

## Tell Me About Yourself

*by Carole Martin*

It's one of the most frequently asked questions in an interview: Tell me about yourself. Your response to this request will set the tone for the rest of the interview. For some, this is the most challenging question to answer, as they wonder what the interviewer really wants to know and what information they should include.

Eleanor dreaded this question, and when it was the first one asked at her interview she fumbled her way through a vague answer, not focusing on what she could bring to the job.

"I'm happily married and originally from Denver," she began. "My husband was transferred here three months ago, and I've been getting us settled in our new home. I'm now ready to go back to work. I've worked in a variety of jobs, usually customer service related. I'm looking for a company that offers growth opportunities."

The interview went downhill after that. She had started with personal information and gave the interviewer reason to doubt whether she was an employee who would stay for very long.

- She's married, and when her husband gets transferred that means she has to leave; she did it once and can do it again.
- She has some work experience with customers but didn't emphasize what she did.
- She is looking to grow. What about the job she is applying for? Will she stay content for long?

The secret to successfully responding to this free-form request is to focus, script and practice. You cannot afford to wing this answer, as it will affect the rest of the interview. Begin to think about what you want the interviewer to know about you.

### **Focus**

List five strengths you have that are pertinent to this job (experiences, traits, skills, etc.). What do you want the interviewer to know about you when you leave?

Eleanor is strong in communications and connecting with people. She has a strong background and proven success with customer relationships. Her real strength is her follow-through. She prides herself on her reputation for meeting deadlines.

### **Scripting**

Prepare a script that includes the information you want to convey. Begin by talking about past experiences and proven success:

"I have been in the customer service industry for the past five years. My most recent experience has been handling incoming calls in the high tech industry. One reason I particularly enjoy this business and the challenges that go along with it, is the opportunity to connect with people. In my last job, I formed some significant customer relationships resulting in a 30 percent increase in sales in a matter of months."

Next, mention your strengths and abilities:

"My real strength is my attention to detail. I pride myself on my reputation for following through) and meeting deadlines. When I commit to doing something, I make sure it gets done, and on time."

Conclude with a statement about your current situation:

"What I am looking for now is a company that values customer relations, where I can join a strong team and have a positive impact on customer retention and sales."

### **Practice**

Practice with your script until you feel confident about what you want to emphasize in your statement. Your script should help you stay on track, but you shouldn't memorize it – you don't want to sound stiff and rehearsed. It should sound natural and conversational.

Even if you are not asked this type of question to begin the interview, this preparation will help you focus on what you have to offer. You will also find that you can use the information in this exercise to assist you in answering other questions. The more you can talk about your product – you – the better chance you will have at selling it.