

... toward all members of that fraternity or sorority. Bad-mouthing a previous employer only makes this employer who is interviewing you, worry about what you would say about them, after they hire you.

(I learned this in my own experience. I once spoke graciously about a previous employer during a job-interview. Unbeknownst to me, the interviewer already knew that my previous employer had badly mistreated me. He therefore thought very highly of me because I didn't bring it up. In fact, he never forgot this incident; talked about it for years afterward.)

Plan on saying something nice about any previous employer, or if you are pretty sure that the fact you and they didn't get along will surely come out, then try to nullify this ahead of time, by saying something simple like, "I usually get along with everybody; but for some reason, my past employer and I just didn't get along. Don't know why. It's never happened to me before. Hope it never happens again."

TIP #10

Naturally, the employer is going to ask you questions, as a way of helping them figure out whether or not they want to hire you. Books on interviewing, of which there are many, often publish long lists of these questions, with timeworn, semi-clever answers suggested, and the recommendation that you memorize the answers to all those questions. Their lists include such questions as:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What do you know about this company?
- Why are you applying for this job?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What are your major strengths?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- What type of work do you like to do best?
- What are your interests outside of work?
- What accomplishment gave you the greatest satisfaction?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- Why were you fired (if you were)?

- Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- What are your goals in life?
- How much did you make at your last job?

But really there are only five basic questions that you need pay attention to. The people-who-have-the-power-to-hire-you need to know the answers to these five, which they may ask directly or try to find out obliquely:

1. "Why are you here?" This means "Why are you knocking on my door, rather than someone else's door?"
2. "What can you do for us?" This means "If I were to hire you, would you be part of the problems I already have, or would you be a part of the solution to those problems? What are your skills, and how much do you know about the subject or field that we are in?"
3. "What kind of person are you?" This means "Will you fit in? Do you have the kind of personality that makes it easy for people to work with you, and do you share the values that we have at this place?"
4. "What distinguishes you from nineteen or nine hundred other people who are applying for this job?" This means "Do you have better work habits than the others, do you show up earlier, stay later, work more thoroughly, work faster, maintain higher standards, go the extra mile, or . . . what?"
5. "Can I afford you?" This means "If we decide we want you here, how much will it take to get you, and are we willing and able to pay that amount—governed, as we are, by our budget, and by our inability to pay you as much as the person who would be next above you, on our organizational chart?"

These are the five principal questions that employers need to know the answers to. This is the case, even if the interview begins and ends with these five questions never once being mentioned explicitly by the employer. The questions are still floating beneath the surface of the conversation, beneath all the things being discussed. Anything you can do, during the interview, to help the employer answer these five questions, will make the interview more helpful to the employer. And you can do a lot, if you'll just do the Flower Exercise (chapter 13) in this book. You will know the answers.

5 Qs

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