



The Hiring Manager's **Toolbox**

23

Surefire  
Interview  
Questions





## **The Hiring Manager's Toolbox:**

# **23 Surefire Interview Questions**

Resumes and referrals can provide a great amount of valuable information about an applicant, but there is no substitute for talking directly with a potential hire. The interview process is your time to really get to know a candidate. Asking the right questions throughout the interview will give you a better sense of an individual's work experience and skillset, as well as their personality and fit with your company.

The following questions serve as a guide to prepare for interviewing job candidates. Asking each of the questions will provide you with plenty of information about a potential new hire so you can make a confident decision about their future with your company.

## The Warmup

Introductions and warm up questions will help both you and your candidate to feel more comfortable throughout the interview. Start with a simple icebreaker. Ask about the weather or a favorite pastime. Basic small talk will let the candidate know that you intend for this interview to be a conversation, rather than a stressful situation.

### Tip: *Be genuine.*

Some interviewers believe they should try to intimidate or trick potential employees when asking questions. While it's great to get insight into how an individual will deal with stressful situations, it isn't an effective interview technique to test them. Instead, build rapport and ease into tougher, more in-depth questions. This conversation will set the tone for the rest of your relationship with the job seeker. If they become your next great hire, you want to start off with a positive feeling about each other.

### Question #1: Do you have any experience with our company? Or how did you hear about us?

**What You'll Learn:** These icebreakers are an opportunity to learn a bit about applicants. They will have the chance to share any connection they have to your company and offer some information about themselves, without feeling the need to divulge personal details right off the bat. This is a good chance to find out if the applicant has done any homework to learn about your company.

## Verify Experience and Knowledge .....

A good segue into the bulk of the interview involves asking about previous work experience. In this portion of the interview, you'll want to find out more about where the candidate has worked previously, what they were doing in that role, and why they left.

### *Question #2:* Tell me about your most recent position.

**What You'll Learn:** Learning about candidates' current role will give you the context you need for the rest of the interview. Also, listening to how they describe their role can offer insight into how they perceived the work and their position in the company.

### *Question #3:* If I were to contact your previous supervisor, how would he/she describe your work performance?

**What You'll Learn:** This is a spin on a more generic question that is usually asked in an interview. Rather than asking for your candidate's opinion of their performance, this question will cause them to give some thoughtful consideration to how others view them in a work environment. Mentioning a previous boss will also keep applicants on track, reminding them that you can make a phone call to verify information if necessary.

### *Question #4:* Why did you leave your most recent job?

**What You'll Learn:** Some individuals may be vague with this answer while others may go into detail. It can be helpful to find out whether candidates left their job with hopes of advancing their career, or if the job was terminated as the result of issues in the workplace. If the applicant has had many jobs in a short period of time, ask this question about each one. By asking this question about each role held previously, you can identify reoccurring themes and patterns of behavior in their work and job satisfaction.



## Verify Skills for the Job


In addition to asking about previous work experience, you'll also want to find out if job seekers have the specific skills necessary for the position. While resumes may be filled with lists of accomplishments and awards, they are nothing more than words until an applicant can show you how those skills can be used to help your company meet its goals.

**Tip:** *Ask for specifics to avoid future headaches.*

Asking detailed questions will help you choose a candidate who is prepared to take on the designated tasks. Look for the kind of details that will help you understand the day-to-day work and pace of the role. For example, ask about the volume of work completed or the percentage of time spent on specific tasks. You can also ask about software and tools used to complete tasks and uncover their level of expertise with those tools by asking about specifics, such as the ability to create pivot tables in MS Excel.

### *Question #5:* What were your responsibilities at your previous job?

**What You'll Learn:** It can be easy to create a long list of buzzwords under an impressive title on a resume. Asking for specifics around previous job responsibilities will help you get a better sense of what an individual did from day to day. If you feel that applicants are exaggerating their skills, ask for clarification. Have them explain tasks and give examples of their duties.



## **Question #6:** Can you tell me about three accomplishments that you achieved during your time at your most recent job?

**What You'll Learn:** This isn't an opportunity for applicants to brag about their achievements, but a time to share a real way in which they put their skills to use to help an employer. This is an excellent indicator of the type of achievement you can expect from candidates in the future. If there is hesitation or no solid answer to this question, applicants may not be comfortable with their skill set or their ability to go above and beyond at work. Asking for three examples makes candidates stretch—and candidates who can give you three solid answers will stand out.

