

# Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

## Career Center – Interview Tips: What Are They Really Asking



Anyone who's ever spent time in a job search has probably walked away from at least one interview knowing right away that she botched it. Quite often, people who do feel confident about their last interview know they still could have answered one or two questions much better than they did.

The problem behind such scenarios is that too often, job seekers misunderstand or underestimate what they're being asked during an interview. A question such as, "Do you have any more questions for me?" may seem innocent and simple enough to answer, but candidates who give a weak response are usually the ones screened out of consideration for the job.

Job seekers should be aware that every question an interviewer asks is an opportunity to sell themselves as the most outstanding, must-have candidate for the job. Here are some of the most popular interview questions, and what interviewers really want to know when asking them, as well as tips to help job seekers develop a savvy response.

These questions include:

### **Tell us about yourself.**

*What they're really asking:* What makes you special? Why should we hire you?

*Tips:* Prepare several selling points about yourself. Give a quick "elevator speech" that overviews your experience and achievements.

### **What are your greatest strengths?**

*What they're really asking:* How do you perceive your talents and abilities as a professional? Will you be an asset to our organization?

*Tips:* Sell yourself. If you don't promote your strengths, nobody else will. Prepare six or seven responses. Be "confidently humble."

### **What are your greatest weaknesses?**

*What they're really asking:* How honest are you being about yourself with us? How realistic are you?

*Tips:* Present your weakness as a positive. Don't talk too long or emphasize your downfalls, i.e. "While I have not been directly involved with developing the annual park and recreation budget, I have been an active in determining what my portion of the operations should entail regarding revenues and expenditures, and I am certain that I could manage the overall budget as well."

### **Why are you interested in working here?**

*What they're really asking:* How dedicated are you? Do you have a passion for this type of work?

*Tips:* Keep your answer simple and to the point. Stay away from such responses as, "Many of my friends have worked here." This response isn't very impressive.

### **Why should we hire you?**

*What they're really asking:* Can you convince us you're "the one?" Can you sell your "product?"

*Tips:* Make a powerful statement about the value you'll bring to their organization. Toot your own horn, but be wary of sounding arrogant.

### **Where do you see yourself five years from now?**

*What they're really asking:* Will you be here for only year a before moving on, or are you committed to staying here for a while? Are you a stable person? Can you set goals for yourself?

*Tips:* Be aware that they might not want to hire someone who will be around for only a year or two. Feel free to say that you have one goal at the moment: to be the very best employee for that particular job.

### **What are some of your hobbies?**

*What they're really asking:* How well-rounded are you? What do you do outside of work that might transfer positively into the workplace?

*Tips:* Emphasize any hobbies or activities that may relate to the job. Help the interviewer learn more about you and perceive you as a person, rather than a job candidate. Therefore, don't just answer questions, respond to them.

### **Would you be willing to pursue an extra certificate or credential?**

*What they're really asking:* How is your attitude? How flexible are you?

*Tips:* Tell the interviewer how important professional growth is to you. Understand that the person who will impress the interviewer the most is the one willing to do the extra work.

### **What were you hoping we'd ask today, but didn't?**

*What they're really asking:* Is there anything special about yourself that you want us to know?

*Tips:* Consider this a "show and tell" opportunity. Use materials from your portfolio to convince them how valuable you'll be to their organization.

### **Do you have any questions for us?**

*What they're really asking:* Are you prepared to ask questions? How interested are you in this position?

*Tips:* List five or six questions on an index card. Ask at least one question, even if all of your prepared questions have been answered. Never say, "No, you've answered all of my questions."

It's important to sound natural and thoughtful when replying to such questions, and don't let your responses sound 'canned' or rehearsed. It's important to make the interviewer feel as though you've given serious thought to their question and are genuinely interested in the job.