

Pharmaceutical Job Interview Questions And Answers



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Pharmaceutical Interview Questions And Answers Guide.

Question - 1:

I am in college. What can I do to enhance my odds of being hired as a pharmaceutical rep?

Ans:

Study hard and get good grades. There are many more applicants than open positions and the drug companies can afford to be picky. If you have an outstanding GPA, it tells the drug company that you are a hard worker and a disciplined student - two valuable traits.

Also, get involved in campus activities such as student-government or intramural sports -- these activities show that you are a team player and that you can get along with people.

Also, I strongly suggest that you take a life-science course or two to demonstrate that you enjoy learning scientific subject matter.

It is also a good idea to get some sales experience during the summer vacation or during the academic year. Sales experience is not an absolute prerequisite, but it can only help you land that job.

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Question - 2:

What are the pros and cons of working at a small pharmaceutical company versus one of the biggies?

Ans:

There are a lot of advantages to working for a small pharmaceutical company. First of all, a small company may be more willing to take a chance on somebody with less experience.

It is easier for you to shine and advance at small pharmaceutical companies. Also, small pharmaceutical companies can become big pharmaceutical companies very rapidly. Small companies offer stock options as incentive to stay with them long-term. Often, small companies get acquired by larger companies, and the original stockholders get wealthy.

However, working for a small pharmaceutical company is riskier than working for a big one. If your company has a small stable of products, that means you have all your eggs in one basket.

Small pharmaceutical companies don't provide big expense accounts for entertaining clients, and you don't have as much marketing support. Also, the territories are bigger so you have to drive more. Instead of working a territory that's 3 hours end-to-end, your territory may be an entire state.

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Question - 3:

What should I bring to an interview?

Ans:

It's a matter of opinion, but I wouldn't focus too heavily on a "brag book" full of your accomplishments. You should certainly bring a pen and something to write on, as well as additional copies of your resume. Also, bring your PMA (pharmaceutical industry jargon for Positive Mental Attitude).

Make sure that you are on time, etc. There are many interview books and articles out there that go into detail regarding interview etiquette.

Go over your resume because the interviewer should have a copy in front of him as he interviews you. Make sure you know the timelines of your employment or schooling.

You should look professional and well groomed.

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Question - 4:

What is a ride-along?

What is proper etiquette for a ride-along?

Ans:

A ride along is where you ride with an experienced sales representative for an entire day. You are the representative's shadow.

You two go into each doctor's office together. On ride-alongs you get a good idea of what your day will look like if you get hired.

In the eight hours together, the two of you will talk, have lunch together, etc.

Did you ever hear the phrase "there is no such thing as a stupid question?" This does not apply to ride-alongs. Don't ask stupid questions that may give your host the wrong impression of yourself.

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Question - 5:

I have been on several interviews but received no offers. What could I be doing wrong?



Ans:

If I knew the answer to this question, I would just wave my magic wand and give everyone who wanted one a job in pharmaceutical sales. I can't diagnose your problem, but I do recommend you take a good look at yourself.

This is a really tough question. There may be something that you are doing or saying that you are not aware of that leads the interviewer(s) to believe that you are not a good match.

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Question - 6:

I have tried to network, by collecting business cards of current pharmaceutical sales representatives, but none of the doctors or pharmacists in my town will give me any. What do I do next?

Ans:

I have heard that statement a couple of times. My answer is that you need to be more resourceful. You have to use your imagination. I can think of 10 different ways of getting your hands on pharmaceutical sales reps' business cards and telephone numbers.

Networking is a skill that pharmaceutical sales representatives have to be good at after they are hired as well.

In a way, being able to obtain contact information of pharmaceutical reps is a test of the same skills you will use if you are fortunate enough to land a position as a rep.

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Question - 7:

What is a Job-Fair? How useful are they?

Ans:

The problem with job-fairs is that they can be very crowded and have really long lines, so be patient even if the line is out the door. You are the gem, the job fair is the setting.

Job fairs are very useful. A company will usually not hold or participate a job-fair unless they have an acute need for candidates.

A job-fair is probably the 2nd best way of landing a job, after personal recommendation based upon networking.

Don't try to squeeze in a job fair into your lunch hour. Block off at least three or four hours minimum.

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Question - 8:

Should I accept a contract sales position if my real goal is to work directly for a drug company?

