How to ace the world's toughest job interview question

By Martin Yate CPC

I've been writing about job interviews, from both sides of the desk, for twenty-five years and without a doubt, the toughest interview question going the rounds in 2012 is, "Your job exists to help your employer achieve and maintain profitability. How do your efforts support these goals?" It's a question that can only be answered when you really understand the guts of the job you are pursuing.

The question actually has two parts. The first part, your job exists to help your employer achieve and maintain profitability, shouldn't be too difficult because it is a statement of fact: all jobs exist to support profitability.

You need to think through whether your job is chiefly concerned with generating revenue, protecting assets, improving productivity in some way, or is perhaps a combination of these imperatives. Once you have determined this you have also outlined the correct framework for your answer.

The second part, how do your efforts support these goals, is much tougher to deal with. To answer effectively you need to grasp that the true guts of every job is essentially the same: to identify, prevent and solve problems that occur within your area of expertise, and in the process help your employer achieve and maintain profitability.

You answer by identifying for the interviewer, the ways that you make your small but important contributions towards achieving and maintaining profitability. You do this with these specific strategies:

a) You anticipate the ways that problems can arise in your areas of responsibility and explain how you execute your work with conscious concern for preventing many of the problems typical to your job from arising in the first place. You have an example or two ready.

b) You tackle and solve problems that do occur, because they cannot be prevented, in a timely, effective and professional manner. You'll have an example ready to illustrate how you do this.

c) Do so in a way that is courteous to customers, vendors, and considerate to those co-workers who in their jobs must deal with the results of your work. Again, you'll have recalled an example or two.

If you catch a break next time out and you aren't asked such a tough question, you can make major points with any hiring manager or recruiter by using this understanding to color the way you answer other questions.

Martin Yate takes readers through over two hundred perceptive answers to tough interview questions in Knock em Dead 2012, The Ultimate Job Search Guide, in ways, like this one, that not only help you answer the question, but also help you grow professionally in the process.


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