

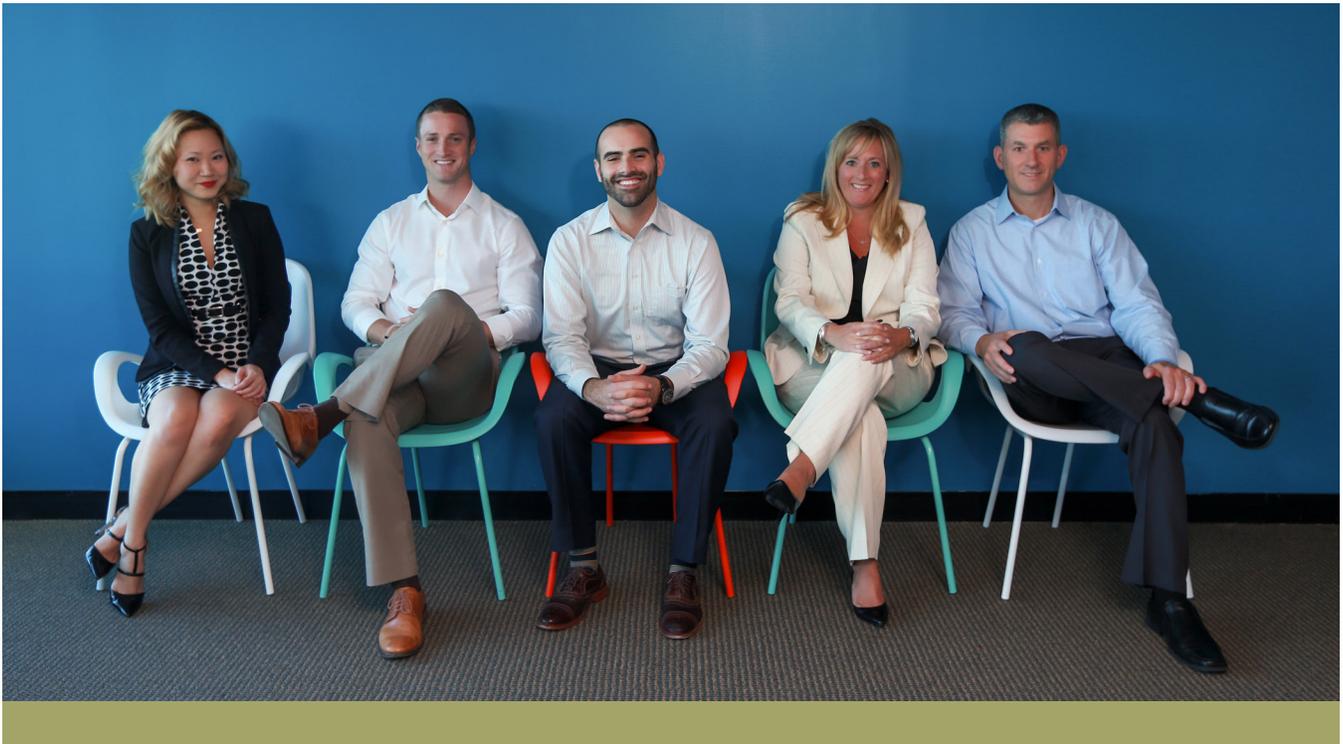
How to Make the Perfect Hire

PLUS!

*Hiring Millennials:
What You Need
to Know*

- ▶ 10 MUST-ASK INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
AND THE 5 QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD
NEVER ASK A JOB CANDIDATE





One of the biggest mistakes a job candidate can make is not putting in the time to properly prepare for an interview.

BUT WHAT MANY INTERVIEWERS DON'T REALIZE IS THAT THEY, TOO, NEED TO PREPARE.

In order for a successful interview — meaning you walk away with the insights you need to make a good hire — you need to know what questions to ask, what makes a good answer, and the red flags to watch out for.

To help you prepare for your next interview, we've assembled this list of 10 critical questions to ask interviewees — and the cues to listen for — so you can make your next hire the perfect hire. In addition, we've added extra questions you can use to drill down into specific skills and situations, as well as five questions you should never ask as candidate.

▶ 10 Questions to Ask Your Next Job Candidate

1 WHAT ONE SKILL MAKES YOU THE BEST PERSON FOR THIS POSITION?

This is a simple question but really cuts to the heart of the matter. Not only can you uncover what the candidate thinks is his or her core competency, but you can also learn if he or she truly understands what the role is about.

