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# Top 25 Interview Questions

*The questions you don't (yet) ask but really should*

Presented by



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Whichever side of an interview desk you've been on, you will know that there are good questions and bad questions.

From a recruiter's perspective, bad questions stick in the memory. They're the ones that, time and again, generate 'one-word', un insightful or carefully rehearsed answers.

The right question on the other hand, can – in just a few words – provide a deep insight into a candidate (and give them the chance to demonstrate) - their skills, their values, and their way of thinking. How a candidate sees themselves, what drives them, and the extent of their emotional intelligence, and – most crucially of all – whether they'd be a good 'fit' for the role and for your organization's culture.

It's been found that up to 20% of people leave jobs within 45 days of joining, with a mismatch of expectations, cultures and values often being the main problem. And of the 43% of those in work saying they want to leave their job, corporate culture was the most commonly-cited reason. So maximizing your chances of finding a fit that's right is vital.

Of course, there are some 'boilerplate' questions that you'd expect to ask in any interview. Questions necessary to establish the bare minimum about a candidate's suitability or verify details in their resumé. But well-targeted questions can do so much more than this and – in a process where every minute counts – can both quickly sift out unsuitable candidates and float your next star hire to the surface.

**So with that in mind, what follows is a list of 25 questions – from recruiters and interview veterans across the web – that if you're not already asking, you probably should.** Questions that will help find the right person for your role, from graduate programs to the C-suite.

And with face-to-face interviews being increasingly replaced by more cost-effective solutions such as video interviews, we've chosen questions that will work well in all scenarios; questions tailored to elicit an insightful response even in situations (for example one-way interviews) without scope for 'back and forth' or follow-up questions to the candidate.

## 1. In your career, how do you evaluate success? / What's your greatest career accomplishment?

This question may look unprepossessing, but it can reveal a huge amount. Not only details about a candidate's experience and future ambitions, but – as with many of the questions in this list – insights into their motivation, passions and values. Also, while it may look similar to commonplace “Where do you see yourself in five years' time” questions, it's less likely to elicit a ‘tick-box’ response. Rather, it can provide tangible insights into what drives a candidate, how their career motivations relate to your company, and – critically – whether their values would fit with yours.

## 2. In what working environment are you most productive?

Questions like this (and similar ones, like “What level of oversight would your ideal boss provide?”) help you learn about how a candidate works best. Are they self-starting and proactive? Better in smaller or larger teams? Would they work effectively in your open-plan offices? Or for a boss like the one they'd work under in your business?

But at the same time – and, for the reasons we've seen, just as importantly – it will help surface potential cultural mismatches. No matter how talented or experienced a candidate may be, if a ‘clash of cultures’ means that they're not able to showcase that in your company, they risk becoming another ‘employee turnover’ statistic.

## 3. What's your favorite aspect of your current role?

Again, this provides a sense as to your candidate's values, but it puts them in a very present context. By asking about their current role, you can see a real-world example of how and when the candidate is likely to be ‘at their best’ – and what they'll be looking for if you hire them. You'll know what would be involved in their new role better than them. Based on what inspires them in their current role, is your position going to motivate them to deliver for you?

## 4. Tell us about the best boss/working relationship you've had.

We each know from our own working lives the importance of effective interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Which is why recruiters swear by this question.

It's deceptively simple, but can in fact provide many layers of insight: into what the candidate considers important in their working relationships, the characteristics they value (or dislike) in others, and whether they'd be a good cultural fit for the team they would be joining.

And of course, you can always ask about the worst boss they've had too (and hope that person isn't a pen portrait of your organization's leaders).

## 5. How would you handle a team situation where Nina wants to dive right in, Joe is telecommuting, and Todd wants to gut the project?

This question [comes courtesy of](#) recruitment blogger Maren Hogan, and provides a neat variation on the vital (but rather more well-worn) questions asking how a candidate works in a team or deals with difficult colleagues. Not only can it explore their approach to collaborative working and the skills they would bring, it can also reveal the types of people they will likely gravitate to (are these the people you have in your organization?), their communication and conflict resolution skills, and their ability to understand and respond sensitively to others' points of view.

## 6. When I speak to your colleagues/boss, what will they say about you?

Asking a candidate how others perceive them is a well-tested means of gaining insight into their level of self-awareness, and their ability to 'put themselves in the shoes' of others. And again, small changes in how the question is worded can make a big difference. Note the use of "When I...", in effect envisioning a specific conversation that would verify any response a candidate gives. Even if the candidate knows (or thinks they know) that you won't actually speak to their current colleagues, phrasing the question this way can often sub-consciously elicit a truly honest, self-reflective answer rather than one that's just what the candidate thinks you want to hear.

