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SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Use these questions to qualify applicants and ensure your candidates are a true culture fit. Remember to ask for details and examples to clarify if this is the right candidate for the role.

You'll need to develop the skills-related questions to make them specific for the requirements of the job.

PRE-QUALIFICATION QUESTIONS

WHY ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A NEW PLACE TO WORK?

This question might be easier to assess for what you don't want to hear. If the candidate is driven by money or they complain about their current boss you may want to pass.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I just don't feel like I belong at my current employer and I need to find something where I feel like I'm making a difference."

WHY DO YOU WANT TO JOIN OUR TEAM?

Look for someone that specifically wants to be at YOUR company, not just doing a job.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I'm looking for a place to develop an amazing career and make a difference in the work I do. I see the impact your company is having and I want to be part of that."

WHICH OF YOUR SKILLS DO YOU FEEL BEST ALIGN WITH THIS POSITION?

Ideally, they'll have a good sense of their strengths and weaknesses, as well as which skills are most necessary for the position they're applying for.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I have skills in <insert the skills you're looking for>. And this is how they'll be helpful in fulfilling this position and how they'll benefit the company: <insert some of the benefits you get by hiring someone with these skills>."

WHAT ARE YOUR SALARY AND BENEFITS EXPECTATIONS?

It's a good idea to have some transparency about everyone's expectations to make sure a continued conversation will be worthwhile and expectations aren't too far apart.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I currently make <insert a reasonable salary>. I'm looking for something in the range of <insert what your job pays>. But what's most important is a good fit."



IN WHAT TYPE OF WORK ENVIRONMENT DO YOU THRIVE?

Find out whether they thrive in a positive environment or if they rise to the challenge in a negative environment. Determine if this aligns with the environment the job offers.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I thrive in a <insert the type of environment you create for your team> environment. When challenges arise, they present opportunities to grow.

WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR ME?

Many candidates have been told to always prepare questions. See if these are "canned" questions or authentic questions. Do they reflect knowledge and understanding about the role? Do the questions reflect interest in the company's vision and culture?

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"What's the next step in the process to become part of the team? Will you better define your vision for me? What opportunities exist for personal and professional development?"

CULTURE FIT QUESTIONS

WHAT TYPE OF LEADERSHIP STYLE BEST SUITS YOU?

Look for someone who is self-aware and can articulate what kind of leadership they work with best. If the leadership style is different in your company, ask them how they would be affected by that different style and how they would adjust.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I perform the best when I'm surrounded by leaders with these qualities: <insert the type of qualities that you and your leadership team exemplify>."

DEFINE <INSERT CORE VALUE>. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING FOR A COMPANY THAT HAS THIS AS A PRIORITY?

See how they feel about the core value and if it's one that resonates with them. There should be alignment. While not all of your core values may be core to them, they should value them.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"<Core Value> means to me <insert your definition>. It resonates with me because in my personal life I believe the same thing. <insert example of how they've demonstrated that>."



LET'S SAY YOU'RE ON THE TEAM AND SOMEONE IS VIOLATING A COMPANY POLICY. WHAT DO YOU DO?

You don't want someone who will turn a blind eye to things that go against company policies. You want someone who will support others in upholding standards to protect the company and each other. You want someone who will approach the person first and tell management if that doesn't work.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"Depending on the situation, I would check with them to see if they're aware of the policy, help them understand the reasons for it, and help them correct the situation. If they weren't receptive or the violation continued, I'd have to bring it to management."

THE DEADLINE IS COMING UP FOR THE TASK YOU'RE WORKING ON AND YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO FINISH ON TIME. DO YOU FINISH IT "GOOD ENOUGH" AND TURN IT IN ON TIME OR DO YOU LET YOUR BOSS KNOW IT WILL BE LATE? ELABORATE ON YOUR ANSWER.

You want an employee who understands there can be consequences when work is off-track, and who is willing to speak up and communicate when there is a problem.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I'll make sure I understand the consequences of each direction and whether it's more important to complete the task on time or if the quality of the finished product is more important. I'll make sure my boss is aware and in agreement. Either way, I'll figure out what went wrong with not being able to finish in time for the deadline and figure out what needs to change so this doesn't happen again."

TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU MADE A MISTAKE THAT AFFECTED THE ENTIRE TEAM.

If they've never made a mistake, they're either lying or they never challenge themselves. They may not be engaged and won't help grow the company. This also helps you know just how risk averse they are - whether it's good or bad is up to you.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I made the mistake of <insert a fairly common mistake> and it affected everyone because of <insert the impact this could have on your team>. From that experience, I learned <insert the lesson you think they should have learned>. To make up for the mistake, I did <insert what you think is a good way to make it right>."



TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU WERE TURNED DOWN OR "PASSED OVER" EITHER FOR A LEAD POSITION OR A PROMOTION.

Find out how the candidate responds to disappointments. Does it sour their attitude towards their work or towards particular people or the company? Were they motivated to do more training so they'd be prepared next time?

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"It sucked, if I'm being honest but I understand sometimes I won't have all the information to fully understand a situation. In this case, I spoke about it with my boss so I could be more prepared next time an opportunity came up."

POSITION FIT QUESTIONS

EXPLAIN TO ME HOW <INSERT JOB FUNCTION> WORKS.

Look for evidence that they have deep enough knowledge and understanding to be successful in the role. Ask follow up questions to get more information. Specifics are critical.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I have used <insert job function> in the past to do <insert specific application of the job function>. The way it works is <insert specific examples of how they used this job function>."

WHAT DO YOU THINK THE HARDEST PART OF THIS JOB WILL BE? WHY?