## **Question #7:** Do you feel that your skillset was put to good use at your previous job?

**What You'll Learn:** Does this person have some hidden talents that you could put to good use? This is the time to find out. Let candidates fill you in on where their strengths are and what they have to offer. This question will also give you some insight into the tasks applicants enjoy and excel at, as well as the tasks they feel are less important or less engaging.

## **Question #8:** Create a situation to put the required skillset to the test. For example, if you're hiring for a sales position, you may ask, "If we were introducing a new product next month, what would be your plan for selling that product in an innovative way, while keeping efficiency up and costs down?"

**What You'll Learn:** The purpose of this question is to see how your candidates think. It gives job seekers an opportunity to share ideas, strategies, and goal-setting abilities. Do they value technology as a marketing tool? Will they mention working with a capable team? Is customer service a consideration? This question will offer information about candidates' ability to work under pressure, as well as insight into where their priorities lie.

## Ask About Behavior and Customer Service .....

At this point in the interview, it's likely that you will have formed an opinion about the character of the person you are interviewing. You'll have an idea of their work ethic and whether they would be able to handle the demands of the job. Next, you'll want to find out how they might behave outside of a formal interview.

### **Question #9:** In work situations, what causes you the most frustration?

**What You'll Learn:** Asking this question is a good alternative to the standard “what is your biggest weakness?” and will result in a more honest answer. For example, candidates might admit to struggling with deadlines or answering to supervisors. There might be an issue with working as a part of a team. They may not handle conflict well.

### **Question #10:** Think about a time when you had to deal with an upset customer/ client. How did you handle the situation?

**What You'll Learn:** Clearly, this question is meant to reveal how individuals respond to conflict. If this is a position that involves interaction with customers or clients on a regular basis, you'll want to choose someone who can remain level-headed in stressful situations.

### **Question #11:** Have you ever had a conflict with a coworker? How did you resolve it?

**What You'll Learn:** Handling a situation with a customer or client is a different situation than working through a disagreement with a coworker whom the candidate sees every day. This question will give a glimpse into the applicant's communication skills and ability to resolve conflict in a healthy way.

**Question #12:** Imagine that you are facing a pressing deadline. At the end of the workday, your computer falters, causing you to lose all the work you had been doing. How would you handle the situation?

**What You'll Learn:** There are a few things that you can learn from this question. First, you'll find out how the individual deals with stressful situations. As we all know, technology issues always seem to come up at the most inconvenient times and can be very frustrating. There are several ways that this problem could be handled. Second, you may learn about the individual's work ethic. Would they put off the work or stay late to find a solution? Finally, you will be able to recognize if the candidate has strong problem-solving skills.



## Determining Cultural Fit .....

Every company has a unique culture made up of everything from how coworkers interact throughout the day to how events are celebrated in the office. A healthy work environment will keep productivity high and employees in good spirits throughout the day.

**Tip:** *Don't bring negativity into a positive work environment.*


It's no secret that one negative individual can lower the morale for the rest of the office. Interpersonal communication is a vital skill, especially for those who are interested in positions that require working with a team. Ask some questions to find out how your candidate manages the social aspect of working for a company.

**Question #13:** Describe an effective relationship between a manager and employees.

**What You'll Learn:** This question isn't asking about a relationship that candidates have had with a manager, but rather expectations they have for interactions with superiors. Another way to phrase the question would be to ask applicants about the best boss they've ever worked for. This will show what type of work environment each individual thrives in, what personality types they mesh with, and how well they respond to those above them.

**Question #14:** Describe the role you typically play on a team.

**What You'll Learn:** Interactions with coworkers are easiest to analyze when several people are working together as a part of a team. Some individuals will stand out as leaders while others will thrive when taking direction. Some will focus on the big picture while others will prove to be more detail oriented. Find out where your candidate will fit in with the rest of your staff. thrives in, what personality types they mesh with, and how well they respond to those above them.



## *Question #15:* How would your coworkers describe working with you?

**What You'll Learn:** As with previous questions, this will require interviewees to put themselves in someone else's shoes and examine how they behave in a work environment. This is a chance for the applicant to highlight their strengths and let you know how they will add to the team. Look for future employees who will be able to communicate effectively with others, work well with a team, and remain positive in stressful situations.