## 7. What attracts you to our company? Why have you chosen to apply for this position now?

At their most basic, these questions will quickly tell you how much a candidate has sought to find out about your company, and the role. But they do more than that. They can shine a light on whether the candidate has actually understood your organization's values, and what their new role would entail. They can draw out a candidate's reasons for leaving their current role, without the need to ask this directly (which can make candidate's feel uncomfortable or elicit a 'pre-rehearsed' response). And they can demonstrate what a candidate is looking for from their future career, and how the role fits into that. They can even uncover what a candidate's priorities might be once they are in the role.

## 8. After 30/60/90 days in the role, what do you want to have achieved?

This may be a familiar question, but it's still a hugely effective one.

More than any other, it gets the candidate to look forward and imagine themselves in the advertised role. And, in doing so, will help expose: how well they understand what the new role entails, what they would bring to it and where they will need help from others; whether they've considered the internal dynamics of the organization they would join and the impact of their arrival, and what their short and longer-term priorities are.

## 9. Are there any roles you consider beneath you?

No-one benefits from 'trick' questions that try to catch a candidate out. They can put candidates on edge and are as likely to lead to a carefully-couched response as they are an honest, considered answer. But this question isn't one of those. Rather, it can be an effective means to find a candidate who is unhierarchical and willing to 'muck in', but also aware of where their true value lies.

And of course, if they answer with various roles that fall squarely within the list of responsibilities they'd be taking on, this probably isn't the job for them ...

## 10. What's your USP?

You want a candidate to be able to showcase their strengths. It's why "What's your greatest strength?" is an interview question staple. But by asking a candidate to focus on their 'USP' – the thing that makes them stand out from others – you're likely to get a more candid, informative (and, in all likelihood, more interesting) response. And of course, there's the argument that a candidate who can't say why they're what you need probably isn't what you need.

Just a word of caution though: remember that some people are more comfortable with self-promotion than others, and try to avoid questions that ask candidates directly to make impossible comparisons with other applicants that they've never met.

## 11. Give me two reasons why I shouldn't hire you.

The inspiration for this question – detailed in Adam Grant's book about non-conformists, [Originals](#) – was entrepreneur Sarah Robb O'Hagan, who began a job application by listing the qualifications that she didn't meet, and why she was suited to doing the role anyway. In many ways, it's just the flipside of the 'USP' question and can elicit similar insights.

But it should be said that questions like this (and its close cousin "What's your biggest weakness?") tend to divide opinion. Some recruiters believe focusing on negatives is unfair, or likely to encourage candidates to lie or try to be 'clever' in their answers (say, with answers that dress strengths up as weaknesses).

Others, however, swear by them as important ways to test a candidate's self-awareness and break them out of any pre-prepared 'sales patter'. CloserIQ CEO Jordan Wan, for example, advocates deliberately starting a question with an objection – "I don't think you're the right fit for this company, tell me why I'm wrong" – to see how a candidate might handle a similarly abrasive challenge from a potential client or colleague.

Different approaches will work for different companies – think about what it is that you're looking to understand about the candidates you're interviewing.

## 12. Describe a time when you were faced with an underperforming colleague or team member and how you responded.

Behavioral questions, which ask candidates for specific past examples, are a recruitment staple – and with good reason. As an interviewer, the aim is to elicit a STAR answer – one that sets out the Situation the candidate was in, the Task required, the Action they took, and its Result.

This particular question is one for which all candidates – even those with little prior work experience – will likely have an example. And that example can tell you a lot about whether they would fit in your organization, revealing how they work in a team and deal with others, how they deal with adversity and resolve conflict, how they seek to change things for the better, and the extent of their EQ – the emotional intelligence to be able to put themselves in the shoes of their colleague and consider the impact of the situation, and the candidate's own actions, on them.

## 13. Describe a time when you made a mistake. What did you learn from it?

The key to this question is, of course, less the mistake, and more what the candidate learned from it.

A candidate that tries to convince you they've never made a mistake is likely lying or lacking in self-awareness. By contrast, one who is able to acknowledge a past failing, to take ownership of it, to deal with its implications and effects on others, and to show how they have learned from it, could well be exactly the kind of employee your business needs.

## 14. Describe a time when you unexpectedly faced several urgent tasks with competing deadlines- how did you ensure delivery?

This is a scenario that candidates - even those straight out of high school – will likely have faced, and can tell you a lot about how they would respond to unexpected and stressful circumstances.

At its simplest, it will help show if and how they prioritize tasks. But it's also a chance for a candidate to demonstrate adaptability, creativity, resilience and an appreciation of the importance of communication and collaboration in high-pressure circumstances.

Cristian Rennella, CEO of comparison site oMelhorTrato.com, has a nice take on this question. He asks candidates to imagine they have 72 hours to deliver a project that normally takes a month, and then to choose the three people they'd ask to help them get it done. Who the candidate chooses, he says, can shine a light on their awareness of the skills they have (and don't have) and the sorts of teams in which they would be likely to thrive.



## 15. Tell us about a time when you disagreed with a decision a senior colleague made or you felt you (or someone else) had been treated unfairly- how did you respond?

