Q: I had an unusual experience on an interview recently and was curious to know if you’ve ever heard of such a situation. The first interview for the position was conducted by a human resources manager. She asked me a number of boilerplate interviewing questions (“tell me about a time you used your communication skills to work with a challenging patron,” “tell me about a time when you had to manage several tasks at once,” etc.). I did well enough to be invited to a second interview several days later, with the supervising librarian who would be my direct manager. I was stunned when he asked me the *exact* same questions, verbatim, as the first interviewer.

In such a situation, should the interviewee give the exact same answers as he/she did on the first interview? After the first interview, I thought of better answers to a couple of the questions and gave the better answers on the second interview, but was also concerned that perhaps the human resources manager and supervising librarian would compare the answers I gave, so I was wary of doing this. In general, I found this practice of being asked the same questions on two consecutive interviews to be strange, but is this something that’s common?

A: That is unusual! At some workplaces, each applicant is asked the same questions (this is called “structured interviewing”), but to ask someone the same questions twice seems to me to be a missed opportunity. If you have an applicant come back for a second interview I would think you’d want to learn more about that person, and not ask the same exact questions. Perhaps they were looking for consistency which would lead me to believe that for that job, consistency is very important(?) I don’t know. Maybe they didn’t know they were asking you the same questions? Each one thought s/he was the one asking you the “official” questions, or the second interviewer thought the interview with him was your first one? It’s hard to say what might have been going on but it is not common.

I would say unless you really contradicted in the second interview what you said in the first one, you should be fine. A better answer the second time indicates you gave it some thought, as anyone would following an interview and preparing for a second interview. Perhaps that’s what they were looking for.

Thank you and good luck!

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