

FACING ATYPICAL QUESTIONS IN A JOB INTERVIEW

Questions like "what would you do if you were in a room full of rats with three big pieces of wood and a ball of yarn?" The ingenious might suggest the creation of a rattrap, the vicious might think of fashioning a weapon to beat the rats to death, and the eco-friendly might offer the creation of a wooden platform on which to perch and live in harmony with the rats. There's no set answer to an atypical question and the interviewers truly want your individual response to assess your mindset. In this case, probably the winner would be the person who refuses the cue of "three big pieces of wood and a ball of yarn," and answers that he or she would just open the door and walk out. You see, nobody said that the room was locked. Atypical questions are created to probe into your logical abilities and tracks of thought. They are more important than typical questions like "why do you want this job." Whenever you find an atypical question in an interview, a seemingly innocuous question that seems more intended to pass time than useful for the interview, be careful. Know that job interviews have nothing casual about them, and questions that seem casual and insignificant are actually more important and you need to consider carefully before you answer. A most often cited and used atypical question would be "who are the two people you would want to be with you on a deserted tropical island?" The average Joe will instantly mention his loved ones, probably his two kids, or wife and child. What the interviewers actually expect here is to find out whether the candidate has the ability to size up a situation and visualize its consequences. They want an answer that shows that the candidate has correctly identified the problem and created a solution within the given options. The usual intelligent answer would identify the problem of survival and create its solution with the given options of "two people." So, the "two people" could be a Marine and a cook. That would solve the problem of survival and existence. However, that does not solve the problem of escaping the stranded situation in the given case, but only solves the problem of survival. So, a better answer would be a Marine and a boat builder. While the Marine can help to solve the problem of survival, the boat builder can solve the problem of trying to escape from the deserted island. One of the best answers I ever heard a candidate give to this question was "a radio operator with his HAM radio and my wife." This person went beyond the typical level of having a boat builder or shipwright, and was totally opposed to unnecessary labor. He would have his vacation, make most of the situation, and use the radio operator to signal for help from passing vehicles. In extreme cases and high-level job interviews (which are rare nowadays) we have also seen companies create full-scale atypical situations. For example, while selecting a batch of management trainees, I remember an interview where eight fresh graduates were called to a five star hotel and each casually given a sum of pocket money to spend during the stay. Nothing else was communicated to the candidates, but a strict watch was kept on how they spent their time and the money given to them. During the interview, each candidate was asked to place the account of their expenditure, and only two candidates turned out to have maintained a log. The company was looking at the expenditure pattern of the job candidates, but more importantly, they were keen to find out which of the candidates had the habit of keeping regular accounts of their minor expenditure. So, whenever you face an atypical question or an atypical situation in an interview, think deeply, identify the problem presented, and consider the given options and how they might be used to contrive the best solution. Responses to atypical questions are given more weight by interviewers for differentiating between candidates who otherwise seem equally matched. And atypical questions require you to be most attentive, alert, and logical to provide a suitable answer.

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