

Mastering the Interview *Questions That Reveal Top Talent (and Those to Avoid)*

Hiring the right person the first time is crucial. The cost of employee turnover can be significant, reaching as high as 150% of an employee's annual salary. Beyond the financial impact, constant team turnover, disrupts team dynamics, hindering rapport, effectiveness, and efficiency. A stable team fosters a more balanced and productive work environment.

Asking the right questions is imperative to choosing the right candidate. Examples are provided to help you gain an understanding of a candidate's skill, character, and cultural fit, so you can be confident and select the best candidate from the start.

Assessing both hard and soft skills is essential for successful hiring. A candidate might possess all the necessary qualifications on paper, but if they aren't a cultural fit for your team or organization, their performance and productivity can suffer. Conversely, a candidate who aligns perfectly with your company culture but lacks the required skills will also negatively impact team performance, as colleagues will likely need to compensate for their shortcomings.

A well-rounded interview strategy utilizes behavioral, situational, and skill-based questions. Each question type targets a different facet of a candidate's potential performance, providing a more complete picture. The following questions are categorized by type – behavioral, situational, and skill-based – to help you structure your interviews effectively.

BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS UNCOVERING PAST PERFORMANCE

Behavioral questions delve into specific situations and challenges candidates have faced in their previous roles. These questions are designed to reveal crucial soft skills, such as how they handle stress, pursue professional growth, and contribute to team building.

Understanding a candidate's past behavior is a strong indicator of how they'll perform in your organization. Pay close attention to what they choose to share. Do their qualities and temperament align with your existing team members? Do they demonstrate effective and diplomatic communication skills? Do they seem like someone who can contribute positively to team balance and cohesion?

Sample behavioral questions for interviewees

1. Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult colleague. What did you do to resolve the situation?
2. Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult client. How did you resolve the situation?
3. Have you ever delivered an assignment late? What steps did you take to ensure it didn't happen again?
4. How do you handle criticism from supervisors or coworkers?
5. What's your opinion of one-on-one meetings? How often should they occur?
6. Have you ever been given an assignment you didn't understand? Give me an example of how you resolved the situation. Would you do anything differently?
7. Tell me about a time you helped your team or organization overcome a challenge. How did you find a solution that worked for everyone?
8. Tell me about a time a client or manager surprised you with an assignment you weren't expecting. What steps did you take to move forward?
9. Do you have any habits you're working to improve?
10. Tell me about a time you set a personal goal for yourself. What steps did you take to achieve it?
11. Describe a challenge you faced in a previous role. How did you overcome that challenge, and what did you learn?
12. Have you ever led a team or taken on a leadership role?

SITUATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS PREPARING FOR REAL-WORLD CHALLENGES

Situational interview questions present candidates with hypothetical scenarios, asking them how they would respond. These questions are particularly valuable for roles requiring quick thinking and decisive action, such as sales, customer service, and management positions. They offer a glimpse into how a prospective employee might handle the challenges they'll encounter on the job. By exploring these "what if" scenarios, you can assess their problem-solving skills, judgment, and ability to adapt to unexpected situations.

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Sample situational questions for employees

1. If you were leading a project, how would you approach delegating tasks to your team?
2. How would you handle a situation where you disagreed with a manager's decision?
3. How would you deal with a team member who wasn't pulling their weight on a project?
4. If it were up to you, would you rather follow an established procedure or innovate a process yourself?
5. If you had a team member who was resistant to change, how would you help them adapt to new technologies?
6. What would your first steps be for dealing with technical problems, whether it be your hardware or software?
7. How would you handle a conflict between two members of your team?
8. How would you communicate with team members who have a different communication style than you?
9. How would you approach your first 30, 60, and 90 days in this role?
10. What would you do if a manager continually asked you to work on evenings and weekends, hindering your work-life balance?

SKILL-BASED QUESTIONS EVALUATING EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE

Skill-based questions directly assess a candidate's abilities, experience, and expertise, providing insights into both their hard and soft skills. These questions help you determine what they can do, but also how they approach their work and apply their knowledge. Evaluating a candidate's unique skillset is crucial for understanding how they will perform in the role and contribute to the overall success of the organization.