What to listen for: If the answer is not relevant to the position, it shows the candidate doesn't grasp what will need to be done.

2 WHAT PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

This is a great question to ask early in the interview. Most candidates are prepared to answer this and since it's something they like to talk about, it can put them at ease and settle in to the interview.

What to listen for: The answer should showcase the candidate's strengths in a variety of areas including goals, motivations, qualifications, etc.

3 WHAT WAS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU'VE OVERCOME?

Starting any new job is a challenge, and this question digs into how (and how much) a candidate handles roadblocks and adversity.

What to listen for: What's the biggest roadblock he or she has faced? How much is too much for him or her to handle — or has he or she even really been tested yet?



4 WHY DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE YOUR CURRENT ROLE?

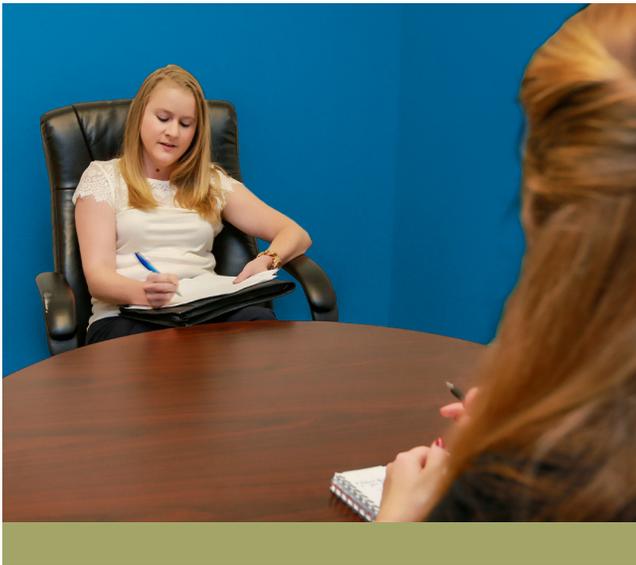
This is almost always the first or second question a client asks when we refer a candidate. It's subtly different than asking the candidate why he or she wants a new position; this question gets at why they have to move on.

What to listen for: The answer provides insight into the candidate's professional objectives but is also an opportunity to identify red flags. Always give the candidate enough rope to expand the answer — especially if anything jumps out as a warning sign.

5 WHAT WAS THE MOST/LEAST ENJOYABLE PART OF YOUR LAST POSITION?

At all costs, avoid asking the standard, "What's your biggest weakness?". Most people tend to excel at things they like, and not as well at things they don't. Asking about the enjoyable part first allows you to easily follow up with the least enjoyable question.

What to listen for: The "enjoyable" answer is a strength; the "least enjoyable" is a *potential* weakness.



6 WHAT SKILL WOULD YOU LIKE TO IMPROVE THE MOST? WHAT'S YOUR PLAN TO DO SO?

This question expands on potential weaknesses without leading your candidate into the canned “I take on too much responsibility” answer.

What to listen for: Answering this requires some thought to see if he or she can identify a hole in his or her skills, and more importantly — is he or she aware it needs to be improved and how is he or she going to remedy it?

7 TELL ME ABOUT A COUPLE OF THINGS YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME.

This is a good question to hold in reserve to ease nervousness, relieve awkwardness, and get a better sense of the candidate's personality.

What to listen for: Will the candidate mesh with you and your team's personality? Keep in mind, diversity is a good thing and shaking things up may benefit your team in the long run.

8 TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU FAILED. HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH THE SITUATION?

Asking this question gives you a sense of the candidate's self-awareness. Learning what type of setbacks candidates have faced and their response to them is critical.

What to listen for: A big failure isn't a problem, but not learning from one is. Can the candidate accept that he or she made a mistake and what changes did he or she make as a result?

9 IF I CONTACTED YOUR LAST SUPERVISOR AND ASKED WHICH AREA NEEDS IMPROVEMENT, WHAT WOULD HE OR SHE SAY?

The answer should reinforce many of the questions already asked, so it's nice to hold this question until the end.

What to listen for: This is a standard reference question asked by our companies, so if the responses mesh, the candidate has a good understanding of his or her own developmental needs — and we all have them.

10 DO YOU PERFORM BETTER WITH A LOT OF DIRECTION, OR ARE YOU MORE OF A SELF-STARTER? GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE TO SUPPORT THIS.

Whether the role you're filling is for an individual contributor or part of a large team, this question helps gauge how this person will need to be managed.