Ans:

That's a matter of personal choice. Contract reps are highly regarded, although the pay and prestige level may not be as high at first. Working as a contract rep could be a great transition into your job of choice.

Contract reps that are good workers have the perfect opportunity to network their way into their dream-job. They can wait and choose the perfect territory rather than grab the first opening that comes up like you and me.

The contract companies are an integral part of the industry. Most new product launches employ contract reps for added share of voice. The biggest are PDI and Ventiv.

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Question - 9:

What is a contract sales company?

Ans:

A contract sales company, such as Ventiv (formerly known as Snyder Healthcare) or Innovex is an organization that hires and then leases employees to a drug company. The drug companies "lease" the sales representatives for a contracted period of time, usually 2 years. They work along-side the sales reps of the drug company that has them under contract.

Drug companies contract pharmaceutical sales representatives to provide extra noise level for their products at a reasonable cost. Sometimes, the contracted sales-force is paid an hourly wage rather than a salary. Their benefit and bonus structure can differ from their associates who work for the drug company.

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Question - 10:

How many sales calls are you required to make each day?

Ans:

As many as possible. In this business

, the more time you spend in front of the customer, the more successful you will be. The successful reps I know make a minimum of 10 calls per day. Some make considerably more.

There is a direct correlation between the number of doctors you see and your effectiveness, so it behooves you to learn your territory well and make lots of calls.

Some companies want you to make a minimum of twelve calls per day. Some companies want a minimum of eight calls per day. Your manager will articulate her minimum call-activity expectations in a very clear manner.

The longer you are in the territory, the easier it becomes to make lots of calls. If the receptionists and other gate-keepers like you, they get you in to see the doctor quickly.

You can count on your company to give you lots of goodies such as pens, hand lotion and other door-openers to fortify your relationship with the gate-keepers.

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Question - 11:

When the economy does a downturn, what is the job market like for pharmaceutical sales reps?

Ans:

As a pharmaceutical sales rep, you will never enjoy the same level of job security as a teacher or civil servant. It's a cyclical business that ebbs and flows. If a company loses a major product and doesn't have a replacement, things might get dicey and there may be layoffs. Or if your company gets taken over and there are



too many people in the operation some people may have to find new jobs.

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Question - 12:

I am lucky enough to have more than one job offer. How do I decide?

Ans:

Talented people are in short supply. If you're lucky enough to be born with God-given talent and you have this dilemma, you should think about a few things. The most important factor you should consider is the chemistry between you and your potential manager. You will live and die by your manager. If the manager acts like a schmuck during interview process, she will probably be a real headache when you're working for her as well. You should also ask yourself what your goals and aspirations are. For example, if you are in a hurry to get into management, you might want to go with a smaller company. Maybe you want to go to work for a company that offers stock options. If you're a risk-taker who is willing to sacrifice job security for stock options, you may want to work for a biotech company. Maybe you want to go with a company that starts you off with four weeks vacation from day one (like Sanofi-Aventis). I like to emphasize that you shouldn't just limit your wish list to one or two companies that are household names. Other companies that don't have the same level of name recognition are al

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Question - 13:

If I am hired, and I have poor sales, will I be fired?

Ans:

Yes and no. They will give you a year or two. If your sales suck for two years in a row, you are skating on thin ice. If you are a veteran making good money (compared to the other reps) you will be held to a higher standard and you will likely be out on your ass if you do not have good numbers. But don't worry so much my pharmaceutical brother. If you are smart and you work hard, your sales will be good (unless you inherit a very high quota or the insurance companies take your drug off their recommended list). It's almost a guarantee - the harder you work, the better your sales will be. If your sales are weak, it's more likely that management will come to you and say "What's the problem here?, How can we help you be better at what you do?" Maybe you need more training, or your heart is not in the job. You have to be a real schmuck to get fired. You can be fired for dishonesty such as embezzling company funds, falsifying reports, or violating company policies like playing golf when you are supposed to be working. Most of the time people get fired for doing stupid things such as putting company gas into their boat or off-roader, taking competitor's pills out of the sample bins and throwing them in the trash, getting drunk at meetings, posting back stabbing comments on message boards, etc. One idiot I knew got fired for telling his manager to go "F" herself. Getting a DWI is also a very good way of getting canned. Cruising porn sites on your company computer is a slam dunk "you're fired" strategy. Give your company an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, don't use your expense account as a way to supplement your income, treat your customers and associates with courtesy and respect and you will be in good shape.

