

# Sample Answers to Interview Questions

*Get the Job in the Entertainment Industry* by Kristina Tollefson

- What do you like to do in your free time?
  - I enjoy swing dancing, taking care of my African cichlid fish tank, have recently started a garden and I love talking about all three of those things!
- Why \_\_\_\_\_ (costumes, lighting, SM, etc.)?
  - I love contributing to the production process as a stage manager using my strong skills in problem solving, communication, and leadership to guide the show from conception to opening and performances. I love to support others and help them succeed.
- Why are you interested in this position?
  - I want to work somewhere that will allow me to collaborate on artistic, high-quality productions - I believe your company produces such art. I can also see that you are truly concerned about your employees' well-being, and that you take care of them.
- What aspect of (insert what you do) do you hate or appeals to you least?
  - I don't love meetings. I would rather be in the shop building things. I am glad to be at the table when there are questions I can answer or information I can provide that will support someone else's process though, so I do see their value and the value in my being there.
- What do you consider your strengths for the kind of position you are looking for?
  - I am not only a competent electrician and lighting mechanic, I am also a strong, organized leader, with the ability to communicate with a variety of skill levels.
- What do you think your weaknesses would be for this position / the kind of position you are looking for?
  - I have a lot of trouble conceptualizing in 3 dimensions which is definitely a challenge working in the scene shop. Because I am aware of this weakness I ask a lot of questions and study the plans intensely and always double check my work. I have been able to avoid any major mistakes with this system.
- What unique experience or qualifications separate you from other candidates?
  - I have the experience of working on many different aspects of costuming from patterning to stitching as well as milliner and costume craftsperson. I have been able to build with many different materials, techniques, and fabrics. My skills and experience go beyond the walls of the costume shop. I am just as comfortable working with a MIG welder as I am a sewing machine.
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
  - I have lighting experience in theatre, dance, and television as well as a background in music. I have a lot of perspectives I can use to approach a project to achieve the best result. Beyond that I am a hard worker and really enjoy the work and hope my enthusiasm rubs off on others.

- What two or three things would be most important to you in your job?
  - Safety is always number one. Beyond that I want to enjoy working with the other people on the team, have a clear understanding of what is expected of me, and receive fair compensation.
- What are your thoughts about relocating?
  - Relocating long term would be a challenge for me. I am open to discussing it, though I would need more details and time to organize my life before I could make a commitment to relocate.
- Are you willing to travel?
  - I think traveling for work sounds like a lot of fun. I would love to learn more about the projects that might take me out of town.
- What do you like the most about your current position?
  - The thing I like most about my current position is that I get to problem solve and experiment with new materials. I also love the atmosphere of my shop and the quality of our shows.
- What is the most challenging aspect of your current position? Or What do you hate about your current position?
  - Designing with a limited inventory is very challenging, though my current position has required I get much better at it! We frequently do very large-scale shows with a not-so-large-scale lighting inventory which requires being very creative with which lights to use where. This has made me a better designer because I must be very specific from the beginning. I can't just put a bunch of stuff in the air and figure it out later.
- Why are you looking for a job / Why are you leaving your current position?
  - I have enjoyed my five years in my current position and it is time to move on to a new adventure.
- What would your former boss/colleagues say about you?
  - My past bosses and colleagues have said that I have a great, calm personality and a strong work ethic. They keep asking me to come back so I think that speaks highly of their opinion of me and my work. I think they would also recognize the growth I have experienced over the last several years.
- What do you see yourself doing 5 years from now?
  - In 5 years I would like to be in a staff position and not relying on freelance work as much.
- How do you work under pressure?
  - Calling a show brings with it very high-pressure situations when things go wrong. I got to shadow a Broadway tour that came through town. I got to sit on headset during the show and a board op made an obvious error. The stage manager looked at me and said "She knows she made a mistake and I know if I bring it up during the show it will take everyone out of the moment and only assure more mistakes to

- follow. You have to learn to let go.” When I find myself becoming frustrated, I remember that moment and those words and they really do help.
- Describe a situation where you made a big mistake on the job?
    - Working as an ASM on a very large musical, I became complacent when it came to checking my pre-show checklist because I had done it so many times that I thought I had it all memorized. Well, I hadn’t and I forgot to set several props. That experience taught me that no matter how much I think I remember I must always check the paperwork. I took responsibility for my mistake and assured everyone on the team that I would not make that mistake again.
  - Describe the worst boss you have ever worked with.
    - I worked with a director who did not treat the actors very kindly. After sitting by as the director berated cast members and told them they were not working hard enough, after rehearsal I checked in with each of them. I learned a lot from that situation because I didn’t feel I had the power to speak out against that kind of behavior and I now know that there was nothing about that situation that was acceptable, and now I will always speak up when I see people being abused.
  - Describe the types of people you have trouble getting along with.
    - I would like to think of myself as very easy going, and I usually never have a problem getting along with people. I do get frustrated by people who lie or take shortcuts when they have plenty of time to complete a job correctly.
  - Tell me about your approach to organization and time management.
    - My first step is to set realistic goals. I can’t fit two hours of work in one hour’s time, but I can maximize my work to get the full hour to function at high capacity. Organization comes easy to me and digitizing as much of my process as possible allows me to access the information I need very quickly.
  - Tell me about the last time you made a good decision.
    - Being proactive about paperwork is probably my most recent really good decision. As an assistant, I do a lot of paperwork and I have learned what paperwork is going to be needed even if I haven’t been asked for it. I was able to make my designer’s job much easier recently by providing this paperwork before they even knew they needed it.
  - Tell me about missing deadlines. / Have you ever missed a deadline?
    - I haven’t ever missed a deadline professionally but that isn’t to say that I have accomplished every step without any problems. Before I start a project I map out how much time I think each step is going to take. This means that as I go through the process I know how I am doing with my overall time budget and if I start to fall behind my timeline I can address the problems at that stage before things are too far behind. I always keep my supervisor up to date on my progress and any setbacks I encounter so that we can work together to be sure that our ultimate deadline is met.

