



JOB AND CAREER ADVICE

“OH, NO! THE INTERVIEWER JUST ASKED FOR MY WEAKNESSES!”

No list of the most challenging interview questions would be complete without the ol’ weaknesses question.

Today I’ll explore why they’re asking it and strategies for answering. Bear in mind, no single answer is necessarily best or worst, although I have a couple definitely in the running!

First, why are they asking it? They’re actually looking for signs you’re self-aware. Do you recognize an area or two where you realize you could improve? Beyond that, they’d want to know what you’re doing to actually improve.

Frankly, I think employers miss the mark by labeling it a “weakness.” That word carries a pretty negative connotation. And, when you think of it, an interview is the last place you’d want to talk about your negatives. I’d prefer they phrase the answer differently. For example, “Tell me an area you’ve identified for improvement, and what steps are you taking to address it?”

OK, so they’ve laid that “weakness” trap. Now, how do you answer?

First, the two worst answers are to either say you have no weaknesses or to say you’re a perfectionist. I’ve heard people encourage folks to “turn a weakness into a strength.” Don’t go

there. It's a nice thought and sounds great, but it's impractical and falls apart when the employer drills down to learn more.

Now that you know what not to say, here are a couple ways to answer their question. One thought is to change the question's wording, much like above where I'd wished the employer would have done so right from the start.

It goes something like, "While I wouldn't necessarily call it a weakness, one area I've identified for improvement is _____. Here's what I've done/am doing to address it..." Perhaps you speak of a class or training you're taking. Maybe you're reading a book on a business-related area.

Another strategy is to bring up something easily seen. For example, perhaps you lack a college degree. Or maybe you don't have specific industry experience. State the obvious, then tell them what you DO have.

For example, "Some might say my lack of a college degree is a weakness. And while I can't change that as I sit here today, what I can tell you is I have xxx number of years doing the very sort of work you need to have done. If you have to have a degree, I'm not your man. But if you'll look at my experience and accomplishments, I hope you'd see I'd do an excellent job!"

Avoid bringing up traits such as being impatient, overly analytical, etc. And for goodness sake don't talk about being combative, quick tempered, uncooperative, hard to motivate, etc.

Speaking to weaknesses – or areas of needed improvement – can make you feel like you're giving them a reason NOT to hire you. Hopefully today's tips will give you a degree of confidence in handling one of the most difficult interview questions out there. Good luck!

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