

DEALING WITH INAPPROPRIATE OR ILLEGAL JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Do you know what employers can and cannot ask in the job interview? Do you know how to respond if they cross the line? Prepare yourself, just in case.

Any human resources professional conducting job interviews should be well versed in appropriate interviewing techniques, including what questions they can and cannot ask. However, those new to the profession or individuals who don't conduct interviews on a regular basis may occasionally cross the line and ask questions that are personal, discriminatory or downright illegal.

Dealing with inappropriate or illegal job interview questions might make you feel uncomfortable; however, it isn't the end of the world.

What is and Isn't Okay to Ask in a Job Interview

"Sometimes interviewers are ignorant of the law, or they get comfortable with you and get sloppy," notes career expert Donald Asher, author of 11 books including *How to Get Any Job* and *Who Gets Promoted, Who Doesn't, and Why*. But what exactly is an illegal job interview question?

There are state as well as federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against people based on certain categories of information. Therefore, questions that solicit responses about these categories are inappropriate and generally illegal. Protected areas of information include:

- Age
- Arrest Record
- Birthplace
- Citizenship
- Disability/Medical Condition
- Marital/Family Status
- Military Discharge Status
- National Origin
- Organisations/Affiliations
- Physical Attributes
- Race/Colour
- Religion
- Sexual Preference

In general, job questions should only relate to your work qualifications and ability to perform the job. Even questions about languages you speak (for instance, is it your native tongue?) or when you attended college (revealing dates of attendance may reveal age) can result in the employer gaining access to prohibited information.

How to Handle Inappropriate Inquiries

While you may choose to get up and walk out of the job interview, there are other ways of handling inappropriate job interview questions.

First, you can answer the question. Some say this may help your chances of landing the job. However, a response also may signal the interviewer that you are not aware of your rights under the law and you may provide information that costs you the job offer.

Next, you can ignore or outright refuse to answer the question. However, depending on how you shape your response, this action may label you as uncooperative.

Finally, you can do what Donald suggests and focus on the concern, not the question. Donald provides this example. "If an employer should ask, 'I heard you mention you have children. Are you planning on having any more?' You might respond with, 'I love my kids and my family, but I make sure my obligations at work are always covered.'"

In Donald's opinion, someone with the proper training will realise they've "stepped over the line and respect your answer." On the other hand if the interviewer doesn't get the hint, they are "either untrained (and really shouldn't be conducting interviews) or a Neanderthal, in which case you'd better think twice about working there."

That doesn't mean you should assume that all people conducting job interviews are bad people because they "get close to a sensitive or illegal question." However, it may signal a deeper issue with the employer.

Ultimately, your goal is to present information about your skills and work experience in order to assist the employer in determining your ability to perform the job. Dealing with inappropriate or illegal job interview questions should not deter you from that goal.

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