

Interview Questions That Work

By Eric Kramer

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There are literally thousands of possible interview questions. How does one decide what questions to ask? To get some insight into this question I asked about interview questions on LinkedIn. Responses included the following:

"...Not so much a single question, but a type of interviewing. I want to learn how they think, how they make decisions and how they solve problems. So I will ask them about specific events and issues and walk them through their thought process and their actions. I know there are a lot of "trick" questions out there that people ask such as "if you were an animal what would you be and why?" but I usually only use questions like that if it is obvious a person has over prepared their answers from some interview guide book.

Kevin B. Richardson, SPHR, GPHR

"Tell me about a goal you planned 5 years ago and how you plan to accomplish it this year." This is not a trick question. If you want to hear how a candidate thinks, this question will bring it out. You ask a number of subsequent questions from it.

Stephen Hinton

"Tell me about yourself. Answers vary from good to terrible. Someone needs to tell candidates how to answer this question or one intended to elicit the same information."

Michael C. Dennis

"If you were to have a brand new boss shipped in from a different location while your old boss is on a 2 week vacation, what would he recognize as your weaknesses?"

Darrell DiZoglio

"Each interviewer is different and can ask a wide variety of questions. What I've found is that there are some that are pretty standard and encountered in nearly all interviews. For example, "Tell me about yourself."

Ronald Auerbach

"There is no single question during an interview, but as a retained executive search consultant one of the first questions I ask is "take me through your background" - and by this I mean from the first job out of college. This defines how a person went from job to job. Some questions come up based on answers given.

Natalia Bilash

"I ask an off the wall question at interviews... "If you could have the absolutely perfect job, doing anything, anywhere, for anyone, what would it be?" This is such an open ended question and it can show you what their circle of influence encompasses, their creative ability, their honesty, and their ethics."

Carleen Moscarelli

"In the middle of reviewing their work history ask something unrelated to the hiring process, like "What's the last book you've read?" or " How do you value or measure success?". Most individuals have scripted interviewing answers and this throws them completely off track. How well they react is a pretty good indicator of how they handle pressure. (ie body language, time to respond, facial expression, etc.)"

Demont Daniel

"Tell me about a (recent / favorite) project / job. This is a classic opening question for me. It is also a question that the nervous people can prepare for, but anyone should be able to easily handle without advanced preparation. Actually I seem to get better responses when people are not expecting it. I am more likely to find out what people are really enthusiastic about."

Jessica Gray

As the quotes reveal, other than the most typical request, "tell me about yourself" there are an unlimited number of questions to ask and most interviewers have their favorites. In terms of 'canned' interview questions, my suggestion is to select a few questions you like and ask them.

I have found that the most insightful information comes from a question that Jessica Gray suggests "Tell me about a (recent / favorite) project / job". By asking insightful detailed questions about the project or job the interviewer can learn specifically about what the candidate has done, how they work with others, their work attitudes and their motivations. Also, and importantly, a candidate is typically less anxious when speaking about a personal experience in which they were successful. A less anxious candidate will represent themselves better and you will get a clearer picture of them.

I also advocate having a candidate prepare a presentation that communicates their match with the job requirements and why they are the best candidate for the position. By preparing and presenting a presentation, the interviewer gets to observe the candidates ability to assemble information, communicate the information and respond to questions