

The Interview Questions You Should Be Asking

Get the most revealing answers from your candidates.



Introduction

Interviewing isn't easy, but the process isn't going anywhere.

To find out how to spot a top performer in today's saturated job market, we asked LinkedIn hiring managers how they screen candidates.

With their insight, we've determined the most revealing interview questions and answers for today's most in-demand jobs (based on LinkedIn [data](#)).

Whether you're hiring for sales, marketing, or software engineering, or you're just looking to brush up on your interview skills, this ebook is designed to get you asking the right questions and analyzing candidate answers so you can hire the best person for the role.



The top 5 traits

Learn to screen the top soft skills for each industry by asking the right interview questions and analyzing a candidate's answers.

Sales

- Ambition
- Integrity
- Adaptable
- Customer-centric
- Proactive

Marketers

- Relationship builder
- Storyteller
- Adaptable
- Innovative
- Cultural add

Software engineers

- Adaptable
- Team player
- Approachability
- Curious
- Takes ownership



Sales

65% of sales hiring managers agree that a lack of soft skills among candidates limits company productivity. Though they're difficult to screen for, soft skills are central to a sales role. And with the right interview questions, identifying those skills – including adaptability, integrity, and ambition – will help you find a highly productive new hire.



Top traits of sales

Ambition

Look for someone who has the drive to set goals and actually achieve them. Your ideal candidate should strive to exceed quota and meet business goals.

Integrity

Successful sales employees focus on accuracy and radiate integrity. Determine whether a candidate has those traits by asking for a scenario where they stood up for what was right.

Adaptable

A sales candidate should demonstrate an aptitude for critical and flexible thinking, as well as the ability to excel in a fast-paced environment where change is inevitable.

Customer-centric

Any question centered around process and customer management should shine a light on a candidate's strategy for working with customers. Focus on how they navigate a sales scenario, how they prepare, and whether they act like a strategic partner.

Proactive

A strong candidate is one who values growth opportunities. Candidates who not only provide situational examples of failure, but also reveal how they learned from it, demonstrate high emotional IQ, curiosity, and leadership potential.



Ambition

Sample question

Where do you see yourself within our organization in five years?

Sample answer

In five years, I would like to be considered a mentor – not just on the sales team, but throughout the organization as a whole.

I'll also have taken the lead on a number of projects that helped your company succeed. I'd love to be the type of employee you benchmark future hires against.

What to listen for

High performers should be able to list a series of accomplishments and achievements from their past, which will help you predict their future success.

Look for candidates who align their goals with your organization's success and who treat this question as an exploration of ways they meet the job description.

Use the advanced search functionality in [LinkedIn Recruiter](#) to find candidates with “ambition” and “leadership” in their profiles.

Integrity

Sample question

Tell me about a time when you had to handle a tough problem that challenged fairness or ethical issues. What did you do?

Sample answer

A few teammates inserted language in a proposal that overstated product benefits relevant to business needs. I took steps to demonstrate why this language shouldn't be included, referencing internal product documents and even looping in product managers to get a second opinion. The decision to remove certain language wasn't welcomed by the entire team, but it was the right thing to do for the prospective client.

What to listen for

This answer reveals the candidate's ability to solve problems in the face of adversity and actually influence the process. If the candidate doesn't present a specific experience or their scenario lacks complexity, it could be a red flag.

No candidate will be perfect, but one who demonstrates that they were willing to go against popular opinion reveals their transparency and trustworthiness. This should translate to someone who values the longevity of client relationships over a short-term sale.

Adaptable

Sample question

Tell me about a time when the policy, price structure, or product changed at the last minute and you already had a deal in the field. How did you handle the situation?

Sample answer

I called my contact as soon as possible to inform them of the changes, but not before I took the time to thoroughly understand the implication for their business. During the conversation, I tried to anticipate their potential concerns and presented a few different options for addressing them, because I wanted to focus on the solution rather than the problem. By flagging the change early and working with the customer to find a resolution together, I was able to maintain the trust in the relationship and secure the deal.

What to listen for

An answer like this reveals a candidate who can think on their feet and shows creative problem-solving to overcome challenges.

Look for signs that a candidate can keep a positive attitude even under high pressure or while in a stressful situation.

Customer-centric

Sample question

You've got a new product to sell.
Walk me through your sales process.

Sample answer

I always begin by doing my homework. I want to know the ins and outs of how the product works. This means curating product datasheets, case studies, and various resources to make sure that I'm armed with the right information to share with prospective customers. I make sure to let the customer do a lot of the talking from the start so I can get a clear picture of what they need and where they can benefit from the product before I tailor the conversation around their particular challenges.

