

The Weakness Question

Advice: These are the Worst Answers to ‘What’s your biggest weakness?’

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What’s your biggest weakness?

This interview question has tripped up many a candidate. You prepare yourself to play up your strengths, but many candidates don’t spend as much time thinking about how to discuss their failures. Hiring managers ask this question because they want to understand the full story of your career and they want to test how you respond to everyday pressure. No matter what you answer, most experts agree that you should briefly own up to your shortcomings, so that you can spend the majority of the answer showing recruiters how you’ve learned and improved from the experience.

But not everyone treats the question this way...

Biggest weakness examples...

Looking at Reddit answers and recruiting experts’ advice, *Ladders* rounded up the *worst* ways to respond to this question, so we can learn from these cautionary tales.

My biggest weakness is “I’m a perfectionist.”

The real question being asked with “What’s your biggest weakness?” is “How are you going to think critically and face adversity in my organization?” When you answer that you seek perfection, that doesn’t address the real underlying question being asked, and it doesn’t give recruiters insight into how you work with others and what you’ve overcome.

Like saying “I’m too passionate,” saying that you have perfectionist tendencies as your biggest weakness is a non-specific answer that does not tell a recruiter a story about your career. Not mentioning any weakness also makes you sound defensive. As *Forbes* advises job seekers on this question, “Be honest and specific about key weaknesses that are relevant to the job. Be prepared to tick them off on your fingers without any spin or rationalizing.”

My biggest weakness is “identifying weaknesses.”

One Reddit user said that when they were asked the question, “What is your greatest weakness?”, they responded, “Identifying weaknesses.” It would not be surprising to experts that this user said they didn’t end up getting the job. When you say you have a hard time recognizing weakness, you’re telling a manager that you don’t know how to address failure, conflict, and hardship.

Saying that you have a hard time seeing weaknesses in yourself and other people also makes it sound as if you don’t understand interpersonal dynamics. It suggests that you’re not good at reading people’s emotions and motivations.

My biggest weakness is “condescension.”

Sometimes, you can be a little too honest and transparent. One Reddit user said they answered that, “People say I can be condescending. That’s when you talk down to people.” The user didn’t elaborate on what happened when they said this answer, but it would not be surprising if this didn’t inspire confidence in a hiring manager about how you, the self-proclaimed condescending candidate, would act on their team.

If you do have a problem with interpersonal communication, you at least want to also address how you’re working to fix this issue.

My biggest weakness is “I work too hard.”

Certain career experts use workaholism as an example of a good answer for the weakness question under the thinking that it turns a personal weakness into a strength that could benefit the organization’s bottom-line.

But others strongly disagree with using this answer. One Reddit user who identifies as a hiring manager said that they when they hear this question from candidates, they consider it a “cop-out” answer.

Writing for *Harvard Business Review*, human resources expert David Galloreese said that working hard is among the “canned responses” that he advocates against using because when you turn a negative characteristic into a positive you’re not being authentic about the underlying weakness.

“Responses like these tell me little about how a candidate faces challenges and immediately implies a lack of sincerity. It doesn’t demonstrate to me how they think — beyond their ability

to creatively avoid being honest or self-critical. It indicates to me that they're not willing to stand up and say what's not working," he argues.

Saying that you work too hard does not tell a memorable story about your career, because get in line, buddy, we all work too hard.

If you don't believe these recruiting experts, trust in science. A workplace psychology study found that when candidates hid their weaknesses in a compliment such as "I'm too nice" or "I'm too demanding when it comes to fairness," these answers weren't as interesting to hiring managers as the candidates who mentioned a weakness that didn't airbrush the flaw. Interviewers said they were 30% more interested in hiring the job seekers who acknowledged a weakness like "I overreact to situations."

When you're in an interview, you need to tell an engaging story about your career that demonstrates that you're self-aware about where you need to improve. Those are the kinds of stories that will linger in a hiring managers' mind long after you've finished talking.

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