

Interview questions and advice

1. Tell me about yourself...

This is one of the questions most often asked and very rarely answered...we don't like talking about ourselves and we definitely don't like selling ourselves.

The biggest piece of advice here is do not waffle on! Keep your answer clear and succinct.

I would always include something about me at work and something also about me out of work. The company are recruiting you as a person so don't be afraid to tell them a little about you other than what they can read on your CV.

2. Why do you want to work here?

This is where your company research comes in because your answer needs to tell the person on the other side of the table that you are the right "fit" for them. Therefore, make sure your reasons for wanting to work for them reflects the company's attributes and brand values.

3. Why do you want this job?

Not to be confused with the question above this is now about the job. Again, your research will come in handy here.

It's true to say you probably want the job because it seems better than the one you have now but that isn't what the person across from you wants to hear. They want to hear that you know what the role is about and that you can do it...so tell them!

You need to know what the company are looking for and what the job you have applied for is all about, once you know that you simply align this with your career to date. Highlight your relevant experience, goals and aspirations in line with the role, to showcase why you are the best person for the job.

4. "What was your reason for leaving?"

Keep your answer positive regardless of the reason you left your last role / are looking to leave your current role. No matter what the reason you will have added extra experience or skills to your career history.

Therefore, acknowledge what you learned and what was on offer at the time. Demonstrate good reasons for the decisions you made and show that you understood what was to be gained or acknowledge what you have learned from your past employer.

5. “What are your strengths and weaknesses?”

“I have been told that I am an excellent communicator, especially on the telephone, but I feel I have good interpersonal skills generally and find it easy to get along with all sorts of people”.

Many interviewers will ask you to name your strengths and weaknesses. Typically, people find it easier to express their strengths, but struggle when it comes to identifying even one weakness. Part of the reason for this may be that they do not want to disclose a particular weakness, as this may result in them failing to be successful in getting the job.

A good initial answer (bearing in mind you are applying for a telephone position) to the ‘strengths’ part would be *“I have been told that I am an excellent communicator, especially on the telephone, but I feel I have good interpersonal skills generally and find it easy to get along with all sorts of people”*.

For weaknesses you need to think of something which is really a strength but put it across as a weakness. It is also important to make it clear what you are doing to address that ‘weakness’.

A good example would be *“I am a very conscientious worker and I get irritated by colleagues who don’t share this value and take any opportunity to take time off work or do the minimum required when they are there. I am learning, however, that these people generally get found out and I leave it to my supervisor to recognise these problems and address them”*.

An answer such as this would probably make the interviewer think *“well that’s not such a bad thing, actually”*.

6. “Tell me about a difficult obstacle you had to overcome recently at work? How did you overcome this?”

Here your interviewer wants proof that you will tackle problems head on and not just bury your head in the sand.

A strong answer will clearly demonstrate a problem, an action and a solution.

For example:

Problem: When I was first promoted to team leader, I consistently struggled to ensure that my team achieved their sales targets on a Friday.

Action: I sought the advice of more experienced team leaders to find out how they motivated their teams through the Friday slog.

Solution: Acting on the advice of the other team leaders, I implemented a combination of incentives over the next few weeks and successfully boosted my team’s sales figures.

7. “What is your greatest success and achievement to date?”

Here your interviewer wants to see that you will bring something to their company and not just fade into the background.

You need to keep the answer specific, what ONE achievement do you want to talk about?

Whatever you end up talking about, try to keep your answer short and concise.

8. “How would your current team/manager describe you?”

Try to think about how you would describe yourself if someone asked you for your strengths, then relate these to what people say about you; peers, agents, managers and stakeholders. Have three or four at the ready, ideally in line with the role you are being interviewed for. Have examples or situations ready, in case your interviewer wants to drill down as to why you think or believe these are your key strengths.

9. “How do you keep yourself motivated?”

This is your opportunity to tell your potential employer what keeps you focused. Possible answers include:

- Breaking your workload up into daily or hourly targets to ensure that the next small success is never too far away.
- Living a healthy life-style. Eating the right foods and drinking lots of water in the office can have a big impact on your concentration levels.
- Motivating others and promoting a positive atmosphere in the office.

10. “How do you deal with work issues? Would anyone know you were having a bad day, or would you keep it to yourself?”

Morale is infectious – whether positive or negative – and, when working in a team-orientated environment like a call centre, it’s important that there is always an air of positivity around.

It’s therefore vitally important to ensure that if you’re having a bad day, you contain this and don’t let it influence the morale levels of the team, and in turn the productivity and efficiency of the overall operation.

11. “What do you know about the centre/company/role?”

