

Ace the Interview

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Ace the Interview

Having the right qualifications can land you an interview, but a successful meeting requires more than having the key skills for the job.

Excelling in the job interview requires a combination of confidence, strategy, and preparation.

Common Interview Questions

(And How to Answer Them)

Interviewers will ask questions about you to gain insight into your personality and to determine whether you're a fit for both the job and the company. It's a good idea to spend time thinking about what you might be asked, what hiring managers are really looking for in your responses, and what it takes to show that you're the right person for the job.

The following frequently asked questions touch on the essentials hiring managers want to know about every candidate. You may not be asked these exact questions, but if you have answers in mind, you'll be prepared for just about anything the interviewer throws your way.



"Tell me about yourself."



Although it might be tempting to share a list of your most compelling qualifications for the job, a more low-key approach will probably help you to develop a personal rapport with your interviewer.

What the Interviewer Wants to Know

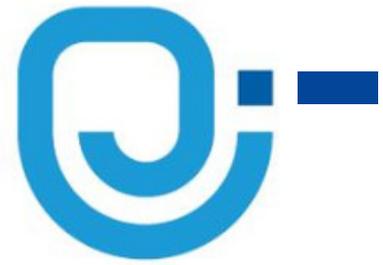


They're looking not only for indications that you're qualified to do the work, but that you'll gel with the team and the company culture. Resist the urge to give a detailed account of the last two decades of your career. The interviewer is looking for an answer that shows them you're qualified and can respond to an unstructured question.

Sample Answer



"I participate in charity walks several times a year. Recently, I did the Walk for Hunger and I have a few events planned for the summer and fall, as well. I walk for exercise with friends after work and on the weekends. I enjoy the fresh air, learning new routes, and connecting with new people. I also like the fundraising aspect, which has come in handy in my job. I've learned how to connect with people to increase their commitment to the cause."



"What is your greatest strength?"



This is not the time to be humble. While you don't want to exaggerate your strengths, you should be comfortable articulating what makes you an ideal candidate. Do not answer this question with a laundry list of vague strengths – be specific!

What the Interviewer Wants to Know



The main reason interviewers ask this question is to identify whether your strengths align with the needs of the company and the job's responsibilities. The hiring manager wants to learn whether you're a good fit for the role and team. The goal of the interviewer is to make a match between your credentials and the skills needed to succeed in the job.

Sample Answer



"I pride myself on my customer service skills and my ability to resolve potentially difficult situations. With five years' experience as a customer service associate, I have learned to understand and resolve customer issues effectively. On a related note, I also have strong communication skills, which help me to work well with customers, team members, and executives. I am known for being an effective team member with a talent for giving presentations."



"What is your greatest weakness?"



You'll want to communicate a specific story that shows you're self-aware. It's okay that you don't come off as perfect—that shows you're authentic.

What the Interviewer Wants to Know



The interviewer is assessing whether your weaknesses will get in the way of doing the job. They are looking for humility and whether you're committed to learning and growing in this role.

Even though the question is about weaknesses, your answer should always lead to the positive aspects of your skills and abilities as an employee.

Sample Answer



"I've been working on improving my sales skills. As a product manager who works with internal teams, I don't do much selling in my role. However, since I communicate frequently with the sales team, I wanted to have a greater understanding of their strategies and tactics.

I took a sales skills course online, which has improved how I work with the sales team. Now, when I participate in sales meetings, I'm more effective in communicating. This course also helped to me expand my skills to better "sell" my vision for our products internally."



"Why are you the best candidate for this job?"



Believe it or not, this is not the time to go overboard selling yourself.

There's the possibility that the question could become a trap. The hiring manager might use your answer to determine if you have an inflated view of yourself or if you tend to be overly critical of your colleagues.

What the Interviewer Wants to Know



Part of what interviewers look for is a cultural fit. In most cases, they'll want to avoid hiring someone who thinks they're superior to their colleagues or who tends to complain about the people around them.

Start with a disclaimer explaining that you are not aware of the strengths of the other candidates. After that, assert your strengths that will enable you to make a solid contribution to the company.

Sample Answer



"Although I'm not familiar with the others you are interviewing for this position, I'm sure there are a lot of talented people applying for this job.

However, given my unique background and success in event planning for the Philadelphia Flower Show—leading event operations and coordinating complex requirements for over 200 exhibitors—I consider myself to be a strong candidate for this position."



"Why are you leaving your current position?"



Focus on where you'd like to go in your career. You're someone who is looking forward, not backward. Communicate your interest in what you want to learn in your next role.

What the Interviewer Wants to Know



Employers want to see that you have a good attitude in general. Resist the temptation to say bad things about your current job, employer, or boss.

Bring the conversation back to them. Show that you've done your homework about the company and you're interested to join in on their good work. Relate your career goals back to the position you're interviewing for.

Sample Answer



"My biggest reason for leaving is that I'm ready to take on more responsibility. I enjoy managing a team, but there are no leadership positions available at my current company.

I also enjoy delivering training sessions, it's something I do a lot in my current role, and I've received lots of positive feedback.

I know you're looking for someone to lead and provide ongoing training to your sales team; I'm really excited about the prospect of helping them in selling your new line of products for the food service industry."



"Can you explain the gaps in your work history?"



Most people are nervous about how a gap will be perceived—even if there's a good explanation. But if they've invited you in for an interview, then the gap hasn't ruled you out.

The key is to be honest, though that doesn't mean you have to share more details than you're comfortable with.

What the Interviewer Wants to Know



Show the benefits of your time off.

Bring up the good that came out of this time—whether you were taking classes, stepped away to be with family, or even got fired. It's a great way to reframe the situation and an opportunity to showcase some useful skills that you gained during your time away from work.

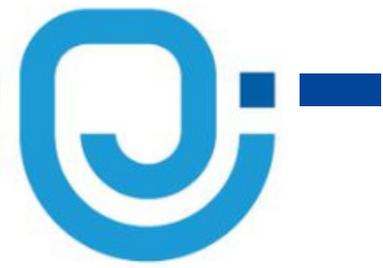
Sample Answer



"I had to resign from my previous position to care for an aging family member over the past year. Since then, my family and I have hired a full-time caregiver so I no longer need to be there.

During this time, I took two online leadership courses to keep my skills sharp, and to learn more about coaching, mentoring, and motivating a team.

I am fully available to work now, so I've begun a job search focused on a sales supervisor or manager position that will help me advance my career further."



"Is there anything else I should know about you?"



Start your answer with a summary of some of the key strengths that you have already shared. This will help the interviewer remember why you are a strong candidate for the position.

Then, add one or two items from your list that haven't been covered.

What the Interviewer Wants to Know



Interviewers ask open-ended questions like this to gain an idea of your personality, your self-knowledge, and your ability to communicate effectively. They'll be impressed if, at the end of an intense conversation, you are eager to continue the dialogue in order to make another point.

Resist the urge to politely respond by saying that you feel like everything's been covered. Instead, use this as an opportunity to close the interview on a strong note.

Sample Answer



"We've already touched on many of my strengths, such as my writing, presentation, and computer skills, but I haven't had the opportunity to tell you about my salesmanship.

My ability to be persuasive was valuable in my prior position. For example, I was able to convince seven local businesses to sponsor the charity run which I organized for my department, and I was able to place several stories about our top sponsor in the local media."