What to listen for

Look for an answer that indicates that a candidate knows how to position themselves as a strategic consultant who helps people solve their business problems, rather than just a salesperson.

Proactive

Sample question

Describe a time when you received criticism or feedback from your sales manager or client. How did you react?

Sample answer

When I first got started in sales, I had the sales aspect of the role down, but I struggled to manage my time against the high volume of leads that were in pipeline. After a review with my manager that indicated she was aware of these issues, I was determined to figure out a systematic approach to staying on top of prospecting and nurturing my book of leads. First I defined the cadence of communications and used calendar tools to make sure I had reminders in place. That allowed me to follow through on daily tasks and ensure that I had time to complete all the necessary activities to be effective in this role.

What to listen for

Salespeople are accustomed to constant rejection, but they should be able to absorb criticism, analyze it, and take actions to constantly improve.

The best candidates are the ones who want feedback so they know what they can do to improve. They ask lots of questions, are accountable for mistakes, and take action to remedy the situation quickly.

Marketers

Hiring a great marketer can be even more difficult than hiring a great engineer or salesperson. Marketing, as a role, tends to be amorphous. So while it's difficult to pinpoint specific metrics of success in this field, you can ask questions that help define the candidate's understanding of marketing strategies and how they might approach specific challenges.



Top traits of marketers

Relationship builder

Strong marketers should be able to cultivate and foster relationships with everyone they work with, both internally and externally.

Storyteller

In the digital age, effective marketers are glorified storytellers. Candidates should be capable of crafting a compelling story that educates, illuminates, and excites.

Adaptable

Today's marketing landscape is ever-evolving, so flexibility is key. Find someone who's motivated, curious, and interested in exploring new trends or technology.

Innovative

Every job comes with challenges, but someone who can think outside of the box to communicate, create, and drive results will be a valuable asset.

Cultural add

Look for someone who can add to – and more importantly, elevate – your culture in order to foster inclusion and diversity.



Relationship builder

Sample question

Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult colleague. What did you do to build the relationship?

Sample answer

In my previous role, I worked with someone who had a particularly hard time communicating. I made a point to sync up with them outside of presentations – meeting them for lunch, organizing brainstorming sessions beyond what was originally scoped for – until we finally got on the same page. It helped cut back on future rounds of creative presentations and ended up developing our partnership further.

What to listen for

Marketers should be team players. Look for nonverbal cues that a candidate effectively collaborates with teammates.

Storyteller

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Sample question

Give me a presentation on a topic you care a lot about.

Sample answer

Did you know that there are over 7,500 people living on the street in our community? I was shocked to hear this number, which is why I began volunteering with a local nonprofit. Along with accepting individual donations, the organization throws an annual fundraiser to help raise awareness about the plight of those who are unsheltered. And over the years, I've held various positions with the organization, which has allowed me to utilize my skills to support a cause I care about deeply.

What to listen for

Search for clues in an answer that make it clear this candidate is a natural conversationalist who can craft a story with a compelling framework that both educates and excites. Their answer should reveal some expertise, which will prove that they can passionately advocate for new projects.

Adaptable

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Sample question

Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something you had never done before. How did you approach the situation? What did you learn?

Sample answer

I love that this industry is always changing and there's always something new to learn. When my company added a new client, I wasn't super familiar with their technology. So I took a couple of online courses well in advance of the project kickoff so I was up to date on the latest and greatest. I actually like taking on new types of projects – it gives me an excuse to keep learning!

What to listen for

A curious marketer is often a successful one. Listen for phrases like “keep learning” in a candidate's answer, because it shows their willingness to explore new trends, processes, and technology.

A candidate who is flexible and has the desire to continuously grow their skill set will be an asset to the team.

Sample question

What is the most exciting project/program you've worked on? What was your role and what impact did you have?

Sample answer

In my most recent role, I was a key member of the team who brought to market a new on-the-go dog treat. I was responsible for leading the external communication launch and packaging designs, and worked closely with a counterpart to handle the manufacturing and distribution. The product was purchased by 80% of mainstream retailers and has seen two new iterations.

What to listen for

This candidate should highlight how they played an integral role in the project, as well as its successes and failures.

They should also highlight key insights that are sharp and grounded in methodology. It's important to articulate the pain point and consumer need.

Cultural add

Sample question

What's the most interesting thing about you that's not on your resume?

Sample answer

In my past life, I was an EMT. While my work took me a lot of places, one scenario I'll always remember is the time I had to administer emergency CPR at the beach while on vacation. A young girl was having trouble swimming and without a lifeguard on duty, I stepped into action.

