

# 5 interview questions to stop using immediately, and what to ask instead



With so much riding on the decision, smart hiring managers know the importance of making each interview question count. However, many companies use this valuable time to ask questions that, frankly, simply waste time. Many outdated and ineffective questions are still seen frequently in interviews. These questions may seem classic or even creative at times, but they don't get to the heart of an interview's purpose — determining if a candidate is a good fit for the role and your organization.

An effective interview question gives you a glimpse into how an employee thinks, works, and how they might perform on the job. Well-intentioned interviewers may think they're doing this. However, if your list of interview questions hasn't been updated in a few years, it's probably time to refresh it.

With that in mind, there are 5 common interview questions that you should stop using immediately, and a few alternative questions to use instead.

## **Where do you see yourself in five years?**

Interviewees expect this question. Knowing organizations value loyalty, they come prepared to say what they believe you want to hear.

“They usually answer that they intend to remain at the company where they are interviewing, excelling, and

making significant contributions. This provides little insight into the candidate's career development goals," says Benjamin Rose, co-founder of [Trainer Academy](#).

Even if their intentions are honest, circumstances change way too often to put stock in the response. Individuals suddenly relocate when a spouse gets a transfer. People take time off to raise children, care for an elderly parent, or go back to school. Interests shift and a new occupation becomes appealing. Technology changes and opens up an exciting role that didn't even exist back when the interview took place.

Rose suggests "Where does this position fall along your career path?" as a replacement.

"This question allows the applicant to discuss the skills and experiences that have prepared them for the responsibilities of this role, as well as giving the interviewer an idea of the candidate's desired outcomes," he says.

Another option: Substitute in a timely question that helps you determine how well the person fits your business's current needs. As the COVID-19 pandemic made clear, companies often can't see five years into the future either. Use your limited amount of interview time to inquire what qualities make the person well-suited to telecommuting or what techniques the candidate employs to stay self-motivated and productive when working remotely.

## **What is your greatest weakness?**

Candidates hate this question. They fear revealing something that will cost them the job. Thus, interviewees follow the popular advice to spin "imperfections" into something positive. All you learn is that they know how to Google "answers to popular interview questions."

"Every job seeker expects this query and has prepared a response to avoid admitting actual weaknesses: 'I get so wrapped up in my work that I neglect to take care of myself' or 'I'm always there for my coworkers and don't always take credit for my own ideas,'" says Brian Chung, CEO and co-founder of [Alabaster](#).

Want a better chance of getting at the truth? Try asking "When I contact your previous employer, what will he or she tell me you could improve upon?"

"This question leaves no room for a candidate to hide!" Chung says. "They'll be more likely to confess if they know you'll get the whole story anyway — you have a hard time meeting deadlines on occasion or you get flustered when juggling too many tasks at once."

## **Why do you want to work here?**

The response to this age-old question might prove flattering. Good interviewers, however, prefer useable information to an ego boost.

"We all know that the most popular answer is for the candidate to ramble on about how wonderful the company is and how great of an opportunity the role provides. In any case, the honest response is that the candidate is not rich enough to be able to live on their own, so they are looking for work. Neither of these answers reveals something about the candidate's work style or career ambitions," says Shad Elia, CEO of [We Buy Houses Here](#).

He recommends instead asking "What particular skills or experiences make you the best match for this position?" or "What qualities will your most recent supervisor say make you the best candidate for this role?"

"These questions allow the applicant to illustrate the aspects of the role that they found important during their research and their vision of how they could fit into the business," Elia says.

## What was your salary in your last position?

In an era of increasing concern over gender and racial equity, this formerly popular question is on the way out. In fact, some state and local governments have adopted laws banning employers from asking it. This effort aims to break the cycle of historically underpaid workers carrying pay disparity into new positions they take on during their careers.

“The answer to this question really doesn't have any bearing on a candidate's value for the position they're applying for. The question only exists to give the hiring company leverage in negotiation,” says Andrea Ahern, vice president at [Mid Florida Material Handling](#).

Interviewers looking for a revealing replacement question might try “What motivates you to work?” Answers may demonstrate a true passion for the industry, a deep desire to contribute to a cause, an aspiration to climb the corporate ladder, the satisfaction of being part of a team, or any of numerous other reasons that inspire someone to come in each day and perform well.

## If you were a vegetable, which one would you be and why?

Yes, such a question does force applicants to think on their feet. Why waste precious interview time, though, finding out if someone is a carrot or a turnip (and making some poor candidate who said “tomato” worry that she'll lose the job because the manager deems it a fruit).

“If you ask this question, or a whimsical one like it, my recommendation is to stop immediately,” says Michael Alexis, CEO of [TeamBuilding](#). “Interviewers ask questions like this to try to inject a little fun into the interview, but if the result is confusion, then it kind of backfires. This recommendation doesn't mean your interview questions or tone can't be fun. Actually, that can be a great way to go, especially if you want to hire for organizational culture fit, but make sure that your questions are still functional and have meaningful utility.”

Try a pertinent, yet interesting, question such as “If resources were unlimited, what are some things you'd be excited to see our company pursue?”

“The 'magic wand' question is a test of someone's ability to get creative but also think on the spot. The other information it reveals about the candidate is whether they did their research and if what they have in mind vaguely aligns with the company's mission,” says [Zoia Kozakov](#), vice president, product manager at a leading financial institution.

Or, consider “Tell me something about yourself that I can't find online, in your resume, or in your cover letter.”

“I know that many people forget to ask this amid all the trick questions that are supposed to help them evaluate the candidate's competence and personality,” says Mark Coster, owner and chief editor of [STEM Toy Expert](#). “But it's good because of at least two reasons: you'll learn something about this candidate as a person, and it opens up some humane space between you, especially if you also tell them something about yourself in turn.”

**Additional resource:** [4 ways hiring managers can assess a candidate's soft skills](#).