

Top Interview Questions

Interviewing can be a tedious and stressful time. Which questions should you ask, which ones are appropriate? Are you going to pick the right person for the position? Below is a list of the top 14 interview questions hiring managers find most effective. These inquiries range from basic to complex and give descriptions of what the question accomplishes. Some of the questions are very straight forward and some are tricky ones that bring out the candidate's personality and behavior without directly asking them.

What circumstance brings you here today?

This is one of the best opening questions ever. This open ended question surprises many candidates. If they do not respond quickly, just sit quietly and wait for the response. Some candidates reveal problems with their current employer, potential insubordination, and both positive or negative character traits.

How would your best friend describe you?

In most cases, the response to this question indicates how the candidate wants you to feel they are perceived by friends. Take notes on the response and then ask, "May I call your best friend and see how they describe you?" You may or may not be interested in talking to the best friend. However, the response and body language after the follow-up question can indicate if you received a truthful response. I suggest asking this question near the beginning of the interview. It helps you get truthful responses for the rest of your time with the candidate.

What would you say are your 2 greatest weaknesses?

This question reveals the candidate's ability to identify the need for personal improvement. The best responses include a plan on how the candidate is addressing the weakness. Some candidates also do an effective job turning their weakness into a positive, which indicates the candidate has good alternative thinking or good sales skills. Watch out for candidates who are unaware or will not admit that they have weaknesses.

How do you alleviate stress?

Every job has stress. So if someone says they are not stressed or claim to not do anything about it, then they are either lying or they do not know how to control it. Look for positive activities or hobbies, rather than substance use or dangerous activities as stress relievers.

What are your short and long term goals?

The response to this question usually reveals if the candidate has personal or professional goals. If they do not have a quick response, it may indicate they do not plan ahead. I especially like responses which indicate drive, planning and good work/life balance. You may also need to ask for more details about certain goals to gain insight into whether or not the employee intends to stay for awhile or just gain a little experience and move on. Consider asking the follow-up question, "What are 3 goals that you have achieved in the past year?"

What type of work environment do you prefer?

When choosing potential employees, it is helpful to know what type of environment in which they prefer to work. If the company is very professional and usually quiet, someone who likes a loud, casual environment might not be the best fit. It is sometimes good to hire someone who does not fit the mold, but it is usually best to hire people who fit your work environment.

What is your typical way of dealing with conflict?

As with stress, conflicts are something we deal with frequently. Conflicts may range from differences with a supervisor, to differing lunch preferences. Most employers look for someone who can deal with an issue without getting frustrated. Either ask for a real-life example or build a hypothetical scenario and ask how they would handle the conflict. Some managers, who prefer a more confrontational interview style, intentionally create conflict and stress in the interview to see how the candidate responds.

What tools or habits do you use to keep organized?

Instead of asking are you an organized person, this makes the interviewee prove and describe their organizational skills. Most hiring managers expect that their employees have some type of system to stay organized. Whether it is using a planner, or electronic calendar, these tools confirm that the potential employee is reliable and responsible.

Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond to get a job done.

This is an excellent question that lets a potential employee really sell themselves. In doing so, the hiring manager can see what type of person they are really interviewing. They can also measure how out of the way this candidate had to go in order to complete their duty. This gives a clearer picture about the work ethic of the potential employee.

What was a major obstacle you were able to overcome in the past year?

Problem solving is the major topic covered by this question. What kind of thinker is this candidate? Can they do projects on their own or does their manager need to hold their hand. It also confirms how determined they can be toward a project.

In what ways do you raise the bar for yourself and others around you?

This question gives the interviewer an idea of who is and is not an above average performer. It also demonstrates leadership potential and the willingness to be a team player.

Tell me about two memorable projects, one success and one failure. To what do you attribute the success and failure?

Asking this question helps determine the candidate's ability to learn from successes and failures.

What unique experience or qualifications separate you from other candidates?

Some candidates have interesting characteristics and experiences that will not be exposed without asking a question like this.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Save this question for the end of the interview. A good response should be consistent and defined when you asked about short and long term goals. Beware of candidates who plan to be the same position five years from now. My favorite response is, "I plan to have either your job or your boss' job."

Interviewing is about finding the right candidate for a position. Proper questions reveal the most promising candidate for a hiring manager. Before interviewing, write down the characteristics the ideal candidate would possess and try to tailor your questions around those attributes. Also, open ended questions make applicants create a clearer image of who they are for the hiring manager. Interviewing is simply a matching game to see which candidate is the best fit for the position.