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How to Answer Common Illegal Interview Questions

Q: Do you plan to have children?

A: I plan to pursue a career whether or not I decide to raise a family.

The interviewer may have a genuine concern about how long that candidate might remain on the job. But the question is improper at best and illegal in many states. This answer ignores the inappropriate question but answers the interviewer's concern.

Q: Are you aware that we've usually hired a more athletic person for this job because the pressure and fatigue of a lot of travel? (Read: not overweight).

A: There's no task in your job description that I cannot perform.

Q: What's your general state of health?

A: I'll be glad to take a pre-employment exam by your company physician to be sure I'm able to handle the job. (The employer may be trying to uncover maladies ranging from AIDS to drug addiction. Your answer relieves those concerns without directly replying to the question).

Q: Is your spouse employed?

A: Yes, and very supportive of my seeking employment here. (Some employers believe that people from dual-income families have less incentive to work, are less dependable, and therefore, are less productive. You've skirted the illegal question, laid to rest the concern and avoided an unpleasant confrontation).

Q: Have you ever been arrested other than for traffic violations?

A: There's nothing I've ever done that would give your company any concern that I'd breach any trust that the job you have requires. (Some states allow questions about convictions, but not arrests. The interviewer may be concerned about employee dishonesty, hence the question. Your answer satisfies the concern without turning off the interviewer).

Q: When was your last physical exam?

A: Answer with the actual time frame, example: two years ago. (This is an area in which you decide ahead of time whether to give a direct response to an inappropriate question; one that the employer may be using to learn about physical handicap. Since discrimination for handicaps is illegal, you're on safe ground to answer directly).

Q: What hobbies do you have?

A: I collect stamps and coins, ski in the winter and sail with a friend on his boat in the summer. (Is the interviewer trying to find a pitcher for the company's softball team? There's no reason not to give a direct answer, although you're looking for a job based on your professional skills, not your sports ability).