

“If you were a tree, what would you be?”

The reason behind weird interview questions and how to answer them

You have prepared yourself for the coming interview as much as you could possibly could. From your impeccable outfit, to your personal documents and the list of possible questions you might be asked, you are confident you are doing well at the job interview so far.

But suddenly the interviewer asks: “If you were a tree, what would you be?”

What would your answer be?

Why do interviewers ask such strange questions?!

In the early 2000s, encouraged by the dotcom bubble, technology companies used off-the-wall interview questions to further assess the creativity and problem-solving abilities of prospective software developers. And according to US online job portal Glassdoor.com, these ‘strange’ interview questions were often applied by large corporate organisations to distinguish between multiple job applicants with MBAs - who are usually taught case studies and therefore, would be able to handle such questions.

These questions are sometimes used to appraise the thought process of potential employees as well.

Here are some of the most bizarre questions ever heard (collected by Glassdoor.com):

- “If you were shrunk to the size of a pencil and put in a blender, how would you get out?” - asked at Goldman Sachs
- “How many basketballs can you fit in this room?” - asked at Google
- “If you could be any superhero, who could it be?” - asked at AT&T
- “Given the numbers 1 to 1000, what is the minimum numbers guesses needed to find a specific number if you are given the hint ‘higher’ or ‘lower’ for each guess you make?” - asked at Facebook
- “How do you weigh an elephant without using a weigh machine?” - asked at IBM

There is a point to the kinds of questions asked by employers. Often then not, these questions were asked to do a number of things - test your creativity, find out how well you respond to stress and reveal your thought process.

So, there are almost no wrong or right answers to these questions.

How to handle off-the-wall interview questions

“Think before you speak” may be the most important advice, especially when it comes to answering any question during an interview. There is nothing wrong in taking some time to mull over the question for several moments rather than blurt out a less thought-out response to fill the silence.

Keep calm and cool. The bizarre interview questions could serve as a form of a stress test. No matter how strange the question, remember to always be polite in your response.

Recognise the light-hearted nature of the question. Most interviewers acknowledge these questions are of a humorous nature. An equally humorous response is often warranted.

Decipher the question behind the question. The questions may be strange but they are most likely asked to gauge your ability from your response and reaction. Attempt to give an answer that would reflect your creativity, personality and self-awareness - avoid obvious politically-correct responses, but do not reply with equally off-the-wall answers.

If all else fails, politely redirect the question. If your mind is a total blank, state politely that you would get back to the question later, or respectfully decline to respond. However, use this as a last resort.