitate going over their head and which decisions you should follow?
- If you could do so, how would you plan your academic studies differently?

- The gift of age and experience offers us the opportunity to realize where we could have made better decisions. This provides the employer an opportunity to see if you have gained any wisdom and humility about the mistakes you made or the opportunities you overlooked.
- What two or three things would be most important to you in your job?
 - This question helps them check to make sure that this job will be able to provide you with at least one of the things that are your priorities. If this job doesn't align with your priorities you are unlikely to take the job and if you take it you are even more unlikely to stay.
- What are your thoughts about relocating?
 - If they know this job will require you to move they want to make sure that that is something you are willing to do. No use offering you the job if you don't want to live where the job is. You do not need to discuss your family situation, just address the question.
- Are you willing to travel?
 - If the employer knows that travel will be involved in this position they need to make sure that travel will be a positive aspect of the position for you and that you are agreeable to the amount of travel that will be required.
- If you didn't work in theatre or entertainment what would you do?
 - Do you have other interests? Have you explored other possibilities to know that you are committed to the challenge that a life in the arts brings with it?
- Why _____ (costumes, lighting, SM, etc.)?
 - They want to know what you enjoy about what you do and why you want to keep doing it. Understanding how you got into what you do helps them get to know you and your thought process.
- Describe your process of _____. (SM, design, a new project, etc.)
 - Depending on the job you are applying for, this question could be to make sure you understand the standard process at an entry level. If for a more advanced level they will be looking for clues as to what innovations or advanced skills you incorporate into what you do. And, does this all make sense with the way the company already does things.
- How do you use technology to accomplish your work?
 - Are you trained to use the technology they will need you to use, will it take you time to learn what you need to know, or are you a luddite that still does everything by hand? This is an opportunity to mention the types of technology you use that would be considered standard as well as any specialty technology that you use or would like to use.
- What new technology are you especially excited about?
 - This question is checking to see if you keep up with the latest developments in the industry. Are you reading the trade magazines? Are you attending conferences and industry gatherings? If you don't know of any new technology in your field this could be a sign that your experience is stale or that you aren't into moving forward with the industry.
- Have you used XYZ equipment or software?
 - Do you already know how to use the things that they use or would they need to provide you with training? Do you have a history of being able to teach yourself or

- learning new equipment or software quickly? Have you used something similar which will make your transition easier?
- What are your salary requirements?
 - This is absolutely a question you need to be prepared to answer and there is a lot of strategy involved. Are your salary expectations reasonable? Can they get away with paying you less than they are willing to pay? Review the negotiation and setting your fees sections for more information.
 - Is there something you would like to tell me that I have failed to ask?
 - Reference the list of things you wrote down ahead of time that you wanted to make sure to get across or stories you knew you had to tell, and share with them anything that you didn't have a chance to address earlier in the interview. This gives you a chance to make sure they have the information they need but neglected to ask about.