

A hostile job interviewer can tell you everything you need to know

Miller, Karla L . The Washington Post (Online) , Washington, D.C.: WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post. Aug 26, 2021 .

[ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

Reader: When I first started working, work advice columnists suggested asking, "Why is this position open? Why did the prior person leave?" in interviews as a way to learn more about the office culture and potential problems with the employer.

When I did that last year, the interviewer became indignant, saying that asking why the prior employee left was inappropriate and that I was asking about a private personnel matter.

Is that true? I understand that personnel matters are private to the individual, but are they private to the company? Of course, I don't want to anger the interviewer. Have times changed so much that what was once considered an appropriate and smart question is now bad form?

*Karla: As an old-timer who's been in this gig nigh on a decade —
(spits coffee grounds)*

—here's my cynical take: Interviews are as much about avoiding bad picks as they are about making good ones. Both parties try to cast themselves in the best possible light, while examining the other side's shadows as subtly as possible.

The employer is looking for reasons not to hire you. But instead of blurting, "So what's wrong with you?" the interviewer will ask why you're interested in the job and have you explain any gaps in your work history, and form an impression based on how you answer —or don't answer —the questions.

On the other side of the conversation, even though you're there to sell yourself as a great candidate, you also should be looking for warning signs why you wouldn't want to work for that employer. But instead of asking, "What's wrong with this job?" you ask about the work environment and management's expectations, keeping one ear trained on the silence between the lines.

In any case, your asking why the position you're applying for was vacated is every bit as appropriate as an interviewer asking why you left/are leaving your old job. Rather than getting huffy and telling them that's none of their beeswax, you would probably have anticipated and practiced answering that question, especially if the circumstances were dodgy.

Likewise, seasoned interviewers will anticipate your curiosity and will have prepared some bland response, perhaps with a gentle deflection away from the question they can't or don't want to answer to the question they would prefer you had asked. The fact that your interviewer went into puffer fish mode and tried to shame you for committing some alleged breach of business etiquette should absolutely trip your warning system.

Of course, a clumsy interviewer might not have anything nefarious to hide, and smooth, neutral answers can hide a multitude of sins.

That's what reference checks are for. Glassdoor and LinkedIn may offer clues or connections to people willing to speak freely about employers, and you can always ask to speak with prospective co-workers to get a sense of the work culture.

Back to your original question, it's true that some interview questions once considered reasonable are now deemed

inappropriate because they might indicate an illegal hiring bias, such as, "Do you have kids or plan on having any?" So employers have learned to ask less personal, more job-centered questions to get at what they really want to know: Are you available to work on short notice? Can you maintain consistent working hours? What are your goals beyond landing this job?

So again, while nothing about your original question was inappropriate as far as I can see, if this experience has left you gun-shy, you could retool your interview questions to focus on the job itself and what it requires, such as:

-When and why was this position created?

-What would you say is the average amount of time people spend in this position?

-What would you say are characteristics of people who have been the most successful in this position?

That leaves it up to the interviewer to disclose as much or as little about individual personnel as feels appropriate, while giving you an opportunity to listen for clues about whether the job is a good fit for you.

DETAILS

Subject:	Business etiquette; Corporate culture; Employers; Interviews
Business indexing term:	Subject: Corporate culture Employers
Publication title:	The Washington Post (Online); Washington, D.C.
Publication year:	2021
Publication date:	Aug 26, 2021
Section:	Business
Publisher:	WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post
Place of publication:	Washington, D.C.
Country of publication:	United States, Washington, D.C.
Publication subject:	General Interest Periodicals--United States
ISSN:	26419599
Source type:	Blogs, Podcasts, & Websites
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	News
ProQuest document ID:	2564709233
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/hostile-job-interviewer-can-tell-you-everything/docview/2564709233/se-2?accountid=44910
Copyright:	Copyright WP Company LLC d/b/a The Washington Post Aug 26, 2021

Last updated: 2021-08-27

Database: U.S. Major Dailies

Database copyright © 2021 ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.

[Terms and Conditions](#) [Contact ProQuest](#)