What to listen for: Does this match what you are able to offer? If you are unable to incorporate a variety of working styles, recognize there could be a weakness within your team structure.

INTERVIEWING MILLENNIALS

Sometimes called the “me generation”,

millennials are defined as people born between 1981 and 1996. They tend to be associated with certain (often negative) traits — whether deserved or not — that translate into their expectations in the workplace and how they perform.

But it's not really as simple as applying labels like “entitled”, “sensitive,” or “wants a trophy for showing up” to an entire group of people born in a 15-year time span. And remember, not all traits associated with millennials are negative. Millennials tend to be **technologically savvy** and also **passionate about finding meaning in their work** — whether that means working for a company that has a mission they care about or simply wanting to know the company they work for facilitates opportunities to give back to the community.

When interviewing millennials, keep an open mind. Rather than dismiss a candidate because the answer doesn't fit with what you expect to hear, you may need to **readjust your expectations** and/or management style. For example, millennials often value flexible work schedules, but that doesn't necessarily mean they want to (or will) work less than people who are sitting at a desk in the office from nine to five every day. Instead, they may be **highly productive** working outside the office and make **more efficient use of technology** to get their jobs done.

INTERVIEWING MILLENNIALS

These questions can help you better understand if the millennial you're interviewing is the right fit.

1. What three words would you use to describe your ideal work environment?

Culture is often difficult to define; therefore, it can be hard to match. Asking for three words — quiet, fast-paced, etc. - narrows the answer down to make it easier to identify a candidate that is a match.

2. What excites you the most about this position?

This is a great question to ask any candidate to gauge whether he or she will dive right in with excitement or if this just a way to pay the bills. But especially when interviewing millennials, who might not have much relevant professional experience, enthusiasm and passion can make up for a lot.

3. Describe your ideal work day / environment.

In today's world, millennials AND managers are almost always connected 24/7. However, managers still need to make sure an employee understands and will be present for the standard work hours.

4. Tell me about the first job you had. What did you do to learn the ropes?

You could also modify the question by asking about their first challenging job. This answer reinforces prior questions about how they learn and handle roadblocks.



When asking candidates about challenges and roadblocks they've encountered, it may seem some are easily self-directed while others need to be spoon fed. In many cases, the latter is not a reason to deny them the position, but it highlights how they need to be managed.

5. How does this position fit into your career plans?

Instead of asking a millennial what his or her five-year plan is (and treating it as a negative if they don't have one), simply listen to see where this new position fits into a logical progression. You can expand the discussion by asking where else in the company he or she could see him or herself. Or, is this just a job to pay rent while searching for something more meaningful? Depending on the role, that may not be a bad thing.

INTERVIEWING MILLENNIALS

6. How do you handle feedback?

No one is perfect. Learning from mistakes is part of growing as a professional; therefore, it's important for the candidate to be open to coaching — and articulate how they are best communicated with — as well as for you to understand HOW you can best coach your new employee.

TIP *It's critical for the candidate to view the new boss as a mentor and coach who takes his or her professional growth into consideration. Accordingly, this question not only helps you understand the candidate, but lays the groundwork for the candidate to accept the role because he or she believes the new manager will help him or her progress, too.*

7. Tell me about a time you were passed up for a promotion or award.

Millennial employees tend to get frustrated when they don't see results quickly. The answer here provides insight into the type of resiliency they might possess.

RED FLAG: *Listen for signs of frustration and blame. This could indicate that the candidate may have difficulty with adversity and/or self-awareness.*

8. What type of relationship would you like to have with your boss?

Another question that helps both sides, millennials have shown they are looking for mentors and even friends in their work. In fact, they may have already experienced the opposite. Will this fit in with your vision for the role? Be prepared for follow-up questions where the candidate may ask more about you and your team's culture to help answer their question.

9. Tell me about a time when you worked with a group of opinionated people.

Millennials are used to working in diverse groups and your office won't be any different. Chances are they've encountered opinionated people at work or even on social media. How they respond to those opinions will help identify how easily they will integrate into your company's environment.

10. Tell me about a time you failed.

Responding to failure is an essential part of success. Any failure will suffice and it doesn't need to be an immense failure either. What you're looking for in the response is how well the candidate can tell a story. Did he or she get to the heart of the matter quickly? Was he or she concise in explaining the challenge and the steps taken to rectify it? Finally, what was the takeaway? The topic and results indicate self-awareness while the story telling highlights communication skills.

INTERVIEWING MILLENNIALS

11. Tell me about a time you or your friends/teammates felt like giving up, but you knew you could pull through.

You want to hire optimists...someone that won't give up and will give others the same sense that things can and will get done.

