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Job Interviews

Amazon Senior Technical Program Manager Onsite Interview

C   itoS26
     May 24

Hi, I have been invited for an onsite interview for a Senior Technical Program Manager position at Amazon, and I would appreciate any advices or insights into the interview process.

Amazon   Technical Program Manager   Interview Questions

Questions

1. How should Senior TPM interview candidates prepare for Amazon leadership principles interview questions? -- Which Amazon leadership principles are commonly asked of Senior TPM interview candidates? -- Will answers to Amazon leadership principle question be evaluated more stringently for Senior TPM interview candidates (vs TPM interview candidates)? -- Any tips or advice on what successful answers to Amazon leadership principle questions should sound like?

    50 words minimum.

2. What kind of technical questions (if any) should a Senior TPM interview candidate expect in the interview loop?

    50 words minimum.

3. Should I prepare to answer questions regarding Agile, Scrum, or any of the popular project management frameworks?

    50 words minimum.

4. Should I prepare for any other type of questions?

    50 words minimum.

5. Any other tips, advices, or insights regarding the Senior TPM interview process will be greatly appreciated.

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Leadership Principals (LPs) are the culture at Amazon. To understand how to prepare for LPs you must first understand how these questions are asked. No one will ask you tell me about your 'Bias for Action' or 'Ownership' or 'Customer Obsession'. The interviewer will ask you general questions like tell me about a project where you took on more than you were supposed to. Now depending on your answer the interviewer will can gauge anything from 1 to 9 LPs. Did you take the expanded scope as your own (Ownership), did you gather the right data (Dive Deep), did you understand what your customers wanted (Customer Obsession), did you expand the scope further (Think Big), did you participate in technical decisions and change something that made the product more efficient (Innovate and Simplify), did you think of the cost as well (Frugality) and I can go on.

The key for you to remember is that you must showcase what you have done by taking all things into account. So for any behavioral question your answer should be structured in such a way that you showcase as many LPs as possible.

There are no specific LPs that are asked for Sr TPMs. Generally you would have 5 interviewers and we have 14 LPs so its not that hard to get answers to all 14. So it would be best if you prepared for all the LPs. DO NOT skip any.

LPs are gauged strictly for all roles at all levels we want you to have all 14 ingrained in you before you come to Amazon. The difference between a TPM II and a Sr TPM is the scope at which you were acting. As an example what was the size of the customers you were dealing with were they small shops or fortune 500 companies? What was the revenue that you were responsible for a few 100Ks or 10M? Were you working in one team with different leads or were you working across organizations that had different VPs? Did you present to VPs/SVPs on a regular basis etc. So to get into amazon you have to be have the LPs, once we know you are a good fit the leveling conversation comes up and then you need to show that you actually have managed projects that can level you at a Senior position.

As far as tips on what successful answers sound like I would say don't fake it. We dig deep into your answers and ask multiple follow up ques The best strategy is to think about your past projects and see how what you did maps to the LPs. Don't try to force the LPs into your answers.

feel like your projects are missing some LPs then tell the interviewer how you could have improved what you were doing, being vocally self-critical is a big part of 'Earning Trust'.

2. What kind of technical questions (if any) should a Senior TPM interview candidate expect in the interview loop?

For a Sr TPM interview you will be asked System Design questions. Prepare very thoroughly for your system design interview, a good way to go about it is the grokking system design course on educative.io. Don't just jump into the answer if you know it, ask clarifying questions all along and please use the whiteboard I cannot tell you how hard it is to visualize diagrams in the air. The more you practice on the whiteboard the easier it will be for you to visualize and place your functional requirements, assumptions, diagrams etc. A well-organized board will convey clarity of thought and organization to your interviewer and give you more confidence. Many times interviewers will take a photo of the whiteboard and attach it in their notes on the interview debrief where hire/no-hire decisions are made.

3. Should I prepare to answer questions regarding Agile, Scrum, or any of the popular project management frameworks?

As a Sr TPM you will be expected to know how Agile software development works as well as its artifacts like Sprints, Scrum Boards, Retrospective meetings etc. You should be able to distinguish between Agile, waterfall, spiral, kanban and other models and also when to use what model. But most importantly you should be able to show how you have or have not used these techniques in your projects. There are no true Agile or waterfall projects, real world projects are messy and you end up slipping from one methodology to another. Most of the projects that I have worked on are indeed a mix as you need to understand requirements and design your project and then write code to implement it which is waterfall. But once you get into implementation you need to stay in touch with your customers, constantly course correct and decide what features can be delivered and when. So, bottom line yes you should know these methodologies but if you haven't used them show how you could have to make your projects better.

4. Should I prepare for any other type of questions?

For a Sr TPM interview I would focus on the following:

1) Your resume: be prepared to talk about anything on your resume in depth. If you are unsure do not put it on your resume and if you do put it there be prepared to dive deep into the topic concerned. They will dig deep into areas that you claim expertise in or claim to have worked on.

