

# All about me

## *Tackling the toughest interview question*

Your one-on-one with your potential new boss is going well. You've demonstrated your knowledge of the company's strengths and weaknesses, identified its competitors and talked up your own successes in the industry – all without a single sign of insecurity or doubt.

Then comes the question: "So, tell something about yourself?"..... Panic sets in.

Do you launch into a biography about your childhood? Should you mention your recent hair implants? Do you talk about your interest in slot-car racing?

How you answer this all-encompassing question could determine whether you're offered a position. But what's the best approach? We asked our experts the best way to handle this challenging question.

### **Landmines and treasure troves...**

Jonathan Paul, VP HB Staffing: "'Tell me about yourself,' is a great discovery question that is posed to learn: how a candidate thinks on their feet; their preparation for the interview; their knowledge about what's important to disclose – and what not to disclose. Verbal skills, body language, applicant background, and appropriateness are all potential land mines or treasure troves which can be uncovered in your answer to this question. Keep your response business-relevant and succinct. Rehearse your response before you interview."

### **Let your personality show through, but stick to information that's relevant to the position.**

"When I interview, I am curious to see where a person takes that question and if they are prepared to answer it," says Barb Krantz Taylor, an associate with The Baily Consulting Group, a career development firm based in Minneapolis. "Are they succinct? Do they point out a variety of things about themselves that are relevant to this job such as education, work history, experience, skills, competencies, personality strengths, relevant leisure activities, purpose and goals? Are they a likable person, easy to talk to and get along with?"

### **It's important to remember what not to say.**

According to Claudia Newton, founder and president of Rewarding Resume Services in Columbia, S.C., it's not the time to tell all.

"Some candidates make the blunder of giving the interviewer personal information which as marital status, hobbies and extracurricular activities," she says.

"Remember, this question is totally job-related. It is designed for the interviewer to hear you talk and see how you express yourself. It is also aimed at seeing if you will fit and assimilate into the culture at the organization."

### **Keep your response brief.**

"You don't want to be long-winded and go through your whole resume. You need to summarize your response and talk about key accomplishments in your career: 'These are the things I'm good at, the things I can do for the company,'" says Paula Rue, vice president of operations for Allen and Associates, an outplacement firm with offices in Plantation, FL. "The kiss of death is when you have the interviewer thinking, 'How long is this person going to speak about herself?'"

### **Staying relaxed and comfortable is important when telling the interviewer about yourself.**

Norman Meshriy, a career counselor in Walnut Creek, CA, says that when interviewers ask this question, they are inviting the interviewees to provide some insight into who they are.

"The interviewer is looking for a short presentation of you," he says, "What are you like? How do you think? How comfortable are you to be with? The answer needs to be delivered in a comfortable, natural and genuine style."

### **Say something that will distinguish you from others.**

The interviewer should be left with three things after you answer the question. Darrell W. Gurney, a Los Angeles-based career coach and executive recruiter, says it's important to say something passionate that will stick with the interviewer.

"What you want the questioner left with after the answer is what is unique about you – your essence," he says. "An example of that essence in action, and how you're looking to utilize that talent or ability. This is an opportunity for the interviewee to create a good comfortable first impression."

### **Stay away from revealing personal details that are irrelevant to the position.**

"The response should be developed to focus on employment achievements and professional development or education – not on family, positions held many years past, where you were born, religion or other personal remarks," says Diane Burns, a career management coach based in Baltimore.

"If the recruiter does not automatically ask follow-up questions, then the candidate may ask, 'Which of these accomplishments would you like me to respond to first?'" Burns says.