

HOW TO ANSWER FAMILY-RELATED QUESTIONS IN A JOB INTERVIEW



Summary: Here's how you can answer family-related questions in a job interview.

The issue of balancing family and work is a very important one in today's employment market. More and more companies are realizing that they must change their work environment to be friendlier to working parents. This has become especially important in the recruitment and retention of qualified employees in a tight labor market.

Because most of us would agree that this change is well under way, we may be surprised when the issue of family comes up in an interview. Surprisingly, family related questions are not as uncommon during the interview as we might think. Most often, this type of questioning comes up innocently, especially when the interviewer is inexperienced.

Being faced with questions relating to our family life brings up a dilemma. Should you answer the question or make the interviewer aware that this is an inappropriate area of discussion? Several factors will certainly effect your decision on how to proceed.

The perceived intent of the question will probably be the most important factor in helping you to decide how to answer the question. That is, do you think that the interviewer is specifically asking these questions as part of his or her screening process, or that the questions came up as an innocent part of your conversation?

If you believe that the interviewer intends to use this family related information in the hiring process, warning alarms should sound in your head. This person must have strong opinions regarding work and family if he or she made it part of the interview. Requiring a day off for a sick child may be a problem in the future.

When I have been confronted with a direct question such as this during an interview in the past, I simply answered the interviewer's question. Because I was no longer interested in the organization, it didn't matter to me what the interviewer thought of my answer. However, in the event that I was offered the position, I would decline - telling the employer my reason for declining their offer. Another option is to simply state that this is an illegal question and refuse to answer. I myself would rather continue the interview for practice (and in hopes that they will offer me the job and learn a lesson!).

Now, let's assume that this is a position in which you are very interested and you don't feel the interviewer means harm with a family related question. How do you answer? I have found it very useful to answer these questions with my feelings on work and family, rather than with the details of my family status.

For example, assume I grew up on a farm. When asked family related questions in the past, I have told the interviewer how I learned to balance personal issues and work while growing up as a part of a family owned business. I then go on to explain that I have the ability to handle both aspects of my life very effectively. This type of information should answer any valid question they might have. If the interviewer goes on to probe further, you know that it was not an innocent question.

Remember, the interview is also your chance to screen your employer. If you find that you are asked questions which make you uncomfortable, be grateful that you learned this about the employer before you accepted a job!