

How to answer the 5 most important interview questions

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Mark Zuckerberg, CEO and founder of Facebook, describes his hiring process this way: “I will only hire someone to work directly for me if I would work directly for that person.”

Zuckerberg’s comment illustrates an overlooked, yet fundamental, truth about hiring — people are ultimately looking for someone they want to work with.

This is why companies of all types will ask you the same five questions.

Human nature ensures interviewers return to these questions time and again to find out if you’re someone they want to have down the hall.

Your ability to wow the interviewer and land the job hinges on how well you answer these questions.

Fear not! I’ve provided perfect answers to the five questions you will be asked every time you interview.

“Why are you leaving your current job?”

This question trips a lot of people up because it can get you into a negative mindset or a rant against your present (or previous) job. The interviewer only wants to know that you aren’t leaving purely for money and that you don’t have trouble getting along with people.

Even if you were fired, the key to answering this question is to maintain undying positivity. Put a positive twist on the negatives to show your interviewer that you’ve learned significant and valuable lessons.

If at all possible, show the interviewer that your moving jobs is all about passion and career growth.

“Tell me about yourself”

When interviewers ask this, they don’t want to hear about everything that has happened in your life; the interviewer’s objective is to see how you respond to this vague, yet personal, question.

Most people are quick to gush about their life story or their passions outside work. In the process, people have the tendency to slip up and to reveal things that cast them in a negative light. You don’t want to be too loose with your personal life with someone you just met.

The idea here is to give the most important points of your resume and how these experiences make you a great fit for the job. All you need to do is show the interviewer why you’re the best fit for the position and leave all the other extraneous details out.

“What are your weaknesses?”

It’s difficult to find a *genuine* weakness that makes you appear competent.

For instance, telling your interviewer that your weakness is working so hard that you have trouble prioritizing your family life is a little too cliché and comes across as disingenuous. But telling your

interviewer that you lose interest in mundane tasks (though this may be genuine) makes you an unappealing candidate as well.

To answer this question perfectly, pick weaknesses that are *minor* and can be *developed*.

A great tactic is to choose a past weakness that you have an awesome story about fixing. For example, if your weakness is that you have difficulty confronting people with bad news, tell your interviewer that you've learned to begin with something positive before moving into the negative. This is a perfect example because the issue is minor (interviewers won't consider it a deal-breaker), and you've shown that you're someone who can learn and seeks improvement.

“What is your desired salary?”

The unwritten rule when it comes to salary is this: whoever proposes a number first, loses.

When you interview, you should never feel pressured to answer this question. Simply let your interviewer know that the most important thing to you is how well you fit the position.

Say something simple like, “Though I know salary is relevant, I don't make decisions based solely on it, and I would prefer to discuss it later once you know more about me and I know more about the role.”

This shows the interviewer that you have put thought into the question and that you would prefer to focus on fit before pay. You'll have far more leverage in a salary negotiation if you wait until they want to hire you before discussing it.

“Tell me about a time when you _____”

This question sounds simple, but it's difficult to clearly and concisely share a meaningful story.

Laszlo Bock, the head of HR at Google, says you should approach this question like this: “Here's the attribute I'm going to demonstrate; here's the story demonstrating it; here's how that story demonstrated that attribute.”

Bock also says, “Most people in an interview don't make explicit their thought process behind how or why they did something and, even if they are able to come up with a compelling story, they are unable to explain their thought processes.”

A perfect answer to this question shows what you did and *why* you did it (i.e., how you think).

Have stories prepared that demonstrate different desirable attributes of yourself. Just don't forget to explain the thinking that went into your actions as you tell them.

Bringing it all together

Now that you know how to answer the five most important questions in any interview, you'll have a leg up on the competition. Just don't forget to prepare and practice your responses until you can share them without your answers sounding rehearsed.

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