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Question - 14:

What is the hardest thing about being a pharmaceutical sales representative?

Ans:

The hardest thing for me is remaining psyched up and enthusiastic. Selling the same product for 1, 2, 5 or 10 years can get boring. When I am bored or unexcited, my presentations are boring and unexciting. This translates into uninspired and mediocre sales. I keep my creative juices flowing by speaking to the patients who use my products and thinking about how my stuff has changed their lives for the better. Thinking about the many people who are living better lives because of me getting the doctors to use my products recharges my selling batteries.

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Question - 15:

What are some of the things that you do not like about being a pharmaceutical sales representative?

Ans:

You have to have lots of patience. You spend a lot of time in waiting rooms, waiting for hours and hours. Sometimes I feel like I'm going to jump out of my skin with anxiety when I have to wait a long period of time to see a doctor. Also, every once-in-a-while, you run into a secretary, receptionist, or some other gate-keeper that is less than polite. Sometimes, the gate-keepers can be downright nasty. However, the positive aspects of the job far outweigh its negative aspects.

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Question - 16:

Do Reps really make large bonuses?
How many products does a rep carry; how do you get paid bonus on them?

Ans:

Usually, a rep carries two or three products. Sometimes a rep will be responsible for four products. Each product contributes to a portion of the rep's sales bonus. Example: Mike is responsible for three products - a blood-pressure medicine, a headache medicine, and an anti-fungal medicine. In the beginning of the year, his manager will tell him what the target bonus is, if he reaches 100% of quota on each product. His manager will also tell him what the weighting of each product is with regard to his bonus. Let's say that the company has a target bonus of \$20,000 (if you attain 100% of quota on each product you will make \$20,000).

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Question - 17:

If I am hired, what kind of training can I expect?

Ans:



You can expect training that is a combination of charm school and university studying. It's very vigorous and intense. You'll be learning every aspect of the product you'll be selling, from the underlying anatomy and physiology to competitor products. You will be bonding with your associates and hopefully form life-long friendships (or at least career-long friendships).

You'll also be taking a course in sales. You will likely be sent to another city for your training, but don't count on having any extra time for sightseeing or meeting with friends.

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Question - 18:

What is a typical day for a pharmaceutical sales representative?

Ans:

One of the nice things about being a rep is that each day is different.

Here's what a typical Friday is like for me:

I start about 7:45 AM and get home about 6:00 PM. Fridays are always the busiest and most productive in my territory because on Fridays there is a weekly medical meeting, called a "Grand Rounds" at a large institution in my area.

Daily Planner

7:45 Attend a grand rounds at the hospital early in the morning to meet my customers for a coffee and bagel and catch up on the latest in medical education. Removed from their busy hectic private offices, the doctors are in their own environment in and they are mostly friendly and cordial.

Some of the doctors ask me to stop by their offices because they need drug samples or clinical information on my products. I might work the room, making pseudo-appointments for later in the day

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Question - 19:

Why do the drug companies give so many interviews? Why does it take so long from the first interview until an offer is made?

Ans:

You have to look at it from the drug company's perspective.

They are taking a big risk - they offer a great job that has little direct supervision, an expensive company car and a large training investment. Also, their hard-earned reputation will rest on your shoulders.

There are many interviews because they want to get to know you before they offer you a job. The long interview process also gives a candidate a chance to get to know the company she is interviewing with.

It also takes time to conduct reference checks, do motor vehicle checks, and receive the results of drug screens.

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Question - 20:

What is the best way to land a job in pharmaceutical sales?

Ans:

Without question the best way to find a job in pharmaceutical sales is to network your way into it.

If you read the page that has become known as "Corey's Famous Advice," I describe how important word-of-mouth is when you want to land a good job in detail.

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Question - 21:

What about a cover letter?

Ans:

Your cover letter should be brief and concise. Personalize the letter as much as appropriate and include the name of the person who referred you.

A nice cover letter should state that . . . " Dear manager: I have been referred to you by such and such, a friend of mine (or a colleague of mine or a classmate of mine, etc.) who I have known for bla bla bla years.