12. What type of charity work do you do?

Progressive companies are becoming more involved with the community and this meshes well with many millennials, but ultimately this is a leadership question. Volunteering helps build confidence and esteem; introduces people to new environments; helps people connect and network with others they might not ordinarily; and even gets people outside their comfort in some cases. These are good traits to look for in any employee and can help you when making a final decision on inviting a candidate back or making an offer.

13. What type of goals have you set for yourself in the past? What did you do to make sure you achieved them? Which one was the toughest and when?

This can seem overwhelming, so don't ask all at once. Start with the first question and use the follow up questions to guide the conversation to deeper insights. Setting goals is good, but the process of developing the steps to achieve the goals is essential. You could start by asking what he or she is most proud of. Then, break it down into the steps he or she set. In addition, you could ask about what steps he or she might take in the new position to match their answer in question 5 (How does this position fit into your career plan?).

14. Do you prefer written or verbal communication?

As with many questions, the right/wrong answer may be job dependent but more importantly it again can provide you with an understanding of management needs and coaching opportunities.

While these questions are geared toward millennials, they are great questions to use with any job candidate.

► Assessing the qualities that make a good fit

At times you may want to dig deeper into specific qualities or skills that are essential to a job. These questions can help you assess whether a candidate has the traits necessary to be successful in the position.

TEAM PLAYER

1. Give me an example of a time when you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle it?
2. Everyone makes mistakes; tell me about a mistake you made with a teammate and how you could have handled it differently.
3. Tell me about a time when you had to work closely with someone who has a personality type different from yours.

CLIENT MANAGEMENT

1. Tell me about a time when you didn't meet a client's expectations. What did you do to rectify the situation?
2. Tell me about your most difficult client.
3. It's always challenging to prioritize customers. How do you manage it?



COPING WITH CHANGE

1. Tell me about a time when your team or company was experiencing some type of change? How did that impact you and how did you adjust?
2. Describe a time when you were under pressure. How did you get through it?

COMMUNICATION

1. Talk about a successful presentation you made. Why do you think it went well?
2. How would you explain a complex problem to a client/customer/colleague who is already frustrated?
3. What would you do if you misunderstood an important directive on the job?

MOTIVATION

1. What has been your proudest achievement?
2. Describe an instance when you worked under close supervision and an instance where you worked under loose supervision.
3. Tell me about a time when you were allowed to be creative.
4. How do you set goals for yourself?

WHAT NOT TO ASK

In addition to discriminatory or illegal questions, here are five questions you should never ask in an interview:

1. What is your biggest weakness?

As mentioned earlier, a better way to phrase this is to ask, "What's the least enjoyable part of your job?" (See question 5.)

2. Where do you want to be in five years?

It's more important to understand if the job fits into a logical career progression, rather than having a five-year plan. (See question 5 in the special section about millennials.)

3. Tell me about yourself...

This is over-used and, as a result, answers are often canned yet vague at the same time. Time is better spent structuring the interview to get answers to specific questions about experience, skills, or qualities relevant to the position.

4. Why are manhole covers round? (and other crazy brain teasers)

Asking these types of questions doesn't really assess a candidate's qualifications and can even annoy or turn off a great candidate by making them feel as if they are being set up to fail. Instead, ask something more pertinent to your industry.

5. We're interviewing several other people; why should I hire you?

Interviews are as much for job-seekers as they are hiring employers. It's not about why they should work for you — it's why wouldn't they want to work for you? Asking this question immediately requires the candidate to be submissive and can even be degrading to make them jump through this hoop, changing the tone of perhaps an otherwise excellent interview. By asking this question you risk souring the candidate on the role.

► Making the Hire

Once you've found a candidate or candidates who could be right for the job, these additional questions can help you further narrow down the decision to extend an offer:

1. What would be the first thing you would tackle in this position?
2. From everything you've learned about this role, me and our organization, how do you feel you could make a contribution?



The EEOC states that employers cannot ask questions about race, religion, gender, pregnancy status, disability, age, citizenship, marital status or number of children.

FOR GUIDANCE, VISIT

<https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/index.cfm>

Effective July 1, 2018, Massachusetts enacted the Massachusetts Equal Pay Act prohibiting wage discrimination based on gender. Accordingly employers are no longer allowed to inquire about past compensation until after a job offer which includes compensation is made.

FOR GUIDANCE, VISIT

<https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/index.cfm>