

20/20 CAREER SOLUTIONS

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Adapted from themuse.com

Teamwork

If you want to hear a story that illustrates the candidate's ability to work with others under challenging circumstances: think team conflict, difficult project constraints, or clashing personalities.

- Talk about a time when you had to work closely with someone whose personality was very different from yours.
- Give me an example of a time you faced a conflict while working on a team. How did you handle that?
- Describe a time when you struggled to build a relationship with someone important. How did you eventually overcome that?
- We all make mistakes we wish we could take back. Tell me about a time you wish you'd handled a situation differently with a colleague.
- Tell me about a time you needed to get information from someone who wasn't very responsive. What did you do?

Client-Facing Skills

If the candidate will work with clients, listen for an example of a time where the candidate successfully represented his/her company or team and delivered exceptional customer service.

- Describe a time when it was especially important to make a good impression on a client. How did you go about doing so?
- Give me an example of a time when you did not meet a client's expectation. What happened, and how did you attempt to rectify the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you made sure a customer was pleased with your service.
- Describe a time when you had to interact with a difficult client. What was the situation, and how did you handle it?
- When you're working with a large number of customers, it's tricky to deliver excellent service to them all. How do you go about prioritizing your customers' needs?

Ability to Adapt

If you want to determine how the candidate successfully navigated through change, and consider that even if not successful at the time, but learned a lesson from the situation:

- Tell me about a time you were under a lot of pressure. What was going on, and how did you get through it?
- Describe a time when your team or company was undergoing some change. How did that impact you, and how did you adapt?
- Tell me about the first job you've ever had. What did you do to learn the ropes?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to think on your feet in order to delicately extricate yourself from a difficult or awkward situation.
- Tell me about a time you failed. How did you deal with this situation?

Time Management Skills

If the candidate will need to juggle multiple responsibilities, then listen for how he/she organized it all and completed everything before the deadline.

- Tell me about a time you had to be very strategic in order to meet all your top priorities.
- Describe a long-term project that you managed. How did you keep everything moving along in a timely manner?
- Sometimes it's just not possible to get everything on your to-do list done. Tell me about a time your responsibilities got a little overwhelming. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time you set a goal for yourself. How did you go about ensuring that you would meet your objective?
- Give me an example of a time you managed numerous responsibilities. How did you handle that?

Communication Skills

You will probably hear some examples demonstrating communication skills through other questions, but listen for the candidate's thought process or preparation in the situation.

- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully persuade someone to see things your way at work.
- Describe a time when you were the resident technical expert. What did you do to make sure everyone was able to understand you?
- Tell me about a time when you had to rely on written communication to get your ideas across to your team.
- Give me an example of a time when you had to explain something fairly complex to a frustrated client. How did you handle this delicate situation?
- Tell me about a successful presentation you gave and why you think it was a hit.

Motivation and Values

If you want to understand what motivates a candidate:

- Tell me about your proudest professional accomplishment.
- Describe a time when you saw some problem and took the initiative to correct it rather than waiting for someone else to do it.
- Tell me about a time when you worked under close supervision or extremely loose supervision. How did you handle that?
- Give me an example of a time you were able to be creative with your work. What was exciting or difficult about it?
- Tell me about a time you were dissatisfied in your work. What could have been done to make it better?
- Tell me about a recent project or problem that you made better, faster, smarter, more efficient, or less expensive.

STRATEGIC THINKING QUESTIONS

Adapted from 20/20 Career Solutions (biginterview.com)

These are great questions for current students/new graduates or experienced professionals. It's not a true case study question as it's more of a hypothetical and most students or new graduates do not have a specific client example to share. However, the ability to demonstrate <basic> knowledge of business frameworks and how to structure the approach to this type of client situation is important.

It's essential that the candidate organizes his/her thoughts, prioritizes his/her questions, and carefully thinks aloud to demonstrate his/her logic. These questions do not necessarily ask the candidate for a proposed recommendation and focus more on thought processes and analytical skills.

How would you go about analyzing whether a potential acquisition would make business sense for your client?

The candidate should be asking a lot of questions to analyze the situations and understand the business impact.

Example of what to listen for from candidate:

"First I would need to ask a lot of questions related to how different areas of the business currently operate and then assess the post-acquisition impact. There are so many factors that need to be considered to analyze the client's situation in order to make a sound business recommendation. I would research the client's:

- Organizational/Ownership Structure
- Products & Services
- Current Processes
- People & Resources
- Technology & Data
- Current Customers & Future Customers
- Supply Chain Analysis
- Competitors Analysis
- Market/Industry Analysis
- Legal/Regulatory Implications

Based on that information, I could do a cost/benefit analysis to determine if the opportunity made sense for the business. I'd be most curious about what the business or value drivers are for the client. Why is the client considering an acquisition and why *this* particular acquisition? What is their strategy?"

