Interview Questions:
A Guide for Employers

boly:welch

Interviews are one of the primary methods we have for determining whether a candidate is qualified and a good cultural add for a role. However, interviews can also be a place where likability and a candidate's similarity to existing team members can lead bias to cloud our judgment, resulting in a less-than-great hire. We recommend structuring interviews so you're comparing candidates to the role and not each other. We also recommend small panel interviews and focusing primarily on job-related behavioral interview questions for better evaluations.

Here are some of our favorite questions to ask:

What interests you about this role?

This is a great question to start with because it provides a lot of insight into the candidate's preparation, motivation, and understanding of the role. **A good answer will likely include what a candidate has learned from researching your organization, mention the parts of the role or organization that are the most interesting to them, and show a clear understanding of the role.** A less great answer will be brief, focus on benefits and perks, or not include much in the way of preparation or understanding of the role.

Why did you leave your last job? Why are you looking?

There's a wrong answer here and a right one.

The wrong answer is if the candidate brings up the very negative aspects of their previous or current role(s). For example, they might be leaving their organization because of a toxic boss, but it's hard to know whether the boss is the problem, or if the candidate has a track record of clashing with management.

Instead, **we appreciate candidates who can focus on the future, and call out what they've learned in their prior experience, but spend most of their time talking about what they're hoping to do in the next step of their career.**

What do you know about [our company]?

Has the candidate done their homework? They should be able to tell you quite a bit about your organization and what's exciting to them about it. If there have been any big changes, they should know about them. They could have even tried a product or had an informational interview with a team member.

You want to know if they stopped at your organization's home page, or if they've gotten to know you through press releases, social media, your website, blogs, etc.

Also, you want to hear that they're excited about the role and your organization. Best answers will include a few key factors that make the role (e.g., "I love customer support because the satisfaction that comes from helping someone solve a problem") or organization (e.g., "It's great that you're a B Corp – sustainability and caring about people are two values that really resonate with me") right for them.

Tell me about a time you managed multiple competing deadlines.

This is an example of a behavioral interview question. Behavioral interview questions are queries about past situations. The idea is that the way someone has dealt with something in the past is the best predictor of what they'll do in the future.
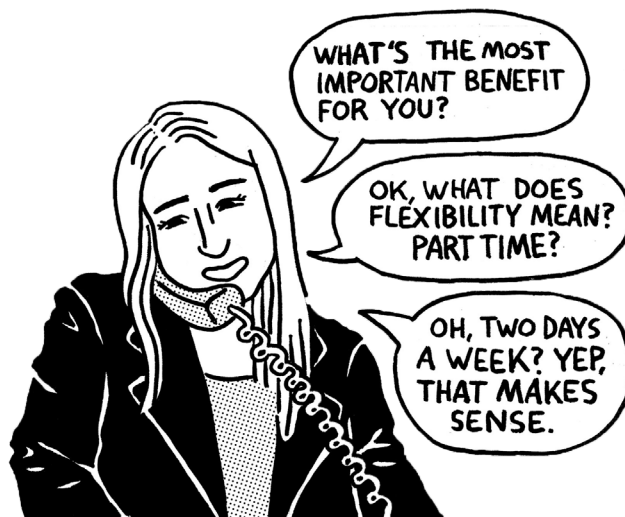
We recommend that most of your questions are behavioral interview questions. It's easy to formulate them. Look at the job description and pick out some key elements of the role. An administrative job? Ask questions about detail-orientation or organization. A management position? Ask about their experience leading a project or giving tough feedback.

The best answers will translate well to the role and your organization. For example, if someone talks about how stressful managing multiple competing deadlines is, maybe your Project Manager role isn't the best match.

Tell me about your ability to work without close supervision.

Another behavioral interview question! This one deals with the dynamics of your workplace. Similar questions might ask about areas like preferred management style, working on a team or independently, need for flexibility or structure, pace of work, etc.

There are no wrong answers, but there are going to be answers that work better in your environment. For example, if your workflow and policies are very flexible, someone who mentions how process-driven they are and how much they like structure might not be the right person for the role. Or maybe your team could benefit from the addition! But at least you'll have some idea of that candidate's preferred working style and how it fits into your current team.

What are your salary expectations?

A loaded question, particularly after the Oregon Equal Pay Act, which prohibits an employer from asking about salary history. However, **if you haven't posted a range in the job posting, it's important to talk money before you get too far into the process!**

The law allows asking about preferred salary or expectations, to make sure you're in the same range. It's not a bad idea to frame the question as: "This is the range we're targeting, $XX-XX. How does that work for you?"

What other companies are you interviewing with?

Companies ask this for a number of reasons. It can be a good way to discover if the candidate is considering similar or different types of roles at other organizations and how interested they are in your organization. **It can also give you a heads up that you might need to expedite your process for a particularly great candidate.**

Do you have any questions for me?

We always hope candidates have questions prepared – they're trying to see if this role and your organization is the right choice for them too! Some common questions: How did you get started with this organization? What do you enjoy most about working here? What has not worked with other people in this position? What has worked best with other people in this position? What type of projects will I be able to assist on? How would you like to see this position develop over the next couple of years? Less great questions only focus on benefits and perks. Or candidates don't have any questions at all!

Don't Ask: Are you planning on having children?

Questions about your family status, gender ("How would you handle managing a team of all men?"), nationality ("Where were you born?"), religion, age, etc. are illegal – but they still get asked (and frequently). Of course, most are not asked with ill intent – an interviewer might just be trying to make conversation — but there are better ways to ask.

For example, if you have a role that requires a lot of travel and you don't think someone with small children would be available, instead of asking "Do you have children?" you should rephrase as "This role requires a lot of last-minute travel – are you comfortable with that?" **Get to the job-related question you're trying to answer, and steer clear of an employment law violation!**

Have a Rubric!

We also recommend asking candidates the same questions and having a rubric to evaluate their answers against the questions (versus each other). This can take many forms. We use a 1-5 rating. We also evaluate candidates' "likeability" to quantify some of the biases that we all have. Did one interviewer on the team give the candidate a particularly low likeability score, compared to the rest of the team? Did everyone have a similarly strong, favorable opinion? Either outcome will tell you something and enable you to have frank conversations.

For employer resources on hiring, onboarding, employee engagement, and more, visit: **bolywelch.com/employers**