



The Interview Question_Tell me about Yourself

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Very often the first question posed during an interview is this one. It can be phrased in different ways, but the question is usually, "Tell me about yourself". Like most questions during an interview, the expectation is that you will use some common sense in deciding how to answer it. In other words, the interviewers want to see if you have enough savvy to know how you should answer such a question. It would not be appropriate to talk at length about your personal life. It also would not be appropriate to discuss a long list of topics that have nothing to do with the job you are being hired for. In most cases they are asking for an overview of your study and work experience where it fits with the job you are being interviewed for. You can mention jobs that do not relate to the one you are being hired for, but be brief. Generally, the best way is to start with post matric and talk about your educational and working experience. Usually in chronological date order so that it makes sense. You can also mention a few personal aspects that are relevant and for this you may want to consider talking about your values and how they align with the company interviewing you.

Before you go into the interview you need to have read the job advert or job description if there is one. In most cases the interviewers are not interested in hearing about all your wonderful achievements. What they want to know is that you can do the job they are interviewing you for and do it well. People are busy. Your interviewers are more than likely very busy people. This time is for them to understand who the best candidate for the job is, so all your answers must be tailored to show that you have what they are looking for in a candidate. When answering the question, "Tell me about yourself", you must have the job requirements in the back of your mind, and having said that, in the front of your mind as well. Briefly go through all your career and educational achievements, and where your education and work experience specifically help with the job you are applying for then answer in more detail. Don't give too much detail though. You don't want to take up half the interview time with the answer to one question. If you are not sure, then rather say less. If the interviewers want more information they will ask for it.

Most people will talk about what they did and what they were responsible for. And yes, you do need to talk about that. However, in an interview you want to stand out in a good way. Which means you want to do something a bit different to most people. The best way is for you to talk about achievements you have from previous jobs that link to what you would be required to do in this job. When you talk about achievements try and quantify them. If, while you are talking about your work experience, you add in one or two examples of actions you took that led to company improvements,

cost savings, increased revenue, better customer service, or customer acquisition, and you can talk in percentages or rands, then you will make a good impression. Not only are you telling your interviewers what your work experience is, you are also telling them that you care about great performance, and if they hire you, you will work to make sure you get results for them. At the end of the day numbers talk, and if you can speak in numbers they will listen to you.

So, in preparing to answer this question, you want to talk about relevant qualifications, you want to briefly describe your entire work experience, you want to talk in more detail about work experience that is applicable to the job you are applying for, and you want to mention some relevant and significant achievements in your career using numbers. Then, in order to make the interview memorable and stand out, you can also say a few things about yourself personally. You could mention one or two hobbies or activities you enjoy. You could mention some of your core values (and if these are likely to be valued by an employer then even better) and why they are your core values. Including a little something about yourself will help build rapport as well as give them an idea of who you are as a person. And they do want to know something about the person behind the CV.

You must prepare for an interview. And you definitely want to prepare and practice an answer to this question or a similar question. As with giving a speech in public, the most nerve-wracking time during an interview is the beginning. Just as you start. And if you have prepared your speech and know and have practiced how you want to open, it will help you steady your nerves and get comfortable so the rest of the speech flows. As this question is often the opening question in an interview, prepare an answer and practice it, so if you do get this question you are comfortable answering it. That helps you relax for the remainder of the interview.

I have had a few clients, who started answering this question, only to be told by the interviewer they didn't want to hear the prepared answer. They asked the candidate to just talk about themselves. Now, you can still give your prepared answer, because the interviewers are not likely to know what you prepared. So don't panic if that happens and think you have to come up with information on the spot. It may just be the interviewers trying to see how you think on your feet or how you answer when things don't go as planned. You can start with the information you have prepared and if you are comfortable adding some more information about yourself then do so. Try and include some work experience in your answer, because this is an interview, and they are interviewing you for the job. So, they do want to know about your fit for the role you are interviewing for. You do still want to be giving relevant work experience and achievements. What you don't want to do is get so thrown by this change in tactic that you start giving really personal information or even information that is not allowed to be asked in interviews.

When you are preparing for an interview write down your answer to this question and other questions you think you may be asked. If you don't know what questions you may be asked then check the internet. There are many places that list the possible questions typically asked in interviews. Write your answer and run it past a few people to tweak the answer. Then practice it a few times. Don't over-rehearse it because you don't want to sound like you are reading an answer during the interview.

Practice it enough that you know the key points and then talk as if you were having a conversation with a friend.

If this is the opening question in an interview and you are comfortable answering it, it relaxes you a bit, helps build your confidence, and makes the rest of the interview somewhat easier for you to handle. You want that.