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15 Qs for Better Interviews with Job Candidates

These interview questions can help you determine a candidate's technical skills, culture fit, and ability to learn and grow within the organization. They are a little outside of what most candidates will expect, so they are likely to prompt honest responses and provide a well-rounded picture of the candidate's skills, past history, and temperament.

1. Tell me something about yourself that others may be surprised to know about you.

Why Ask This Question? This question is an opportunity to learn something very interesting and real about a candidate that might otherwise not come up in a standard interview.

2. If there were something in your past you were able to go back and do differently, what would that be?

Why Ask This Question? This question is another way to understand life lessons a person has learned and how these lessons may be of benefit when managing others or working in teams.

3. If a client made a complaint to you, even if it was a fairly mild one, how would you handle it?

Why Ask This Question? I am looking to understand a candidate's instinct, how they resolve problems and how the experience and knowledge learned can be applied to possible future situations.

4. Tell me about what you consider one of your strongest skills.

Why Ask This Question? It's important to find out what the interviewee considers his strongest skill, and if that skill is relevant to the position. To further assess skill level, ask the following two questions

5. Tell me your biggest success story related to [skill].

Why Ask This Question? This prompt is one that is good to use early in the conversation: it helps the candidate feel at ease and comfortable. Candidates lacking a good success story, particularly recently, raise a flag. Plus, it often helps to fuel better follow-up questions afterward. That said, if a success is particularly noteworthy, it's more or less timeless.

6. Tell me your biggest failure related to [skill].

Why Ask This Question? The purpose of asking this question is to ensure that the candidate possesses self-awareness. But perhaps as importantly, much like the biggest weakness question, the key thing here is learning what the takeaway was to help avoid recurrence. It also provides a good opportunity to evaluate communication ability.

7. What is your ideal position and why?

Why Ask This Question? This offers the candidate an opportunity to share their best skills sets (technical skills) along with their transferable skills (soft skills) and understand what they consider to be the best-fit position. It gives the interviewer an opportunity to see how closely aligned the candidate is with the duties and responsibilities of the position.

8. What is a development area, a deficit, or a gap that you've had to overcome or improve in your career? How was that identified, and what did you do to improve?

Why Ask This Question? It offers a chance to learn how someone deals with self-realization, self-actualization, and potentially how they overcome obstacles or adversity.

9. What are the least and most satisfying accomplishments in your career? Tell me about each of them.

Why Ask This Question? When people are invited to tell a story about what's been important to them in the arc of their careers, you get a window into their values. Did they value the impact they had? Did they value the award or official recognition? You have an

opportunity to see their motivators and their success markers. It's also critical to hear about opportunities that didn't work so well.

10. Describe your favorite supervisor and your least favorite supervisor – and why.

Why Ask This Question? This allows some fast insight into how the candidate likes to be communicated with and managed, as well as some revelations into overall attitude and maturity.

11. Describe work you've accomplished that best compares to what needs to be done here.

Why Ask This Question? A pattern soon emerges of where the candidate excels and how they think they would fit into the organization. It also give a sense of whether or not they've done their homework prior to the interview.

12. How did you end up in your current role?

Why Ask This Question? You'll get a better sense of a candidate's career trajectory, as well as what motivates them.

Finally, these three questions can help vet out the quality of a candidate's preparation for the interview:

13. What interests you most about this position?

14. Do you have any questions for me?

15. How do you think you can add value/help us grow the business?

Why Ask These Questions? More substantive answers signal a higher level of preparation and initiative. Moreover, the candidate having jotted down a few questions to ask signals interest beyond an individual role and to their overall relationship within and among the enterprise.