If you were attempting to value a business, where would you start?

The candidate should be thinking through multiple areas of consideration.

Example of what to listen for from candidate:

“There are multiple considerations and criteria required to value a business. A lot of information needs to be researched, gathered and summarized in order to apply the appropriate valuation formula.

- Is the business a young start-up?
- How long has the company been in business?
- What is the current ownership structure?
- What is the business “worth” to its current owners?
- What are the products and/or services provided?
- Who is the competition?
- What is the value of similar businesses?
- What are the market demand and market barriers?
- How much are the customer contracts worth?
- What is the total compensation for principals and employees?
- What are the current revenue, recurring revenue, net income, and profit margin?
- What are the expected future income, taxes and projected cash flow?
- What are the current debts (with interest) and expenses to run the business?
- What is the valuation of current assets (physical, intellectual property)?
- What is the liquidation value of current assets?
- What is the depreciation of assets?
- What are the future capital requirements?

Understanding the combination of the business strategy, marketplace and financials is key. I would review all of the information and numbers in order to formulate a valuation with an acceptable ROI for the client.”

STRATEGIC THINKING QUESTIONS

Adapted from hbr.org

Give Them a Real Problem to Solve

Provide promising candidates a problem to solve during the interview. You can use a real unsolved problem, which has the advantage of providing you with several potential solutions. Or you can use a problem that you've already solved, which means you'll already know the critical steps that should be included in an answer. With either option, you should verbally describe the problem or provide a written description, give the candidate a few minutes to think, and then ask them to walk you through the steps they would take to investigate and resolve the problem.

What you should look for in a response will vary according to the particular problem you've asked them to solve, but there are essential steps that should be included in every answer:

- compile a list of potential problems
- check the strategic plan
- review company and industry multiyear forecasts
- identify and track key industry and economic environmental factors
- identify and consult with key stakeholders across departments and business units

Depending on the question, you may also look for these steps in their answer:

- identify interconnected and interdependent functional areas, including predictive metrics
- pretest solutions with your customers
- measure success after implementation and use data to make adjustments

Ask Them to Review a Flawed Strategic Plan and Identify Potential Problems

A second tactic is to provide an early draft of your organization or department's current strategic plan and ask candidates to identify any significant flaws or omissions. Since you already know the problems that occurred, it should be relatively easy to evaluate a candidate's ability to identify potential issues. If the individual can't find a significant percentage of what you know to be the flaws and omissions, it's unlikely they are a strategic thinker.

Ask Specific Interview Questions

- How would you go about connecting the dots and identifying the interrelationships and interdependencies in a proposed strategic plan?
- When you are working on a strategic project in your current job, how do you go about identifying the relevant stakeholders across the firm?
- What are the steps that you have taken during your career to become a more strategic thinker? What measures or indicators do you have for growing the skill?
- What are the steps you'd take to identify which candidates for a job are strategic thinkers? (The answer here is helpful in two ways. It will give you ideas to improve your assessment, and it will

provide insight into the candidate's depth of understanding on the topic and how they describe themselves against that criteria.)

Look for Strategic Phrases Within the Answers to Your Standard Interview Questions.

Few strategic thinkers actually label themselves with the phrase, but fortunately there are many other words that can indicate the skill: "strategic goals," "multiyear," "cross-functional," "increasing profitability and margins," "connecting the dots," "data-driven decisions," and "root cause analysis." Individuals that routinely quantify their results in dollars or revenue impacts are highly likely to be strategic. After a candidate uses one of these phrases, the interviewer can ask them to define the phrase and explain its importance. This will help distinguish interviewees who are using catchphrases to impress you from those who truly understand these words and phrases.

Ask Questions That Reveal How Much They Value Strategic Thinking

If you ask a candidate to list their capabilities from most to least important, you can get an understanding of how important they think strategic capabilities are. Alternately, you can ask them to list a few ideal or dream projects they'd like to work on in the future and then consider what percentage of those dream projects are strategic. Because strategic thinking involves continuous learning, you can ask candidates to name the specific learning sources that they use to expand their capabilities. They should be able to immediately name resources, and you can compare those with sources that your current employees use. Ask them questions about your firm's strategy, your strategic products, your recent strategic blunders, your strategic competitors, and the most strategic firms in the industry. The best candidates will have done this research in advance. If they haven't, you should pass on them.

Consider the Questions They Ask You

The right candidate will proactively ask his or her own questions related to strategy. You should take note of the number and quality of the strategic questions that they ask, and be suspicious when a candidate doesn't ask any. For example, you should give positive points when a candidate asks a question like, "How does this job fit into the corporate strategy?" The best candidates may ask questions related to planned changes to future corporate strategy, the opportunities they'll have to contribute to strategy, and the strategic things that are happening within the department. Because the best thinkers are action-oriented, expect them to ask questions related to the implementation of ideas.