

Tell me about yourself

This is a hugely popular interview question and at first glance looks little more than an “ice breaker”. In reality it’s probably one of the more challenging questions asked as it’s not immediately obvious what the interviewer is looking for. What do you focus on - your professional or personal life? How much detail should you give? How long should your answer be?

This isn’t a question that can be answered well without thought and preparation and the following three pointers should help:

Passion

Giving a brief background as to why you entered your profession/specialist area and why it continues to excite you will impress the interview panel. From an employer’s point of view, a candidate who shows passion in the interview room will show equal enthusiasm when they’re on the company pay-roll.

Structure

To get the most out of this question, you need to focus on three to four key points. The following guidelines will help you decide what to include:

- Analyse the job spec and make a note of the qualities that are of most interest to the employer. For example, there’s no point in talking at length about your man management skills if this is a stand-alone position.
- An employer will be more interested in your recent experience than your formative roles
- Focusing on a couple of key achievements can be a great way to frame your answer. When highlighting your achievements, be sure to outline the value added they brought to your employer. The more quantifiable your achievements are the better.

Timing

In an interview setting, less is more. When you have delivered your key points, don’t be afraid to wrap up your answer. Giving too much information will simply dilute your answer, make it unfocused and ultimately lessen its impact. As a rough guideline, aim to speak for two to three minutes.

Conclusion

In the hands of a well prepared candidate, this question is a God send and can put you firmly in the driving seat. It gives you a great opportunity to sell yourself and allows you to set the tone and direction for the rest of the interview.

About the Author

Laura McGrath is the owner of *Interview Techniques*, a leading provider of interview coaching services. She has spent the last 15 years in staffing and recruitment and is a regular contributor with *Recruit Ireland* and the *Sunday Business Post*.

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