



Developing Cross-Cultural Behaviour Based Interview Questions

QUESTION 1 - Tell us about yourself.

Purpose:

- Often used as an icebreaker question.
- Provides a sample of how well the individual can express him/herself and put ideas forward.

Typical responses to this question:

- "I have over 5 years' experience working as a _____. In this role, my responsibilities included ____."

Potential challenges when asking a newcomer this question:

- The individual may provide more information than you expect.

Alternatives:

- "Could you please tell us about your work experience and how it relates to this position?"

QUESTION 2 - What kind of extra-curricular activities do you enjoy?

Purpose:

- Identify skills or experience that the individual may bring to the position, which were developed outside of previous work experience.

Typical responses to this question:

- "I enjoy spending time with my family."

Potential challenges when asking a newcomer this question:

- A newcomer may not have had the opportunity to engage in activities beyond those related to the job search and meeting basic needs.

Alternatives:

- Tell me about an experience you've had outside of work, which has helped you in your previous roles/ career?



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QUESTION 3 - Tell us me about a time when you handled a difficult situation with a (supervisor, another department, client or vendor). How did you go about it?

Purpose:

- Assess how the individual manages conflict with different audiences

Typical responses to this question:

- “When a person in another department did not provide me with critical information which I had been promised, I had to...”

Potential challenges when asking a new immigrant candidate this question:

- The interviewer and /or interviewee may use phrases or jargon which may not be familiar to the interviewer.

Alternatives:

- Provide/ask for a definition of unfamiliar acronyms or phrases

QUESTION 4 - Describe a situation when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.

Purpose:

- Assess how the individual demonstrates initiative and entrepreneurship

Typical responses to this question:

- “I had to find a solution for _____, which involved taking on tasks that were _____.”

Potential challenges when asking a new immigrant candidate this question:

- Cultural differences between how the individual would define “beyond the call of duty” as compared to what the interviewer expects.

Alternatives:

- Please provide an example of an accomplishment in your previous role, which you/your supervisor did not expect you to perform/achieve.



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QUESTION 5 - Tell me about a situation when you had to manage competing priorities and tight deadlines. How did you go about it?

Purpose:

- Assess the individual's time management and problem solving skills

Typical responses to this question:

- When I was asked to help out with a co-worker's project deliverables, I had to _____. As a result, we were able to _____."

Potential challenges when asking a newcomer this question:

- Individual perception of a "tight deadline" may vary across cultures.

Alternatives:

- What do you consider when prioritising work, to ensure that you meet deadlines? Please walk me through the process you use to identify what is most important.

QUESTION 6 - Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss.

Purpose:

- Assess the individual's communication skills and ability to present ideas.

Typical responses to this question:

- "I presented my suggestion in a way that made it sound like _____."

Potential challenges when asking a newcomer this question:

- The individual may be from a hierarchical culture, which does not allow or encourage disagreement with authority figures.

Alternatives:

- In this environment, we encourage everyone to bring their ideas forward. How would you present a suggestion which could seem to contradict your boss?



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QUESTION 7 - Where do you expect to be in your career in the next five years?

Purpose:

- Provide an idea of the individual's career goals.

Typical responses to this question:

- "I see myself as a manager in this organisation."

Potential challenges when asking a newcomer this question:

- New immigrants may not be familiar with specific career paths and differences in position titles within the Canadian workplace.

Alternatives:

- How do you see your responsibilities evolving over the next five years? What type of work do you see yourself done in five years?

QUESTION 8 - Describe a situation where you had to stand up for a decision you made, even though it was unpopular.

Purpose:

- Assess the individual's critical thinking and decision making skills.

Typical responses to this question:

- I was responsible for accomplishing _____, so I told my team that they had to do things as I had already defined.

Potential challenges when asking a newcomer this question:

- The individual may come from a role which granted broader scope and authority to make decisions.

Alternatives:

- Among the responsibilities of this position is to _____, which would be similar to your position as _____. Please give me an example of an unpopular decision you made in that role.



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QUESTION 9 - You have a lot of experience. More than this job needs. Won't you be bored in six months' time?

Purpose:

This question is often raised when the interviewer has concerns that the candidate may not stay with the organisation for too long. The employee may leave when a job that better reflects her experience and skills comes up, or soon as professional certification is complete.

Typical responses to this question:

The candidate reassures the interviewer that she is a committed and loyal employee.

Potential challenges when asking a newcomer this question:

The new immigrant candidate's scope of experience, based on previous job titles may not accurately reflect actual responsibilities.

Alternatives:

Tell me about your responsibilities as _____. Describe a typical day in that role. How might it compare with the position that you are applying for?

QUESTION 10 - What would you consider to be your weaknesses?

Purpose:

Assess the individual's level of self-awareness regarding areas of development, and how he has taken steps to address the challenge.

Typical responses to this question:

"My greatest weakness is that I'm too much of a perfectionist and I hold myself to a higher standard than I expect from others."

Potential challenges when asking a newcomer this question:

A new immigrant interviewee may define "strengths" and "weaknesses" differently from the interviewer. These differences, which are based on cultural differences, may result in misunderstanding of the interviewee's responses and inability to accurately express self.

Alternatives:

Tell me about a time when you found a task difficult. What skill or knowledge did you need and what did you do about it?



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Brief

1. To what extent are behaviour-based interviews used in your organisation?
2. Share some of your experiences when using behaviour-based questions during interviews. These experiences may be presented from the perspective of the interviewer or interviewee, or both (if time allows).
3. Of the sample questions provided, select 2-3 that you have found useful to accurately assess “fit” for the role, from either perspective (recruiter/hiring manager or interviewee). What made these questions effective?
4. Of the sample problems provided, select 2-3 which you found most problematic in the past, from either perspective (interviewer or the interviewee).
5. What made you realise that the question was problematic?
6. Why do you suppose it was problematic?
7. How might these challenges be related to cultural differences?
8. Having gone through the exercise, what would you do to change the outcome for that question?