1. How do you approach your own professional development?
2. How do you build and maintain strong relationships with clients, customers, or team members?
3. How do you stay informed about industry trends and best practices in management?
4. What's your approach to prioritizing tasks and managing your time?

5. How do you keep track of large projects that have multiple moving components and deadlines?
6. How do you work harmoniously with people, including colleagues, management, and clients, who share different views, opinions, or worldviews than your own?
7. How well do you adapt to change? What steps do you take when a major change, such as new technology or a change in team members or management, is introduced?
8. How do you handle interruptions, breaks in routine, and last-minute changes?
9. What strategies have you found work best when convincing someone of your point of view?

CULTURAL FIT QUESTIONS ASSESSING COMPATIBILITY AND PERSONALITY

Beyond skills and experience, understanding a candidate's personality and how they might integrate into your company culture is essential. Cultural fit questions help you gauge whether a candidate will thrive in your work environment. These questions can explore their interests outside of work, revealing their passions and providing insights into their personality. They can also assess their ability to think quickly and respond thoughtfully to unexpected questions, demonstrating adaptability and communication skills. Exploring a candidate's sense of humor and overall demeanor can help you determine if they would be a good fit for the team and the broader organization.

Sample cultural fit questions

1. What's your preferred or most natural communication style?
2. What is a professional accomplishment you are most proud of, and why?
3. What long-term goals do you have for your professional development?
4. What's the most interesting thing you've learned lately?
5. If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
6. As a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
7. What are your favorite hobbies outside of work?
8. If you could acquire any new skill on the spot right now, what would it be?

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EVALUATING INTERVIEW RESPONSES KEY INDICATORS OF CANDIDATE QUALITY

Quickly and accurately assessing interview responses is a critical skill for effective hiring. Here are some key indicators to watch for:

- ▲ **Clarity and Conciseness:** Does the candidate provide direct, focused answers, or do they ramble and avoid the question? Concise answers demonstrate clear thinking and effective communication. Be wary of candidates who consistently go off-topic.
- ▲ **Active Listening:** Pay close attention to whether the candidate actively listens to your questions. Frequent misunderstandings, distractions, or interruptions suggest a lack of focus and could indicate they won't listen to managers, colleagues, or clients.
- ▲ **Professional Demeanor:** Be mindful of the candidate's attitude and tone. Defensiveness, arrogance, or condescension, even when delivering a "correct" answer, are red flags. The way a candidate answers is as important as what they say.
- ▲ **Structured Responses: The STAR Method**

The STAR method provides a valuable framework for both candidates and interviewers, particularly for behavioral questions. It helps candidates structure their responses and allows interviewers to evaluate the context, actions, and outcomes of past experiences.

As the interviewer, you may need to start the candidate with some questions.

Ask the candidate to describe a situation that they were confronted with.

Ask the candidate to describe the tasks that needed to be accomplished.

What action did the candidate need to take to resolve the situation.

Ask the candidate to explain the results, how did the situation resolve.

Situation: Describe the context of the situation. What was the setting or challenge?

Task: Explain your specific responsibilities and objectives in that situation.

Action: Detail the steps you took to address the situation. Did you go above and beyond?

Result: What was the outcome of your actions? What did you learn from the experience?

Using the STAR method helps you assess the candidate's problem-solving skills, decision-making process, and ability to learn and grow. It also provides a consistent framework for comparing candidates.

Asking the right questions is the cornerstone of effective hiring. By thoughtfully crafting your interview strategy to include behavioral, situational, and skill-based inquiries, while also assessing cultural fit and avoiding discriminatory or irrelevant topics, you gain a comprehensive understanding of each candidate. This diligent approach, combined with careful evaluation of responses using methods like the STAR framework, empowers you to make informed decisions. Ultimately, asking the right questions yields the right hire – a valuable addition to your team who possesses the skills, character, and cultural alignment necessary for success.

STAR METHOD OF STORY TELLING