This was luckily a one-time event, but I've always been able to stay calm during stressful situations, figure out solutions, and act quickly.

What to listen for

A candidate's response should be confident and unique. Find someone who will add culture and flair to your team, not someone who fits the same mold as other team members.

Look for what gives them joy outside the 9 to 5. Be sure to identify underlying themes that can translate to the work setting: passion, tenacity, dedication, and creativity.

With [LinkedIn Career Pages](#), it's easy to share your company's story and the part potential candidates will play in it.

Software engineers

Software engineers are some of the most sought-after talent, with the average engineer receiving 3X as much recruiter interest on LinkedIn as the average member. In this competitive hiring landscape, finding top talent that excels in both hard and soft skills can be tough.



Top traits of software engineers

Adaptable

The top candidates will be as comfortable with days spent debugging and writing code as they are with navigating multiple programs.

Team player

Great engineers know that no individual or team can make your company successful on their own. They realize the importance of working together for the greater good.

Approachability

A readiness to teach and help others means a candidate has built a strong rapport with their team in the past, and that they're a good communicator.

Curious

A willingness to embrace continuous learning is essential for successful engineers, because trends and technologies are always evolving.

Takes ownership

Independent thinkers can provide unique solutions to problems and have the ability to recognize when they need to work independently and when the help of colleagues is required.



Sample question

In what kind of environment do you do your best work?

Sample answer

There is something to be said for working in a large organization and the safety net that comes with being part of a big team. However, in my time working with a startup, I learned much more about what it takes to make a business successful, beyond just lines of code.

What to listen for

Look for candidates whose answer shows a real understanding of the demands of the role you are hiring for.

You want their answer to be realistic, but also demonstrate awareness to the expectations of your specific organization.

Team player

Sample question

What distinguishes a great software engineer from a good one? Do you feel you have these qualities?

Sample answer

A great software engineer knows that they can't do everything, and that it takes a team of people to get the job done. I believe I have the makings of a great engineer, because I'm willing to ask for help when I need it. At the same time, I know what I'm good at; when I can, I offer my services in the places I excel. It's all about balance, really.

What to listen for

This question can provide insight into the thought process of a candidate. Look for an answer that shows initiative and communication skills, traits often overlooked for someone in an engineer role. This particular answer shows humility, since they're also willing to ask for help.

A candidate who understands the difference between pragmatism and perfectionism will benefit your organization.

Approachability

Sample question

Describe a situation where you had a positive effect on someone. What did you do? How did the other person react?

Sample answer

During a time of rapid growth in my last company, we were hiring engineers right out of college. At one point I noticed a young developer struggling with their workload. I didn't want to point out that their struggle was evident, but casually offered a few tips I'd learned over the years. Eventually the employee came to me on their own and I was able to assist in a more official capacity. Just a few months later, I was able to ask that same developer for help on another project.

What to listen for

Being approachable is essential in the role of a software engineer. You'll want someone who knows how to work well with others and offers assistance for the greater good of the company.

Curious

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Sample question

Do you have any hobbies outside of work?

Sample answer

I'm a big believer in giving back, so I volunteer with a local nonprofit that helps the homeless. It gives me a better sense of working with all kinds of people and understanding that everyone has different needs and motivations.

What to listen for

Someone who has a hunger for exploration is eager to learn.

A candidate with a curious mind is more willing to ask questions, and might be more engaged in the office. They could also bring new ideas, perspectives, or strategies to the business.

Give new hires access to [LinkedIn Learning](#), which includes resources for every career stage to support their curiosity and eagerness for growth.

Takes ownership

Sample question

Discuss one of your previous projects that didn't go smoothly. Explain how you dealt with those challenges to complete the project successfully.

Sample answer

When my team realized our deadline could be missed, I opened up a dialogue with other stakeholders and quickly determined that the best course of action was to strip back some of the less crucial features to allow us to launch on time with a functioning product.

What to listen for

This question allows you to identify whether the candidate can take control. Even if they generally work alone, it can help you understand their other skills, such as time and project management.

Conclusion

As a hiring manager, you've got a tough job ahead of you.

Finding a candidate who meets all the necessary criteria in a 30-minute interview is no small task. That's why we're giving you sample interview questions and answers for today's most in-demand jobs, as well as tips for analyzing every answer. Use them as a guide in your own interview so you can find that perfect fit, faster.



See LinkedIn in action

LinkedIn Talent Solutions offers a full range of recruiting solutions to help organizations of all sizes find, attract, and engage the best talent. Founded in 2003, LinkedIn connects the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. With 610+ million members worldwide, including 75% of the US workforce, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network.

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