He mentioned that you have an opening in bla bla bla, an area that I am familiar with . . .

I wouldn't obsess over the cover letter. A good cover letter is important but it's not like a manager will say, " I am going to hire this person because she has a real groovy cover letter."

I wouldn't include self-serving documents like letters of recommendation at this early point. Visit my pharmaceutical resume page for more tips.

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Question - 22:

What are the essentials that should appear on my resume?

Ans:

Try to think out of box. Don't use a chronological resume that is just a laundry list of where your body was at a certain point in time. Instead, try to create a more biographical resume that reflects what you are, what you do, and your accomplishments.

You should worry more about the content of the resume than what kind of paper or font you're using. Obviously, there shouldn't be any typos. And skip the cute e-mail addresses: the company you're trying to impress doesn't want to hire "HotNurse" or "Studly_Cakes_3"

Your resume should be easy to read and you should always have it ready to pass around. Remember, your resume is your advertising. Over a 30-year career, you'll (hopefully) earn \$5 million dollars.

You're marketing a \$5 million dollar product, and a good resume is an important part of your marketing plan.

If you don't want to write your own resume, use someone you trust or someone that comes recommended with a good track record. This is not the time for amateur hour.

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Question - 23:

How important is the resume in landing a pharmaceutical sales job?

Ans:

The resume is a very important tool. Every interview process begins with a resume, whether it's direct company contact, Job-Fair, networking, recruiter, etc. Any



time someone is interested in you the first thing they say is, "Send me your resume." So you need a good one.

You want your resume to give the resume reader a good idea of who you are, what you've done, and how you could be an asset to the company you are applying for. A resume is your personal advertisement. It should be easy to read, yet detailed.

You have to keep in mind that management people may have to read one hundred or two hundred resumes per week when they are actively recruiting.

This means that your resume will probably get at best, a quick glance. If you have a well-written resume you have a better chance of getting an interview. Writing a resume is an art.

I have been recommending someone here in New York for years and I have never, ever had any unresolved complaints about him or his work.

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Question - 24:

How do I shop for a professional resume writer?

Ans:

You need to be very careful when choosing a resume writer. There are many people in the resume writing business

. Many are skillful and professional but some of them are scam-artists looking to make a quick dollar. It is up to you to screen out the wannabees from the true professionals.

The best way to find a resume writer is by personal referral from a friend or colleague.

I recommend that you choose a minimum of three resume-writing services and interview them before you plunk down any money.

Here are some questions to ask your potential resume writer:

- How long have you been in business?
- Can you provide me with references from clients that have used your services within the past 4 - 6 weeks?
- How many resumes have you done within the past 12 months for people like me trying to break into a particular industry?
- Do you write the resumes yourself or do you farm them out to someone else.
- Do you have a guarantee whereby if my resume does not attract interviews, it is updated for free?

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Question - 25:

What are the pros and cons of working with a recruiter?

Ans:

There are times when it is wise to work with a recruiter. Usually a recruiter is looking for a very specific candidate. If you match the profile that the recruiter is looking for, your search can be expedited. Also, it's smart to work with a recruiter if you have experience in the field.

Your recruiter can do the dirty work for you while you pick and choose what opportunities to pursue. For example, you can say "I want to work in this particular neighborhood, here are my salary requirements, and don't bother me unless you find something that fits the bill."

On the other hand, a recruiter isn't the answer for most job-seekers. Recruiters tend to cherry-pick: they'll harvest 1,000 resumes knowing full well they are only going to place a few easy candidates who are most in demand.

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Question - 26:

Will an MBA or other advanced degree improve my chances of being hired as a pharmaceutical sales rep?

Ans:

In my experience, an MBA is not going to make or break you.

Most of the people hired for pharmaceutical sales rep positions do not have MBAs. It's more important to have charisma, to present yourself well, and to be able to clearly articulate your thoughts.

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Question - 27:

How necessary is it to have a 4-year degree?

Ans:

YES; The one thing that every drug rep has in common is a 4-year college degree or higher. Even an RN without a BS degree won't get in.

A 4-year degree is a prerequisite if you want to be a pharmaceutical sales representative. I don't want to sugar-coat things -- if you don't have a 4-year college degree, you have very weak prospects of becoming a pharmaceutical sales rep regardless of what your work experience is.

