

Your quick guide to:

HR interview questions

HR professionals have to be a great many things at once: organised, friendly, efficient, reliable, diplomatic, and much more besides. And interviewers tend to present questions that test these characteristics. This guide looks at the type of questions you can expect, and how to answer them successfully.

What skills do you need to be a successful HR professional?

Here you'll need to show your understanding of what makes HR different.

Of course you need to be hard-working and a team player, but these aren't characteristics unique to the profession. Think about traits that stand out, such as:

- Diplomacy – a HR employee has to deal with sensitive issues on a regular basis
- Diligence – dealing with important contracts and documents means thoroughness is vital
- Communication skills – all employees need to communicate well, but in HR, communication is everything
- Flexibility – unexpected challenges are often a daily occurrence, so flexibility is essential

This is just an introduction, but think about the things you do as a HR professional that mark you out from other professions.

How have you dealt with a difficult HR challenge?

A version of this question will almost certainly be asked, because HR is full of challenges.

You have to be a logical, tactful problem-solver to be good at HR. So, when answering this question, you need to show off your problem-solving skills.

Select an example of a particularly difficult challenge, remembering that your job is full of them. Ideally, it should be a problem you didn't cause and that can be explained quickly and simply. Briefly examine what your options were, why you chose the option you did, and what the result was.

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Why are you leaving your current job?

This is a question to test your diplomacy.

Talk negatively about your current employer, and you may come across as tactless. Instead, you need to find a way of providing a positive reason for leaving. Progression is the obvious choice, but focus on developing skills and facing new challenges rather than money or simply boosting your CV.

It may even be worth saying some positive things about your current employer. Talk about the things you've liked, and how they've helped you develop. And then use this as a foundation to explain how and why you want to develop further.

What are your career ambitions?

This is a common and vitally important question.

Once again, you need to present a carefully balanced answer. Ambition is an attractive quality; it suggests an eagerness to learn and develop. However, being overly ambitious can be an ugly quality.

So, talk about why you like the HR profession and what you aim to achieve. It's fine to speculate about your career beyond this particular company, but it's better to talk in terms of skills and development rather than specific roles and companies. Your interviewer may well be your potential boss, and direct ambitions towards their position could be seen as a threat.

How do you accept criticism?

Another test of your personality, this question seeks to examine how balanced and reasonable you are.

As a HR professional, feedback is something you'll be dealing with constantly, and some may well be directed at you. Focus on why criticism is a good thing; how open debate typically encourages a resolution to a challenge, or makes a piece of work better. If criticism is a good thing, then accepting it is easy.

And what if you disagree with the criticism? Your approach has to be the same. All feedback is welcome, and you use it constructively and rationally.

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