This is another question that can tell you a lot about a candidate's values, and how these align with your organization's ethos.

By showing how the candidate responds when their values are challenged, such questions explore how they balance 'standing up for what they believe in', challenging orthodoxies and 'speaking truth to power' on the one hand, with the need to find constructive solutions and 'get on with the job' on the other.

## 16. How do you go about continuing to develop your knowledge and skills?

You want employees who are committed to improving themselves. So ask them about it. This question will show if a candidate is self-aware enough to recognize their development needs, understands the value of ongoing learning (and not just on-the-job learning), and has the motivation and drive to seek out opportunities proactively.

## 17. Tell us about a time you went above and beyond to get the job done.

## 18. Or when you had to cut corners that you weren't proud of in order to meet a deadline.

These are really two sides of the same question, but both can tell you a huge amount about a candidate (the latter is [reportedly used by Airbnb in its recruitment](#))

Getting a candidate to talk about going above and beyond is the type of positive question that gives them a change to showcase themselves at (what they see as) their best. But it also puts into stark relief what they consider to be 'above and beyond'. If that doesn't match your definition, regardless of which of you is right, they may not be the candidate for you.

The Airbnb approach is to flip this on its head – to take a candidate out of their comfort zone and see how they reacted when trade-offs were needed. How they responded, communicated, mitigated risks and balanced quality versus delivery can all provide insight into how they might react in the role when things go awry.

## 19. What's the biggest decision you've had to make in the past year?

The prime function of this question is – evidently – to explore a candidate's decision-making skills and processes, their ability to prioritize, to take a long-term view and to see the bigger picture. But it can also go further than that. Whether by virtue of the decision they've chosen as most important, or the matters they took into account when taking it, the candidate's answer can reveal a lot about the issues and values they hold dear – something you can calibrate against your organization's own culture.

## 20. What are the most important trends in your industry?

For many roles, testing a candidate's insight into, and current awareness of, the industry that you (or they) are working in is vital. But this question, [used by Village Global founder Anne Dwane](#), shows that, by framing such 'current awareness' questions right, you can extract their hidden potential. Phrased in this way, the question can explore a candidate's intellectual curiosity and their willingness and ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The best responses will not only showcase how the candidate is proactively looking to deepen their understanding of these trends, but also how they are preparing now to adapt to (and benefit from) them in future.

## 21. What are the implications of self-driving cars?

## 22. In 90 seconds, describe to us something complicated that you know well

For a time, there was a trend for asking candidates 'off-the-wall' or 'brainteaser' questions – How many golf balls fit in a school bus ([Google](#)) or which breakfast cereal candidates thought they were ([Bed Bath & Beyond](#)).

But if you're trying to test a candidate's ability to think on their feet, to see the bigger picture and look beyond the obvious, there are better ways.

Questions like the two suggested here (the first of which comes from [DropBox Product VP Todd Jackson](#)) will test all those skills. But they'll also test the candidate's ability to explain complex ideas clearly, imaginatively and passionately, and to structure their response in real-time to be succinct and coherent.

What's more – in contrast to some 'quirky' brainteasers – they enable candidates' answers to be mapped more clearly back to your industry or the role in question. You could, for example, replace "self-driving cars" with a technology more relevant to your own sector, or narrow down "something complicated" to something more specific ("a complex scientific theory" or "a difficult legal concept").

## 23. If you had \$40,000 to start your own business, what would you spend it on?

This question – suggested by [HubSpot's Emily MacIntyre](#) – is another great one for getting candidate's thinking on their feet and probing what makes them tick. It reveals what they're really passionate about, and provides scope for imagining all manner of possibilities, but – particularly by limiting the money available – also tests their commercial awareness of what starting a business might involve and cost, and how finite resources are most effectively allocated.

## 24. What's surprised you most about this interview and how could it have been improved?

The benefit of this question is that it isn't one that candidates can 'pre-prepare' stock answers to (although, of course, it wouldn't really work in one-way video interviews). It requires quick analysis of an evolving situation, and the ability to provide a judicious answer that is candid and shows willingness to speak up, but also looks for positive solutions and doesn't just highlight perceived flaws.

## 25. Do you have any questions for us?

OK, this one is probably on your list already, but it can't be overstated. Whether the interview is face-to-face or by video link, it's important to give the candidate a chance to ask questions (or, for one-way interviews, a means to do so 'offline'). The questions they ask won't just help you address any concerns they might have (making them more likely to accept if you do offer them the role), they might also offer further insights into the candidate's values, their priorities, and the type of employee they might ultimately be.

### And that's 25.

Of course, this list is by no means exhaustive, and for any question, there may be a thousand ways to ask it, and as many ways again to tailor it towards your specific business. And we haven't even touched on the importance of a candidate's non-verbal communication. **But what remains clear is that – when it comes to finding the candidate that would thrive within your organization – the *right questions* are the *right answer*.**

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