Even RN's with 10 years experience and an Associate's degree must obtain their 4-year bachelor's degree in order to meet the minimum qualifications.

I get all kinds of hate mail, blah blah blah, etc for stating this. I do not make up the rules; it is what it is.

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Question - 28:

I have bad credit, will this hurt my chances?

Ans:

This is a common question. There is no clear consensus regarding how your credit rating impacts your viability as a candidate.

I have surfed many pharmaceutical sales message boards looking for information regarding the importance of a credit rating and its impact on a hiring decision. I have read postings that swear it's important to have a good credit rating; others say it is not important at all.

You have to remember that your potential employer will be entrusting you with a company car, a company credit card and a company gasoline card. You will be required to manage a territory budget of many thousands of dollars each year. You may have to deal with cash advances and other financial instruments.

Therefore, you can understand that some hiring managers may want to use your credit report as a barometer of how you handle money.

In my opinion, you should not let your credit report prevent you from



applying for the job. As long as you don't have any bankruptcies or liens against you, you should be in good shape.

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Question - 29:

Will a DWI hurt my chances of being hired as a pharmaceutical rep?

Ans:

Yes.

It used to be if you have a DWI on your record you were toast. However sometimes exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis. There is no way of predicting if they will make an exception in your case.

There are instances where people who got DWI's in their teens and have clean records for many years have got hired. Also, sometimes one of the smaller companies will tolerate a DWI for an outstanding candidate.

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Question - 30:

I am willing to relocate for the right pharmaceutical sales job. Will this help me in my job search?

Ans:

You don't necessarily have an advantage simply because you're willing to relocate. In fact, it could add a great deal of complication to your job hunt. Territory managers are rated on recruiting effectiveness, and they want to fill their own spots before passing on information to other managers.

I would recommend trying to set up interviews in the city you're hoping to live. After you've already landed a job as a rep, your willingness to relocate may give you more opportunities.

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Question - 31:

How long should I expect my job search to last?

Ans:

If you don't have any experience in the field, it's reasonable to expect your search to last 6 to 12 months, start to finish. It will probably take a minimum of 3 months to land your first interview, and more like 6 months if you don't have any connections. The interview process - from the time you have your first interview until you are offered a job - takes a minimum of 6 to 8 weeks.

In my case, it took a long time. I sent out 170 resumes. I got four or five interviews. I saved my stack of rejection letters for a long time. Apparently, I had "outstanding skills and qualifications, however there were candidates that were more suitable" than I was. Be prepared to get a whole bunch of rejection letters (if they even bother to send you a rejection letter, which they don't always).

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Question - 32:

Is a scientific degree required for entry into pharmaceutical sales? What about prior sales experience?

Ans:

Successful candidates do not necessarily require either of the above. However, there is a great deal of variation here.

Mostly, it depends on the hiring managers' personal opinion. If she is trying to fill a very competitive territory, she may feel the need to hire a real seasoned "pit-bull" to go out there and grab the business. Or maybe, she has had a problem with a recent hire who has difficulty grasping scientific data and is determined to hire a person with strong science background to add to her team's qualities.

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Question - 33:

I think I want to be a pharmaceutical sales representative, but how can I know for sure?

Ans:

The first thing you should do is sit down and talk with as many real live reps as you can. Ride a day in the field with a rep, too. You'll learn firsthand that the job is not all peaches and cream.

You should be very familiar with what you are getting yourself into. It's like any career choice - you need to not have merely a good idea of what the job is about, you should have a working understanding of what a rep does.

The other things you should do is examine your motives. If you're looking for big money fast, this is not the job for you. If you want to be continuously learning and training, this might be up your alley.

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Question - 34:

I am 40-something years old. Am I too old to land a job as a pharmaceutical sales representative?

Ans:

No way, baby. It is true that most of the new hires are in their twenties. However a good candidate is a good candidate regardless of their age.

One of my mentors, a super successful representative here in Long Island, began his career at the age of 45. (He is now in his 70's and is having his best year ever). Age usually brings with it a level of maturity and wisdom. This will translate into confidence and poise in front of the customer. Also, keep in mind that many of the docs are older than 40.

However, keep in mind that all hires are done on the local level. Each hiring manager brings his or her own set of preferences and biases to the interview table.

