

Why Are Manhole Covers Round?

Interviewing for a
system administration job,
from both sides of the table

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What do we want from an interview?

- From the employer's point of view
- From the candidate's point of view

From the Employer's Point of View:

- Want the right skill set
 - Want a good fit for the task, the team, the organization
 - Want a satisfied employee
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- And sometimes there are budget and other constraints...

From the Candidate's Point of View:

- Want to be hired
- Want a good fit
 - Skills, job description, work environment, career plans ...
- Want job satisfaction
- Want good compensation, benefits ...

Tonight's Presentation: Your Participation Required

(sorry we didn't warn you)

Interview Questions

- Is it a good question?
- What is the purpose of the question?
- How can the question be improved?

Answers

- Is it a good answer?
- How can the answer be improved?
- What if you can't answer?

Why are manhole covers round?

Seven people are in a room. You will each have a hat placed on your head. The hat will be one of the 7 colors of the spectrum. You will not see your own hat. You will not be allowed to communicate with anyone else in the room. Each person will write the color of their hat on a piece of paper. If at least one of the seven is right, you all win. You are allowed to talk with the others before the hats are placed on your head.

What is the solution?

What are your responsibilities in
your most recent job?

What has been your biggest contribution at your most recent job?

Which of your jobs have you
enjoyed the most?

What type of management style do
you work best for?

If you could change one thing in your current job, what would it be?

What would your manager say are
your strengths?

What might your manager say as a criticism?

What is your ideal work schedule?

Tell me about a time when you
were not satisfied with your work
performance

How would your co-workers
describe you?

What did you like best about
working at your most recent job?

What did you like least?

In your last job, when did you feel
pressured?

Why?

How do you handle the pressure?

Where do you see your career
headed?

What would you like to be
doing in five years?

Why are you leaving your current
job?

What differences do you anticipate
in an academic environment vs
the private sector?

(or vice-versa, or big vs little site...)

What do you anticipate the biggest challenge would be for you working for us?

What are you looking for in a job
that you haven't had before?

What makes you want to stay in a
job?

A user is complaining that
"the system is slow."

How do you proceed?

You are architecting a fairly large site from scratch.

What are the considerations?

How do you keep current with
technical knowledge and changes
in technology?

What do you think is the most important quality in a system administrator?

You are given a new project, for example new software to support.

How do you proceed?

Sysadmins always have to juggle multiple projects and interruptions. How do you handle that? How do you manage your to-do list?

Of the things our group does, or
you think we do, what areas
interest you?

What don't you want to do?

Describe the biggest IT success
you were part of

Everyone makes mistakes. Once I newfs'd /
on a running system -- the major
instructional server, with 100s of users.

Tell me about a time you made an IT
mistake? How did you recover?
What did you learn from it?

Give an example of how you handled a situation with a difficult customer or client.

How do you handle
micro-management?

Your maintenance window will
expire in 1 hour.

You have 3 hours more work to do.

Now what?

What are the differences between
RAID-5 and RAID-10?

What is the first line of defense in system security?

Tell me about a team project you were part of. What was the project? What was your role? How did the project go?

I see that you worked on <X> at
<this job>. Tell me about that...

Questions for the Manager (and employees):

- Why is this position available?
- What are the career paths at your company?
- What kind of training program do you have?
- How are employees evaluated?
- How are raises/bonuses handled?

Questions for the Manager (and employees):

- What is the mission of this group?
- What is the #1 most important task/responsibility of this group?
- How long have you been the manager?
How long have you been in the group?
How long have the staff been in the group?
- What was the biggest accomplishment of this group?

Questions for the Manager (and employees):

- Who is your most difficult user?
- What are the biggest challenges working here?
- What are the biggest challenges for the group?
- Who sets the budget?
- How are technical decisions made?
- How are technical policy decisions made?

Wrapping Up

Questions for the Candidates

- Ask open-ended questions that don't have an obvious answer
 - But know why you are asking the question
- Probe their problem solving approach
- Probe specific knowledge, to determine their experience and expertise level (not quiz questions)
- Assess their exposure to “the big picture”

Questions for the Employer

- Assess the work environment
- Assess the technical work/issues
- Show your interest in the position, in the “big picture”, in your career...

Sensitive Questions

- Many questions are illegal or inappropriate
 - Marriage status, family situation, sexual orientation, age, religion, politics ...

Candidates and Sensitive Questions

- How to answer?
- How to ask?
 - (sometime) you can ask questions that reveal more about the work environment
 - Ask HR **any** and **all** benefit and policy questions
 - Managers and others may give an incorrect answer
 - HR may have the answers, without you having to ask

Asking Candidates Sensitive Questions

- **DON'T!**
- Make sure you get appropriate training and guidance before the interview
- If you think you have to ask a sensitive question:
 - Think about what you really **need** to know to assess the candidate **for the position**
 - Ask HR how to ask/how to handle the issue