

## Why Employers Ask about Your Greatest Weakness And How You Should Respond

It's a dreaded part of job interviews. You know before you even shake hands and greet the interviewer that he or she might ask, "What is your greatest weakness?"

This question seems nearly impossible to answer in a meaningful way. After all, how many people are accurate and insightful judges of their worst characteristics? And how many are comfortable freely sharing their weaknesses with potential employers? Not many, I'd say, based on what I've witnessed while interviewing job candidates. But a question about your weaknesses doesn't have to be a dreaded part of the interview process if you understand why employers are asking such a question.

Hiring committees use these inquiries as humility tests. Employers want to make sure you're humble enough to accept that you have weaknesses. No one wants to work with an arrogant know-it-all who fails to recognize his or her own limitations. Everyone wants to work with a confident but humble person who recognizes opportunities to improve himself or herself. That's why interviewers care about how you answer the question more than they care about what your actual weaknesses might be.

When faced with a job-interview question about your weaknesses, show employers your humble side with the following strategies:

1. Identify one specific trait that you think is a weakness and indicate that you're working on better habits. You might say, "I am always working on time management because I tend to get caught up in the minor details." Go on to describe specific ways you've worked to improve and positive results you've seen so far.
2. Describe a specific task or project that challenged you and that could have had better results. In other words, talk about a failure or a partial failure. Don't pretend that every one of your previous endeavors has been a smashing success. This is an excellent chance to show that you're a realistic, down-to-earth person who knows there is always room for learning and improvement.
3. Describe how you learned something new from a colleague, something that related to the weakness you identified. Employers want to hire team players. They want to hire people who will value the input of supervisors, will collaborate with coworkers, and who will be open to constructive criticism. If you can refer to good working relationships you had with previous colleagues, here's your chance to illustrate how much you value being part of a good team.

There's a great deal of employment advice that suggests you should never show fallibility during an interview, that you should seem confident even to the point of cockiness or arrogance. Don't be fooled by this bad advice.

While it's true that employers prefer candidates who can answer smoothly and confidently, they also seek candidates who demonstrate openness to new ideas along with willingness to grow and learn. In a February 2014 interview with *The New York Times* Google executive Laszlo Bock, explained that the ability to learn new things is the most important quality his company seeks in new hires. Though other organizations may not articulate it so openly,

Google is certainly not alone in this preference. So, to land the job you really want, show employers your humble side as well as your confidence.

Sources:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/23/opinion/sunday/friedman-how-to-get-a-job-at-google.html>

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