Find out how they think and feel about the job and whether they're prepared for what's going to be required to perform the job duties. See if they share a way they would overcome this challenge. The hardest part shouldn't be a core responsibility in the role. It also shouldn't be due to one of their personality traits, since that will be hard to change.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I know I'll be working outside, where it's really hot. I can imagine there will be days when I may feel like quitting. Instead, I'll work closely with my team and make sure I'm working hard, and look forward to breaks as needed."



WHAT HAVE YOU DONE IN THE PAST THAT IS LIKE THIS ROLE, OR THAT HAS HELPED PREPARE YOU FOR THIS TYPE OF ROLE?

This question is geared toward a general labor role or a role that doesn't require prior job experience. This can include experience from other jobs, personal hobbies, sports, outdoor activities, etc. See if they understand the role and have used similar skills.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I have never had this type of job. But I used to help my dad work on our old Jeep. I loved learning about using different mechanic skills and tools to get projects done."

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I took a mechanic class in high school. I loved learning about the tools and working on old cars. I've always wanted a job where I get to fix things and make them better!"

GIVE THEM A REAL EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING TO DO, TROUBLESHOOT, OR SOLVE.

Test for aptitude and see if they have the skills required for the job. Can they think on their feet? Are they willing and comfortable to forge forward, even if they have to learn something new? Examples: troubleshoot a broken <insert something relevant to the job>, draw a diagram of how something works, make a practice phone call, demonstrate how a tool would be used, etc. Watch their demeanor as they complete the task. Are they focused? Engaged? Energized?

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I look forward to showing you <insert task, troubleshooting, or problem>. I'll let you know if I have questions along the way."

GIVE THEM A SPECIFIC PROCESS TO FOLLOW AND SEE IF THEY STICK TO IT.

Your company likely has specific processes in place that everyone needs to follow. See how closely they follow your process and directions. Make sure they're listening with intent while you present the process and show an eager attitude when asked to follow the process. They should be willing to ask questions about anything they don't understand. The process should be followed without skipping steps or doing it their own way.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"Thank you for this opportunity. I look forward to showing you <insert process>. I'll let you know if I have any questions along the way."



EASTER EGG TEST

Look for specific natural behaviors that indicate how they step up to the plate and whether they'll be a strong team player.

EXAMPLES:

"See if the candidate follows your lead in picking up trash from a spilled recycling container."

"Take them on a walk-through of the shop. See if they keep up with you and show the energy and hustle you expect of your team."

"See whether and how they interact and engage with other people (customers and employees) while they are visiting your facility."

PULL BACK OFFER QUESTIONS

I NOTICED DURING THE INTERVIEW YOU <INSERT "YELLOW FLAG">. HOW DO YOU THINK THIS WILL AFFECT YOU IN THIS JOB? WHAT'S YOUR ACTION PLAN FOR IT?

"Yellow flags" aren't deal breakers, but they may become problematic later if they aren't addressed now. You're looking for someone who's receptive and eager to make a plan to improve the "yellow flags." You don't want someone defensive or dismissive.

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF "YELLOW FLAGS":

- They lack a key skill they'll have to learn quickly.
- They mentioned a personal circumstance that may affect them in the job.
- They mentioned upcoming life changes (education, moving, etc.).
- This role will be significantly different from their previous jobs.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I <insert 'yellow flag'>. I think this could affect me in this role by <insert thoughtful negative consequence>. My plan of action is <specific, detailed plan to mitigate the 'yellow flag'>."

WHAT DOES "ON TIME" MEAN TO YOU?

Do they understand what you mean by "on time?" This is where you make sure expectations are clear. Do you expect them in the building, ready to punch in at the start of their shift? Or geared up, done with their coffee, and ready to work a few minutes early? Is it okay to clock in early or does that throw off payroll?

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I know many people think you're on time if you arrive exactly when your shift starts. However, I always arrive about 15 minutes early to ensure I'm not rushed and ready for my shift."



WHAT WILL YOU DO IF YOU AREN'T MEETING YOUR PERFORMANCE METRICS AFTER A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TIME?

This gives you and the candidate time to address this scenario so you both understand expectations and how to discuss things later if they are not met. You want someone who is goal-driven and willing to speak up when things aren't going well.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"If I can tell I'm not going to meet my numbers, I'll speak up to get help to fix the issue as soon as possible."

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU GET OVERWHELMED AND DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO?

Discuss how to deal with stressful situations that will be unique to this role. You want someone who is willing to raise their hand and ask for help when things get difficult. Ask for follow up examples of a time they felt this way in a previous job and how they handled it.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I know new jobs have a big learning curve and can be stressful. If I start to get overwhelmed, I'll talk to my Supervisor about it to come up with a solution before the stress is too much."

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOUR CURRENT EMPLOYER OFFERS YOU AN INCENTIVE TO STAY?

This is an opportunity to find out what they expect might happen (raise, promotion, promise) and then discuss how they'll respond to that situation. This is also a good time to remind them of the reasons that they are leaving the company.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"My boss may try to give me a raise. But I'll remember that I am leaving because of <insert reason for leaving>. I am looking forward to joining your team because of <insert benefits of working with your team>. I am looking forward to a change."

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE "HONEYMOON" PHASE IS OVER AND YOU DISCOVER YOU'RE NOT ENJOYING THIS ROLE ANYMORE?

Discuss how they'll stay motivated when the job gets hard and how they'll communicate their concerns about their role or performance to their manager. You want someone who knows what motivates them and keeps them focused. You also want to make sure they're realistic about the "shiny new job" feeling wearing off.

IDEAL RESPONSE:

"I plan on keeping an open line of communication with my Supervisor. I'll be able to express my concerns and we can work together to ensure I'm successful on this team."