



How to Answer: What's Your Biggest Weakness?

What Hiring Managers Really Want to Hear

For almost all candidates, the most hated question in an interview is “what’s your biggest weakness?” But there’s a good reason why hiring managers still employ this age-old question—however much it might make candidates roll their eyes or run for the hills.

For hiring managers, this question is akin to sifting through CVs looking for reasons why not to hire an individual. Essentially, the question is asking “is there an obvious reason why I should eliminate you for this role?” Because the question is framed in a negative way, it is set up to assess both your character, and your self-awareness — and as these are more often than not two of the most vital attributes for any job, it is one of the most important questions in an interview.

Unfortunately, most candidates answer this question in such a way that they are immediately out of the running — even those with exemplar CVs, experience, and expertise. In this guide we’ll give you hints and tips so that you don’t immediately rule yourself out from your dream role.

Here is what hiring managers really want to know when they ask you about your biggest weakness...

Self-awareness

Your answer should indicate to the hiring manager that you can assess your strengths and weaknesses objectively. One of the worst things you can do here is formulate a cliché in which you turn a weakness into a positive answer.

Some guides will insist that you do this, but experienced hiring managers will see right through it. Avoid answers such as ‘I am too much of a perfectionist,’ or ‘I am often too enthusiastic.’ Be authentic.

Personal development

Not only will you have to show self-awareness, the hiring manager will want to understand that you are working hard to overcome your weakness. You should give examples of steps that you are currently taking to grow your strength in this area. Whether it be a professional course, exposing yourself to the elements, or working closely with other members of staff to improve, the very fact that you recognise your weakness and you're industrious enough to overcome it will impress even the toughest hiring manager.

Ability to handle difficult situations

We all know that 'what's your biggest weakness' is one of the most difficult questions to answer in an interview. Avoid generalisations, and show that you have considered your answer. Try and stay professional, and stay away from unrelated answers such as 'I don't do enough exercise.' Always answer the question too — 'I don't know' is a sure-fire way to stop you being successful.

Composure

With any job, keeping your cool in stressful situations is key to you being successful in the role. When asked a difficult question in an interview, the hiring manager will want to see that you can remain calm, logical, and professional, even when asked the dreaded 'what's your biggest weakness' question.

Positivity

Everyone loves a little positivity. So it shouldn't be a shock to learn that hiring managers want to hear it in an interview — even in response to a message laced with negativity. Be confident in your ability to overcome your weaknesses, and include other aspects of your personality that are vital to becoming a better, stronger person.

Performance

Whatever weakness you choose to express in your interview, make sure that it won't have a negative effect in your ability to be successful in the role. Read the job description in advance, and ensure that your answer doesn't conflict with the job requirements. In the case that your weaknesses do clash with the job spec, the role is more than likely not the right one to begin with.

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