

The Worst Interview Questions



The Rippling Brainwaves blog has an interesting post about the '[worst interview question](#),' namely "What is your greatest weakness?" and the related questions "what are you bad at?" or "in what areas do you need improvement?"

According to the author, these questions represent a 'Catch-22', and make him wonder if there is any good way to answer them or whether they have ever "done anyone any good."



As a job candidate facing this question in an interview, you don't want to avoid or evade the question, and you don't want to lie, but you don't want to torpedo your interview by revealing a glaring weakness either.

So, how do you answer this question effectively?

The Employer's Perspective

First, let's talk about why an interviewer would even ask this question. Does it serve any legitimate purpose?

From the perspective of a potential employer, this type of open-ended question can be good to see how the candidate handles stress and challenges. The answers can also provide insights into the awareness, maturity, and thinking process of the interviewee, which could be useful in making a final decision among several equally qualified candidates.

In his book *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman argues that emotional intelligence and so called soft-skills can make a tremendous difference in the workplace, and often distinguish superstars from average workers. One of these emotional intelligence skills is self-awareness and the ability to see, recognize, and adapt to our own strengths, limitations, and weaknesses.

From an emotional intelligence perspective, this type of question provides insights into the self-awareness skills of the candidate, revealing whether they recognize their weaknesses or not, how much they've thought about them, whether they can learn from past

experiences, and what self-development actions, if any, they are taking.

I would say that employers are not only justified in asking this question, but it can actually help them spot the potential superstars in the candidate pool.

How to Answer Effectively

Instead of looking at this as a stupid or meaningless question that interviewers just ask, a question where you just need to use a ‘canned’ response that the interviewer has heard a million times before, or a question where you need to somehow ‘trick’ the interviewer, you can look at it as an opportunity to shine, to show your emotional intelligence skills, and to distinguish yourself from all the other candidates competing for this job.

Here are three tips to help you answer this question effectively:

1. Be Prepared

This is the type of question that you want to have considered long before the actual interview. You don’t want to have to come up with an answer right there on the spot.

Being prepared is not dishonest, it is what will separate you from the crowd.

Part of the preparation is doing the work, exercising your self-awareness, thinking about what your relevant strengths and weaknesses really are, and learning from past mistakes.

Then, take it a step further, and actually do something about some of your more relevant weaknesses so you can avoid repeating past mistakes.

“But what if the interviewer doesn’t even ask the question?”

That’s not the point! By honestly preparing yourself for this question, you are actually doing something very valuable; something that only superstar performers tend to do.

This is something you should be doing anyway, whether or not you are going to have an interview.

2. Be Relevant

Sure, you could take the safe approach and pick a generic weakness like being disorganized, or a perfectionist, or procrastination, or working too hard, and then telling them how you are already working

diligently on improving this weakness and have already conquered it.

Or you could try a psychological trick to turn the question on its head and say something like “My weakness is that I get frustrated by red tape and lack of action, I want to get things done.”

Just remember that these ‘canned’ responses are what the interviewer is going to hear from most of the other candidates, and the tricks that you play could backfire.

If you really want to show that you have self-awareness, you can take a riskier approach and actually pick a weakness that is relevant to your job and industry.

For example, if you are a software developer, you could say something like “I sometimes focus too much on solving the technical problems and not enough on figuring out what the real need is.” Then explain what steps you are taking to avoid this problem in the future.

If you really want to stand out, try finding an example from your previous work of a time when this problem surfaced, what you learned about yourself, your work practices, and your industry, and how you are planning to avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

You could talk about a process you now use to identify the real needs before you start working on the design, or how you use regular design reviews to ensure that the real needs are considered.

By choosing something that is relevant and applicable to your job, you are showing the interviewer that you are able to see and recognize your own mistakes, and that you are also aware of some of the common problems or issues facing your industry.

By showing a practical example from your previous job, you are not only showing the interviewer that you can learn from your past experiences, but also that you take a proactive role in self-development and continuous learning.

3. Focus on Technical/Job Skills

Another important aspect of emotional intelligence is self-confidence. Not arrogance, but confidence in your own abilities, skills, and potential.

When you answer this question, you want to do so in a confident manner. Choosing a relevant example from your previous job shows confidence and that you are willing to take risks.

Having said that, most HR managers suggest that you focus on technical or job skills if possible, and avoid revealing potential problems with people skills, even if you've taken corrective actions.

Unfortunately, people skills are an area that could open up a can of worms and torpedo your interview even if you've resolved the problem successfully.

You should still be prepared to answer questions in this area if they come up, just don't volunteer it if you can use a technical skill instead.