## *Question #16:* Describe the work environment where you feel you would be most happy and productive.

**What You'll Learn:** After determining how your candidate prefers to interact with others in the workplace, there will still be some elements of your workplace culture to address. Look to this question for information about your candidate's expectations for the office environment. You may learn about their level of professionalism, dedication to their job, and how they view working relationships with coworkers.

## Determining Interest Level .....

Are candidates talking to you because they have a serious desire to work for your business? If they are truly interested, they will most likely have done some homework to learn about your company, as well as the position.

**Tip:** *Finding the right person for your open position is a two-way street.*

After asking questions to determine if the person you are interviewing is someone who you would like to work with, be sure that your company is one they would be happy to work with. When you find yourself choosing between a few final candidates, these questions may very well be the deciding factor, as you'll find out which individual has enthusiasm for the job.

### **Question #17:** What do you think separates us from our competitors?

**What You'll Learn:** As a company, you always want to be one step ahead of your competitors. Find out if your candidate understands the ways that your business stands out. This is your candidate's opportunity to share their passion for the company, a preference for the product, or their enthusiasm about building the brand.

### **Question #18:** What makes you want to work for our company?

**What You'll Learn:** This question gets right to the point. Candidates' enthusiasm will shine through as they give an answer. Get a sense of their motivation in applying for the position. Let them explain what they know about your company, how they feel they would fit with your business, and why they are excited to be a part of the team.

## Question #19: How long have you been seeking employment?

**What You'll Learn:** Ask this question to gain insight into how serious a candidate is about YOUR open position, verses finding a job in general. As candidates progress through job searches and time passes, it's not uncommon for them to become more flexible about the opportunities they will consider. If they're feeling financial strain, they may want to start a new role as quickly as possible, while also continuing to look for a position that better suits their long-term needs and goals. Keep in mind, however, that if you determined earlier in the interview that your job opening is a great fit for the candidate's professional goals, their desire to get to work quickly can be a positive, and they are likely to stay in the role if hired.

## Question #20: Where do you see yourself in ten years?

**What You'll Learn:** This is a standard interview question, but one that is used time and again for good reason. The answer to this question will let you know the goals and aspirations candidates have for themselves. Look for candidates who describe their future plans with confidence. An ambitious person will work hard to accomplish their goals, and that ambition will, hopefully, carry over into fulfilling the goals of your company.

## Discussing Position Details .....

You may already know whether you've found a good candidate. You may also feel confident that they are interested in the position. What's left? Be sure to flesh out the details of the position to ensure that you and the job seeker are on the same page.

This is the time to discuss job requirements and responsibilities, as well the position's salary. In case there is any confusion about the details of the position, open the floor for questions at this point.

### *Question #21:* What are your salary requirements?

**What You'll Learn:** This question is straightforward but can be tricky to answer. Salary is a very important detail to discuss before hiring, but some applicants feel uncomfortable bringing up salary on their own. By being straightforward with the question, you are opening that conversation.

### *Question #22:* What questions do you have for me?

**What You'll Learn:** You can learn more about the applicant based on the questions that they ask at this point in the interview. Leave it open-ended and see where the candidate takes you. This question will help you find out if job seekers took time to learn about what the job entails. This is also a time when applicants can voice any concerns they may have about job responsibilities or the company. If you see this individual as a strong candidate, you may choose to be more in depth with answers or offer additional information about the company.



## Closing Questions

The questions in this guide should give you a good idea of whether your candidate is a good fit for your company and the position you are interviewing for. At this point, you should be wrapping up your interview. But first, give candidates one final opportunity to sell you on their potential.

### *Question #23:* Why should I stop searching and hire you today?

**What You'll Learn:** If there was anything left unsaid during the interview, this is job seekers' opportunity to make their final pitch. Let them sell you on their abilities, qualifications, and desire for the job.

## Finding the Right Person for the Job

Finding someone who fits the needs of your company can be difficult. If you are finding it challenging to find qualified candidates for your open positions, please contact us. We are happy to discuss your hiring challenges during a free, no-obligation consultation.

## About Hiregy

Hiregy specializes in connecting exceptional employers and job candidates. Businesses rely on our ability to make the right connections that help their companies thrive. Job seekers appreciate that we focus on their long-term career priorities. Both groups know that we take pride in providing innovative staffing solutions and outstanding service. We're proud to provide exceptional staffing solutions to corporations, small businesses, and job seekers in Central Florida and across the United States.

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