

Equipment Hire Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for an Equipment Hire Manager usually mix operational process, commercial judgement and people leadership. Employers want to see that you understand the hire cycle from quote to return, can keep a mixed fleet compliant and available, and can hold your own with contractors and farmers who need a straight answer.

- **Process and operations:** Walk-through questions about the hire cycle, fleet scheduling and depot workflow.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of handling damage disputes, difficult customers or a struggling depot.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Short, pressure-based problems about urgent requests, breakdowns or competing bookings.
- **Technical and compliance:** Questions on licensing, inspections, WHS obligations and maintenance systems.
- **People leadership:** How you roster, supervise and develop yard, workshop and counter staff.
- **Client-facing and negotiation:** Rate conversations, contract terms and building repeat business with construction, mining and agricultural customers.

The process often starts with a phone or video screen with a recruiter or hiring manager, then moves to a face-to-face at the depot. You will usually meet the branch manager and sometimes a state operations manager, and the day often includes a walk-through of the yard and workshop. Expect a mix of process questions, one or two scenarios and a conversation about how you would fit the existing team. Some employers also ask you to talk through a recent hire contract or damage claim, so bring specific examples.

1. Walk me through how you manage a hire from the first customer enquiry to the equipment returning to the yard.

Why they ask

Tests process knowledge and whether you understand the full hire cycle, not just the sales side.

How to structure your answer

Chronological walk-through: enquiry and needs check, quote and rate agreement, availability and booking, pre-hire inspection, delivery or collection, site support, return and damage assessment, servicing and back to available.

Example answer

"I start by asking what the job actually needs: ground conditions, access, duration, operator requirements and any site inductions. Then I check availability in the hire system and put together a quote based on the rate card, delivery and any attachments. If it is a long hire or a repeat customer I will look at a rate agreement that works for both sides. Before it leaves I make sure the pre-start and inspection are logged, the customer has the right tickets and the paperwork is clear. On return I inspect with the customer or their representative, note any damage straight away, and book servicing or repairs before the next hire. Then I update the system so the machine is either available or flagged for workshop. The goal is no surprises and no idle machines."

2. Tell me about a time you had to resolve a damage or loss dispute with a customer.

Why they ask

Tests negotiation, record-keeping and whether you can protect the business without losing a repeat account.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"A civil contractor returned a plate compactor with a cracked housing and disputed the damage, saying it was like that on delivery. I pulled the pre-hire photos and the signed condition report, which showed it was clean when it left. I sat down with their site supervisor and we went through the photos together. I explained the repair cost and offered to split it as a gesture because they were a repeat customer with several machines on hire. They accepted, and we kept the account. After that I made sure every handover included a quick photo set and a signature, which cut those arguments right down."

3. A major construction customer calls at 6am needing an excavator on site by 8am. Your only available unit is booked to another customer for a two-day job. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure, prioritisation and how you communicate when there is no perfect answer.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: acknowledge the request, assess the real options, communicate early and clearly, decide and follow up.

Example answer

"First I would thank them for calling and get the details: size, attachments, site location and how firm the 8am deadline is. Then I check the system for alternatives, including a smaller or larger machine that could do the job, or a unit due back that morning. I would call the other customer straight away to see if their booking can shift by a day or if part of their job can wait. If nothing works, I would be honest with the first customer and offer a concrete alternative, maybe a dry hire from a partner or a machine from another branch. I would also log the request so we can plan better next time. The worst thing is to go silent and leave them hanging."

4. How do you keep a mixed fleet compliant with licensing, registration and inspection requirements?

Why they ask

Tests technical and compliance knowledge, which is central to keeping a hire fleet legal and insurable.

How to structure your answer

Technical explanation: outline your system, records, scheduling and review.

Example answer

"I keep a compliance calendar in the hire system and a backup spreadsheet for the critical dates. Every machine has its registration, inspection, servicing and licence requirements listed, including high risk work licences for operators where needed. I schedule inspections and servicing around confirmed bookings so we are not pulling a machine out during a peak hire. Pre-start checks are logged daily and any fault tags the machine out until the workshop clears it. I also make sure the yard team knows what the current WHS requirements are and we run toolbox talks on anything that changes. If an auditor walked in, I want the records to be ready on the spot."

5. How do you roster and lead a yard and workshop team when demand is unpredictable?

Why they ask

Tests people leadership, cross-skilling and operational planning under real depot conditions.

How to structure your answer

Situational and behavioural mix: describe your approach then give a real example.

Example answer

"I start with a core roster that covers the counter and yard across the week, then build in flexibility for peaks. I cross-train people so a counter hand can help with pre-hire checks and a yard hand can do basic servicing. Each morning we have a quick huddle to set priorities: what is going out, what is coming back, what is urgent in the workshop. If a big project lands, I will ask for overtime or bring in a labour hire person rather than burn out the regular team. I also make sure the workshop gets quiet time to catch up on scheduled maintenance. In my last role we had a harvest season where demand doubled for a few weeks, and because we had planned the roster and cross-skilled the team, we got through it without missing a hire."

6. A long-standing construction customer tells you your rates are too high and they are considering another supplier. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Tests commercial and client-facing skills, including whether you can protect margin while keeping the relationship.

How to structure your answer

Negotiation approach: listen, understand the comparison, value, options, agreement.

Example answer

"I would ask them to walk me through the quote they have and what matters most: is it the daily rate, the delivery, the reliability or the condition of the machines? Often the cheapest headline rate comes with older gear or slow service. I would show them our service records and availability, and if the gap is real I would look at what I can move: a slightly longer hire term, a package rate for multiple machines or free delivery on the next booking. I would not just drop the rate, because that sets a precedent. If we can agree on a fair rate that keeps them running and keeps us profitable, I would put it in writing. If they still leave, I would keep in touch and make sure they know we are here when the other supplier lets them down."