

## How to Ace the “Tell Us About Yourself” Question

One of the things I’m asked most frequently is how to answer the question “Tell me a little bit about yourself”. For some reason this seems to stump both the novice and experienced interview student alike. The question often seems vague, without direction, and meaningless. You’re not sure “what the judge or interviewer is looking for” and for a moment you stare blankly ahead like a glamorous deer in the headlights.

There are several reasons an interviewer might ask this seemingly simple question. He might be using it as an icebreaker to get the interview started and help you feel comfortable and relaxed. She might be asking it to see what you feel is important and what aspects of your background you’re prepared to discuss. Or the interviewer may just be trying to buy some time while he scans your bio or resume to find a more interesting question to ask.

While this may seem like a simple, “throw away” question without a lot of value to your interview, it’s really your chance to take a hold of the wheel and steer the interview in a direction that is to your advantage. A good answer to this question will do three things: 1) grab the interest of the interviewer or judge, 2) mention aspects of your background which you feel make you a good selection for the job or crown, 3) set up a natural situation for the interviewer to ask follow-up questions about topics that you want to highlight.

Okay, you’re first goal is to grab the interest of the interviewer/judge. Please don’t say something like “My name is Valerie Hayes, I’m 45 years old, married, have two children, and live in Houston, Texas”. First of all this is completely boring and doesn’t help distinguish you as different from the other ladies being interviewed, and secondly it’s information that’s already on your bio (ho-hum, already read that on your bio sweetie!). Let’s make that a little more interesting “I’ve been married for twenty years to the same husband, I have two teenage children, a basketball player and competitive dancer, I have five adorable toy poodles, and I’m originally from Minnesota, currently living in Texas which is why I have the wrong accent for someone from the South”. Don’t you think that’s just a bit more interesting? Can you envision someone asking follow-up questions about my teenagers, long-term marriage, or how I managed to acquire five poodles?

Now let’s make sure you tailor your answer to the situation by highlighting aspects of your background that make you the obvious choice. The example given above would be great for many situations, but it’s definitely not what I’d say for a pageant system that stresses community service and personal platform. I would go with something like, “I’m an active volunteer in my community working as a Legislative Advocate for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Co-Chair of the Tamina YMCA Children’s Project, and a spokesperson for the Gulf

Coast Regional Blood Bank. These organizations all deal with issues that have touched me personally and I feel strongly that my leadership and contributions have benefited my community.” A natural follow-up question here is “How have these issues impacted you personally?” or “Why have you decided to focus on these three issues?” It creates a natural segway to discuss topics with which I’m very familiar, feel passionate about, and demonstrates my contributions to the community.

Now let’s adjust that for a pre-audition interview for a television commercial. You would want to stress the experience that makes you a good choice for a screen test. I might go with something like “I have solid acting and public speaking experience including theater, corporate training films, and was recently featured on MTV’s MADE.” Not only does this establish that I’ve already appeared on film, but the interviewer is probably going to be interested that I was on MTV and ask me about that experience. After all, everybody’s interested in a little reality TV “dish” aren’t they?

Don’t overlook the potential impact of this seemingly silly, unimportant question. Think of the “tell me about yourself” question as the perfect opportunity to intrigue the judge or interviewer with a few fascinating facts, highlight your unique qualifications for the job, and encourage follow-up questions on topics where you’ll really shine. By being prepared for even the simple questions, you’ll become a master of the interview and move one step closer to achieving your goal!