You are not required to be an expert on the organisation or role, but a genuine interest and basic understanding is expected. If you are working with a recruitment consultant, then they should be able to provide you with extra details and assist with preparation.

In addition, look for and use press releases, corporate and social websites. Ring the call centre to see how they handle your call: do they offer ‘up-sell’, ‘cross-sell’, how was the service? Read the job

description to prepare for this question, a few key facts or some knowledge show a genuine interest and commercial awareness.

12. “How to deal with a difficult customer?”

Most customer service interviews will include the “How to deal with a difficult customer” interview question. For example – “Can you give me an example of a particularly difficult customer you had to deal with and how you used your skills to successfully overcome the problem they had?” or “Describe a time you had to deal with a difficult customer and how you handled the situation.”

Many interviewees freeze at this question, simply because they cannot think of an example, rather than the fact that they have never dealt with one. So, have an answer prepared and make sure it is one where you resolved the issue, not one where you had to refer the customer to a higher authority (it’s amazing how many people do this). What the interviewer is looking for are the skills you possess in handling difficult customers, not the intricate detail of the particular issue the customer had.

How to answer the dealing with a difficult customer interview question.

In your pre-prepared interview answer you should include the following:

1. I listened carefully to what the customer had to say.
2. I apologised and empathised with their situation.
3. I confirmed my understanding of their concern.
4. I took responsibility to resolve the issue.
5. I offered a solution (plus alternatives if possible).
6. I confirmed the customer was happy with this.
7. I thanked the customer for raising the issue with me.
8. I took immediate action following the call to resolve the situation.
9. I remained calm throughout the whole process.
10. (If appropriate) the customer wrote in to my supervisor congratulating me on my efficiency.

This may seem like a very long answer. But by explaining the situation, without going into the minutia of the product or the complaint, your response need be no more than one minute or so. You will also impress your prospective employer by demonstrating that you already have the skills necessary to handle the most difficult calls.

13. How to deal with an angry customer

There will often be a question about how to deal with an angry customer. A typical question would be “Name a time you had to deal with an angry customer” or “Describe a recent situation when you had to handle an angry guest or customer”.

There are two things that they are looking for here. The first is to see what your customer service skills are like. The second is to see if you lose your temper or if you can keep your cool.

It may help to answer that “the customer is always right” and that it is your duty to help customers out of a difficult situation. You can describe the steps where you helped to calm a customer down, show some understanding, empathy, patience etc.

Ideally use an example of where you were able to turn the customer around and then the customer was able to thank you for your effort.

14. Tell me about a time you went over and above to provide excellent customer service to one of your customers.

Expect questions related to your experience helping customers. Your answers should describe situations where you faced a problem with a customer, and then outline the steps you took to resolve the issue.

You can mention how you recognized the customer's mood and attitude and reacted appropriately, the questions you asked to gather facts about the situation, and obstacles you overcame to ultimately settle the issue.

Keep in mind some of the techniques you might have used to diffuse a tense situation, such as apologizing to the customer or consulting a supervisor.

15. What causes you stress at work

High numbers of calls, rigid productivity expectations, and upset customers make call centres stressful work environments. The hiring manager will want to make sure you will be able to handle such an environment and perform well under pressure.

To explore how well you handle stress, they may ask you to give an example of a stressful situation you dealt with and describe how you coped or tell about a time you had a problem with a colleague and how the problem was solved. This gives you an opportunity to highlight your ability to adapt and perform under pressure, as well as describe your people skills.

16. Give me an example of a mistake you have made whilst at work.

Call centre advisors must be able to assess situations and solve problems independently but should also be able to determine when a problem is beyond their ability to solve and needs to be escalated to a supervisor or knowledge specialist.

A competency-based interview relies on questions that reveal a candidate’s judgment, and comfort level with issue resolution. The hiring manager may ask you to discuss a mistake you made and how you fixed it. Other questions might ask you to give examples of customer problems you sorted out when given a short time frame, or decisions you had to make on-the-spot.

17. Talk me through a typical hour on shift for you...number of calls you will take, type of calls and then the systems you have to use.

Computer skills are of paramount importance to work in a call centre.

In this type of question, the interviewer is asking you to explain how you multi-task...switching between applications for different call / contact types.

Customer relationship management (CRM) software used to maintain data about customers and their accounts must be updated with each call.

Advisors need great keyboard skills to enter information quickly and accurately to meet their productivity goals. They often have to navigate several programs simultaneously to process a call, send emails, and complete forms.

An interviewer may ask you to elaborate on how you've adapted to new technology, how you handled a time when your system crashed during a critical moment, or instances when you've used your technical ability to help a customer. You may also be asked if you have experience with the specific CRM programs the call centre uses, so research this ahead of time.