

## **Illegal/improper questions in job interviews..., and what to do about them**

There are four main approaches that you can use to address improper questions during an interview:

- 1. Answer the question**
- 2. Refuse to answer the question**
- 3. Ask a question**
- 4. Answer a more appropriate version of their question**

**1. Answer the question:** Directly answering improper questions may affect your chances of getting hired, especially if the answer you give is seen as “wrong” in the eyes of the interviewer. However, offering to provide information that might alleviate unspoken concerns – even if no question is asked – can help address the “elephant in the room” (e.g., addressing obvious pregnancy early on in an interview to allow interviewers to focus on your other attributes, or discussing experience/ personal qualities instead of age).

**2. Refuse to answer the question:** If your refusal seems blunt, you can come off as confrontational or uncooperative (in most cases you don’t score “points” by not answering questions, or by pointing out they are improper). Simply refusing to answer improper question may give employers an excuse not to hire you. Your best scenario here is to say something such as “I am not sure I am comfortable answering that” or “I would like to show you how I am a good match for the job” (then reiterate or mention several relevant skills or qualifications).

**3. Ask a question:** This can give you time to evaluate why the person you are meeting with may have asked the question. Make sure that you ask the question in a positive tone (e.g., “That’s an unusual question. Before I give my answer do you mind if I ask you why you asked it?”). You will usually still have to provide some form of answer (see below).

**4. Answer a more appropriate version of their question:** Examine the question for its intent, and formulate an answer that is relevant to the job – in other words, answer the “proper” version of the “improper” question. Focus on the attributes that won’t compromise your chances of being hired.

### **Examples of “proper” questions**

- Are you eligible to work in the US?
- If you are not a US citizen, do you have the legal right to remain permanently in the US?
- Do you foresee any long-term absences in the future?
- List any professional organizations that you belong to that you consider relevant to your ability to perform this job
- Can you work overtime?
- Would you be willing to relocate if necessary?
- Will you be able to start work at 8am?

### **Examples of “improper” questions**

- What does your spouse do?
- Where were you born?
- Are you an American citizen?
- What language do you speak at home?
- How old are you?
- Do you take any time off work for religious purposes?
- Are you planning on having children soon?
- Are you married?
- What will your partner think about all the travel you would be doing if you got this job?
- Do you take any prescription drugs?
- How many sick days did you take last year?