- Have you ever gone over budget?
  - I have never been over budget. I do plan a 10-15% contingency into every budget so I know I have something to cover emergencies. If I ever were in danger of going over budget I would inform the production manager or my supervisor right away and go through the purchase lists again to see where cuts or substitutions could be made. Sometimes that discussion will have to take place with the director if it means deviating from the original design. I would never go over budget without everyone being aware of the problem and getting permission ahead of time.
- Describe a situation when you were faced with problems or stresses at work that tested your coping skills. Or, How do you handle stress?
  - I was Wardrobe Head during a summer stock season. One performance, everything that could have possibly gone wrong costume-wise went wrong. We had to scramble to get things back in working order for act 2. I had the crew gather all the costumes that needed attention and assigned tasks to each of my crew members and myself. I contacted stage management and made them aware of the situation, and made a plan to hold the house in case we needed any additional time. Miraculously we were able to make all of the repairs needed in time for the performers to dress and go back on stage for act 2. In short term, high stress situations like this I focus on the facts and block out the emotions and am able to strategize quickly.
- Give an example of a situation when you had to be quick to come to a decision.
  - During the first week of performances for a large musical I was stage managing, a crew member quit two hours before curtain. I had to decide very quickly if I was going to reassign their responsibilities to existing crew members or get a replacement who wouldn't know the show at all. Because I had very detailed paperwork and the remaining crew members were very skilled, I decided to reassign the tasks rather than try to train a new person in less than 2 hours. The crew members did great, and we were able to finish out the run of the show without having to add in any additional personnel.
- Tell me about a time you made a decision you thought was good at the time but turned out not to be.
  - I was working as a tech for a large concert event. The stage manager became concerned that the crowd may get out of control and began putting contingencies in place in case the event needed to be shut down quickly. She asked me to take up a position next to the power supply for the sound system in case she needed to quickly cut power to the PA. It wasn't until I was in place under the stage that I realized that I was in a very precarious position in proximity to a crowd that would not be pleased if I were told to cut the power. Thankfully, I ultimately didn't have to do anything and the event was able to continue to its natural conclusion. I took away two things from this experience. First, I will never put my own techs in a situation like that when in a leadership position, and, I will also better advocate for my own safety.

- Tell me about a time when you saw something that needed to be done and you stepped up and took responsibility for doing it?
  - This isn't a big thing but on a slow day I walked into the tool room in our shop and noticed that every single one of our wood glue bottles had a ton of dried glue blocking the tips, so I took the time to clean them all off and remove all the dried up glue. It was really nice to have clean glue bottles for a while after that. Another time, I was working at an escape room and there was a phone that was part of the experience that wasn't working. I took it apart between guests and got it working again.
- What is your greatest achievement? What project or task would you consider your most significant accomplishment so far?
  - My proudest achievement production wise was building a headpiece for a Reptile Man costume. The project was extremely challenging. I had to research materials and techniques including sculpting, molding, and casting with unfamiliar materials to create the full head latex piece. I'd love to show you pictures of that process if I can show you my portfolio.
- Describe a situation in the past year in which you had to deal with someone at work who was very angry with you.
  - When working as head of wardrobe an actor got food on their costume prior to the show. When the costume shop manager read the report for that day, they sent an angry email looking for answers as to why this happened and who allowed it to happen. Even though I wasn't aware of the problem before it happened, as head of wardrobe it was my job to keep the integrity of the costumes. I reviewed the entire backstage situation and approached the shop manager with the changes I could implement backstage to make sure nothing like this happened again. They appreciated my plan to maintain the integrity of the costumes that were within my jurisdiction and that I was willing to take responsibility for any possible mistakes on my part.
- Describe a contribution you have made to a project on which you worked.
  - I have made contributions to so many projects. Perhaps my proudest contribution was when I took on a project manager role in the costume shop when we needed to build 10 identical costumes. I saw those ten costumes through from patterning to finishing. Leading that team allowed my supervisor to focus on the many other costumes in the show and gave me an opportunity to demonstrate my leadership and time management skills.
- What qualities should a successful manager or leader possess?
  - I don't expect them to have all of the answers, but I do expect them to be able to get us the answers we need or empower us to make decisions to move forward with our work. I want them to have problem-solving skills and the ability to be calm under pressure. I have found compassion to be an even more important characteristic of leadership the longer I have worked in this industry.

- Tell me about an occasion when you disagreed with a supervisor's decision or policy.
  - I have disagreed with supervisors' decisions about who should be assigned to specific build tasks in the shop but unless it negatively impacts me personally or becomes a safety issue, it isn't my job to second guess their management decisions.
- How do you use technology to accomplish your work?
  - I am certified in Photoshop and have a reasonable amount of experience with Vectorworks and Lightwright. Technology is vital to my work, and I love it for the ease of revisions and efficiency of communication.
- Why should I hire you?
  - I'm confident that I have the skills that are required for this job, and the training I've received has given me the experience I need to be qualified. I'm enthusiastic, persistent, and reliable.
- What are your salary requirements?
  - I have to receive a living wage that acknowledges my skills and experience which would be at least \$20 an hour.
- Is there something you would like to tell me that I have failed to ask?
  - I don't think we talked about how much I love problem solving. That's probably my favorite aspect of doing theatre. We are constantly creating problems and then finding ways to solve them within the limitations of time and money. I love going to the hardware store and buying a truckload of stuff that I'm not going to use in any way close to what it is intended for. That whole brainstorming and problem-solving process is what I look forward to every day.