

Interview Preparation: Don't Talk Yourself Out of a Job



It can be difficult in an interview to determine how much information the interviewer is looking for when they ask a question. If you talk too much, that can work against you. If you talk too little, they feel they really have to pry information out of you, and that reflects badly on you as well.

There are two ways to answer interview questions: the short version and the long version. When a question is open-ended, I always suggest to job candidates that they say, “Let me give you the short version. If we need to explore some aspect of the answer more fully, I’d be happy to go into greater depth, and give you the long version.”

The reason you should respond this way is because it’s often difficult to know what type of answer each question will need. A question like, “What was your most difficult assignment?” might take anywhere from thirty seconds to thirty minutes to answer, depending on the detail you choose to give.

Therefore, you must always remember that the interviewer is the one who asked the question. So you should tailor your answer to what he or she needs to know, without a lot of extraneous rambling or superfluous explanation. Why waste time and create a negative impression by giving a sermon when a short prayer would do just fine?

Let’s suppose you were interviewing for a regulatory management position, and the interviewer asked you, “What sort of regulatory experience have you had in the past?”

Well, that’s exactly the sort of question that can get you into trouble if you don’t

use the short version/long version method. Most people would just start rattling off everything in their memory that relates to their regulatory experience. Though the information might be useful to the interviewer, your answer could get pretty complicated and long-winded unless it's neatly packaged.

One way to answer the question might be, "I've held regulatory positions with three different medical device companies over a nine-year period. Where would you like me to start?"

Or, you might simply say, "Let me give you the short version first, and you can tell me where you want to go into more depth. I've had nine years experience in regulatory affairs with three different companies that had three very different types of medical devices, and held the titles of Specialist, Senior Specialist, and Manager. What aspect of my background would you like to concentrate on?"

By using this method, you convey to the interviewer that your thoughts are well organized, and that you want to understand the intent of the question before you travel too far in a direction neither of you wants to go. After you get the green light, you can spend your interviewing time discussing in detail the things that are important, not whatever happens to pop into your mind.