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CAREER COACHING

a recruiter's guide

THE INTERVIEW ANSWERS RECRUITERS REMEMBER

How to answer "Tell me about yourself," tell stories that prove your skills, handle tricky questions, and leave a lasting impression.

Most interviews are decided in the first five minutes and the last five minutes. The first answer sets the tone. The last questions decide whether they remember you.

I've sat on the hiring side of the table for 15 years. The candidates who got offers weren't always the most qualified. They were the ones who answered clearly, told short stories that proved their skills, and left the room making the interviewer feel good about the conversation. This guide shows you how.

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1. What interviewers are really asking

Behind every interview question are three real questions:

1. **Can you do the job?** Skills and experience.
2. **Will you do the job?** Motivation and interest in this role, not just any role.
3. **Will we enjoy working with you?** Attitude, communication, and fit with the team.

Every answer you give should help them say yes to at least one of these.

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2. Answer "Tell me about yourself" in 60 seconds

This is almost always the first question, and it's not an invitation to recite your resume. Use **present, past, future**:

- **Present:** what you do now and what you're known for.
- **Past:** one or two experiences that prepared you for this role.
- **Future:** why this role is your logical next step.

> EXAMPLE
>
> "I'm an operations manager at a 200-person logistics company, where I'm known for fixing broken processes. Last year I cut our onboarding time in half. Before that, I spent five years in customer service, which taught me to see every process from the customer's side. Now I want to do this work at a larger scale, and your expansion into new markets is exactly the kind of challenge I'm looking for."

Practice it out loud until it sounds natural, not memorized. Then stop talking. Let them ask the next question.

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3. Prove it with short stories

"I'm a great problem solver" is a claim. A story is proof. For questions that start with "Tell me about a time when…", use the **STAR** structure:

- **Situation:** the context, in one or two sentences.
- **Task:** what you were responsible for.
- **Action:** what *you* did. Say "I," not "we."
- **Result:** what happened, with a number if possible.

Before any interview, prepare five stories you can adapt to many questions: a success you're proud of, a conflict you resolved, a mistake you learned from, a time you led without authority, and a time you handled pressure.

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4. The tricky questions, answered

"What's your greatest weakness?"

Pick a real, minor weakness that isn't central to the job, then show what you're doing about it. "I used to take on too much myself. I've learned to delegate earlier, and I now use weekly check-ins so nothing gets stuck with me."

"Why are you leaving your current job?"

Never criticize your employer. Talk about what you're moving toward, not what you're running from. "I've grown a lot there, and I'm ready for a role with more ownership of strategy."

"Why should we hire you?"

Connect your top two strengths to their top two needs from the job description. Be specific and confident.

"What are your salary expectations?"

If you can, ask about the range first: "I'd love to understand the range you've budgeted for this role." If you need to give a number, give a researched range. Many states now require employers to share pay ranges in job postings, and some, including Massachusetts, prohibit employers from asking about your salary history.

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5. Questions to ask at the end

"Do you have any questions for us?" is not a formality. Saying "No, I think you covered everything" is a missed chance. Ask two or three of these:

- "What would success look like in this role in the first 90 days?"
- "What's the biggest challenge the team is facing right now?"
- "How would you describe the team's working style?"
- "What do you enjoy most about working here?"
- "Is there anything about my background that gives you pause?" This one takes courage, and it gives you a chance to address concerns before you leave.
- "What are the next steps in the process?"

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6. The thank-you note that seals it

Send it within 24 hours, by email, to everyone you met. Keep it short and specific.

GENERIC

"Thank you for your time today. I am very interested in the position and look forward to hearing from you."

MEMORABLE

"Thank you for today's conversation. I keep thinking about your point on speeding up onboarding. I did exactly that at my last company, and I'd love to bring that experience to your team."

7. Your interview prep checklist

1. Research the company's products, recent news, and the interviewer on LinkedIn.
2. Rehearse "Tell me about yourself" out loud, about 60 seconds.
3. Prepare five STAR stories with numbers.
4. Prepare answers for weakness, why you're leaving, and salary.
5. Write down three questions to ask.
6. For video interviews: test your camera, lighting, and sound, and look at the camera, not the screen.
7. Send personalized thank-you notes within 24 hours.

ready for your next step?

LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Book a strategy call with Elena

One-on-one help with your interviews, resume, salary negotiation, or next career move.

Book your strategy call

Sign up for the next networking session

Two hours, live, with a small group. Practice real conversations and leave with scripts you can use the next day.

Save your seat

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