One of my best friends in the industry started pharmaceutical sales at the age of 45. He left the insurance business after 16 years to become a rep.

I had the pleasure of training him and mentoring him. Last year, after 4 years in the field, he made enough money in bonus to buy a brand new BMW. (I'm talking 5-series here).

He relates real well to his customers and they will do almost anything he asks them to do.

That being said, being young is not a disadvantage, but it is not the panacea either.



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Question - 35:

What is the most challenging aspect of being a pharmaceutical sales person?

Ans:

A person who is new to the world of pharmaceutical sales will most definitely point out that the most difficult part is meeting the medical practitioner, but that is actually not so.

The most difficult part is actually convincing a doctor to switch from a drug that s/he and their patients are quite comfortable with and present a new alternative, which may or may not be better. Of course, the target group of a pharmaceutical is quite different than a common salesman, but that is the least challenging aspect of a pharmaceutical sales rep.

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Question - 36:

How do you perceive a typical day for pharmaceutical sales representative?

Ans:

When asked this question, it would normally mean that the interviewer is looking for your dedication and whether you are up to the physical aspect of working as a pharmaceutical salesperson.

To this question, you should generally reply that you are quite aware of the day time table of a pharmaceutical salesman.

You would also have to make a special mention of the times when the medical practitioners and other medical officers are relatively free, that being around seven in the morning or even around nine in the evening.

This way, you will not only speak about your knowledge of the business, but also inform the interviewer that you are ready for the hard work that goes into becoming a pharmaceutical sales representative.

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Question - 37:

What is your interaction level with your previous supervisor? What did he do right and what did he do wrong, according to you?

Ans:

Basically, this question is aimed at finding out whether you are good with some kind of authority above you or whether you are someone who requires a mentor.

The best answer to this question is that you had a cordial relationship with your supervisor and that any differences you had were purely theoretical and in the end, what was best for the company won.

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Question - 38:

How do you think the company would help you the best?

Ans:

This question basically means the company wishes to know whether you are a team player and whether you can handle your own resources.

The answer to this question is that the company should chalk out a plan and quota that you should achieve in a month and then give you the resources that are reasonable and logical for you to meet.

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Question - 39:

How do you perceive a pharmaceutical representatives typical workday?

Ans:

As a sales representative you know very well that your job is to sell to the physicians. Whatever it takes you have to increase the sales figures. To do that you must make a favorable impression on the doctors, especially the ones that count. Discuss how you plan for each doctor differently based on their work schedules and preferences, likes and dislikes.

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Question - 40:

What is the most challenging aspect of a pharmaceutical representative?

Ans:

As a pharmaceutical representative your biggest challenge is pretty much in influencing the physicians among many others representatives who are doing the same thing. Tell the interviewer on how you find your way to sell yourself to physicians creatively and to make it count in numbers.

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Question - 41:

If given a territory and a list of physicians to call on, how would you go about it?

Ans:

Nothing beats sound field knowledge to make a strategy. Know your territory first. Know your customers and their sales potential. Analyze the data and figure out where your biggest potential is in terms of the 80:20 principle (80% of your business comes from 20% of the people). After the A list is covered, then make your own B list and C list within a time frame that fits with the organizations sales closing

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Question - 42:

How would you like your ideal sales manager to be - to get the best out of you?



Ans:

Some pharmaceutical interview questions like this one are tricky. But you would certainly like a helpful sort who equips you with all the tools and knowledge, tips and other forms of support. You need one who can assess your potential and set you realistic goals based on a well-analyzed sales plan. One who actually sees you in action and tells you how to get the best strategy in place. One who can drive you, who supports and believes in you, who is open, honest and who can use his knowledge and yours to bring about a synergistic result. One who can add value to both your personal and career goals.

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Question - 43:

How do you think you would get a Physician to switch to your drug?

Ans:

The biggest challenge comes with a physician who is happy with his current drug. In such a case, your first step is to make your presence felt by setting small goals and making small in roads. As you gain more knowledge about the drugs and the physician's prescribing behavior you would use your product knowledge and other tools to make the physician view your drug favorably. Then your next step is to get the physician to prescribe to one patient type, and you have a foot in the door. Follow up with the doctor to see the results on the patient type and then you can push for other patient types.

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