2) Behavioral questions: behavioral questions are very important for PM interviews as soft skills are very important for PMs. Be prepared to answer questions that gauge your comfort with ambiguity, interpersonal relationships, influencing without authority, helping others grow, driving projects, influencing without authority etc.

3) System design questions: I have already covered this in Q2 so will not be repeating.

5. Any other tips, advices, or insights regarding the Senior TPM interview process will be greatly appreciated.

First some general advice:

DOs:

1) Research the team and have a compelling reason for why you want to join the team that you want to join

2) Ask clarifying questions to fully understand the question being asked.

3) Tech is a very data-driven industry. Provide examples using metrics/data.

4) Prepare questions for your interviewers at the end of each interview. Don't ask frivolous questions like what do you like best at the company, try to come up with questions on the projects that they are working on.

DON'Ts

1) Do not be late

2) If you don't know something do not equivocate we will know

3) Listen intently to the question and answer to the point and clearly

As a Senior TPM you will have to show that you are very good at the following areas:

1) Ambiguity: The degree to which a technology project, program, and/or product requirements are defined can vary a lot. Business and architectural strategy may not be defined and you may not know what the problem is before starting. Show how you have driven clarity in such instances.

2) Scope and influence: you must show that you have worked across VP/Director orgs and have broad strategic influence.

3) Execution: Show how you are able to manage significantly complex cross-functional technology initiatives and remediate critical problems. How you manage escalations make trade-offs: business opportunity vs. resources vs. sustainability.

4) Communication: Highlight how you are able to manage meetings effectively and put the right people in the room. You must drive detailed business and technical discussions/alignment and be clear and concise in verbal and written communication. Show that you are trusted to present decisions to leaders up to 3 tiers above level and that you have the ability to communicate across a diversity of areas (e.g., legal, regulatory, finance, PR, external industry groups, etc.).

Stay calm, be yourself and good luck!

C itoS26 ★★★★★

Thank you for such a thorough answer. Your answers and suggestions have been extremely informative, and will definitely help me prepare for my upc⌐ interview. Thanks again!
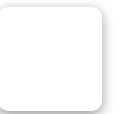
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We have 14 Leadership principles(LPs) and each of those are a result of years and years of experience summarized in a few words. During interviews, you'll get questions about situations related to each one. You should spend a lot of time understanding the essence of each LP and then create a spreadsheet or table mapping each LP to a real life situation you encountered and then prepare for follow up questions. For example, Ownership LP measures the candidates ability to jump into work that is not part of their day job. You will be asked questions like Tell me about a time when you worked on something outside of your area of responsibility? Why was that important? What was the outcome?. We are looking for people who don't say "that's not my job" so as long as you can prove that, you're good. LPs don't differentiate TPM vs Senior TPM. Your Program Management experience and Technical skills do as well as years of experience do.

2. What kind of technical questions (if any) should a Senior TPM interview candidate expect in the interview loop?

You will not be asked any coding questions but be prepared to design the architecture for a system. E.g. "Can you design Amazon.com's product recommendation feature". Take some time to ask good clarifying questions to make sure you understand the requirements, don't make assumptions and if you do, be vocal about them. Next talk them through your thought process and validate it e.g. "This feature will be displayed on Web and Mobile UIs, so I will need a REST API. I expect there to be thousands of requests per second so I will need a cache in memory, there will be a scalable service layer and a database layer and here is how the database schema will look like" A Senior TPM will comfortably design the architecture and identify risks, things to watch out for e.g. scaling up, security issues, etc

3. Should I prepare to answer questions regarding Agile, Scrum, or any of the popular project management frameworks?

Yes this is your primary job responsibility. You will get a lot of questions about your REAL project management experience, not theoreticals like how agile works. Make a list of all the projects you've worked on, how did you create the project plan? how did you allocate resources? How did you identify risks ? what issues did you face? How did you overcome those issues?

4. Should I prepare for any other type of questions?

a TPM loop has 3 components: 1) LPs 2) Program Management and 3)Technical design. Make a list of sample questions for each of these, ask yourself those questions and record your answers and listen to yourself. Repeat until you are satisfied with your answers. Be very aware of the objective of each question that you get. IF you aren't sure, ask them. And only provide an answer that answers that specific objective.

5. Any other tips, advices, or insights regarding the Senior TPM interview process will be greatly appreciated.

Few tips:
1. Always ask clarifying questions to make sure you understand what the interviewer is asking.
2. Don't blabber, be specific and to the point.
3. Prepare and come to the interview with prepared paperwork if you will have trouble remembering all your experience.
4. Expect answers through the whole of your career not just the past few years.
5. NEVER try to trick the interviewer by taking them around the block with a long answer. We all have a radar for those things.

Most importantly, don't over think it. If you take a structured approach to prep and if you understand our LPs inside and out (not just the meaning but the essence) then you are good. No one interviews perfectly you just have to be better than 50% of Amazonians.

C itoS26 ★★★★★

Thank you so much for such a detailed answer and providing another perspective into the Senior TPM interview process. Your suggestions + advice are very useful, and it will definitely help me prepare for the upcoming interview. Thank you!

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