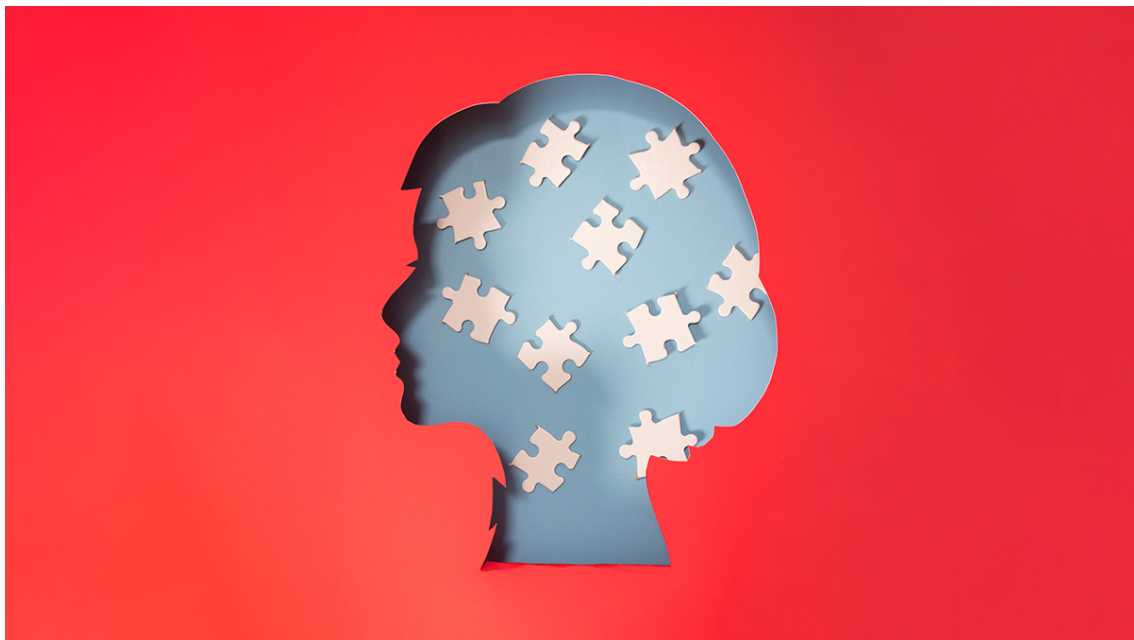


**Career Planning**

# **3 Questions Hiring Managers Want You to Answer**

by Art Markman

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**Summary.** Interviews have an outsized influence on whether you land a job. That's why you need to stand out. To prepare accordingly, be mindful of the three things recruiters are looking for. First, they want to know what you're like to work with. Treat your interview as an... [more](#)

Interviews have an outsized influence on whether you land the job you want. Even though your application materials reflect your lifetime of experience, a few hours of interaction with a recruiting team often

ends up being the determining factor in whether you actually get hired. So, clearly you need to stand out.

To do that, it helps to be mindful of what recruiters and hiring managers are trying to accomplish with the interview and prepare accordingly. Below are three of the questions they want answered and advice on how to address them.

### **“What will it be like to work with you?”**

People can't know from your résumé or cover letter what it will be like to have you work for them. You want to demonstrate to your prospective employer that you will be a valuable colleague and someone with whom they will enjoy interacting. That means that a lot of what will determine the success of the interview is social. Yes, you need to be knowledgeable about your field, but you also need to help people envision you as a member of the team.

One mistake job hunters often make is to treat interviews like exams — ones that they hope to ace, or at least not bomb. The problem with this framing is that it assumes the interviewer is doing an assessment and looking for a correct answer, which can lead people to subconsciously slip into a too-adversarial stance or work too hard to reply with what they think their counterparts want to hear.

If you instead think about interviewers as people looking to find potential colleagues, and the conversation as an opportunity for everyone to get to know one another, the relationship changes. You and the recruiter or hiring manager share the same goal, and your meeting becomes a joint problem-solving effort: *Do we want to work together?* You will probably display your expertise as you chat, but you will also be demonstrating your ability to establish a rapport.

Another benefit to this approach is that it encourages greater synchronization between your and the interviewer's brains. This is something that happens in most conversations. People speak quickly to transmit information in a timely fashion, and your brain, to better understand what they are telling you, predicts the words,

grammatical structure, and tone of voice they will use. In a positive, engaging conversation, you mirror those elements of speech back to them, and vice versa. A wonderful paper by Martin Pickering and Simon Garrod summarizes how this happens.

If you treat your interviewer the way you would a trusted colleague — smiling, leaning forward, talking in a friendly way with energy and enthusiasm, and making eye contact — they should begin to use the same language mechanisms they already use with their favorite people in the workplace, and begin to think of you as someone who belongs at the organization too.

### **“Can you learn?”**

You probably have the basic skill set required to do the job for which you are applying, but you’ll also need to learn as you go. (And if you’re completely prepared for the role, you probably set the bar too low.) How can you demonstrate that you’re willing and able to learn?

Chances are that there will be at least one question during the interview that you are not entirely sure how to answer. Maybe it is framed in a confusing way, so you’re not sure what’s being asked. It might use unfamiliar terms. Or you might understand the question completely but have no idea what to say. Don’t be tempted to bluff your way through an answer. Good interviewers can smell a phony response. (They probably hear a lot of them.)

Instead, admit that there is something you do not know or understand. A number of organizational behavior researchers have found that people don’t like to admit ignorance because they are concerned that it will make them look weak. But interviewers want to see that potential employees will ask questions, seek additional information, give more informed responses, and show initiative in developing themselves. And as studies have shown, you cannot ask for help unless you first let other people know what you do and do not know.

When you're stumped by a question, ask for clarification. Rephrase the question or suggest a couple of possible interpretations. If you're still not sure how to proceed after they've responded, explain that you haven't encountered this issue before.

If the question that brings you up short involves addressing a scenario from the workplace, ask the interviewer whether you should think through the question aloud so that they can see how you work on new problems, or if they would like to talk with you about how this issue is normally handled within the organization (or both). Your goal here is to show the interviewer how you approach challenges while demonstrating that you are open to learning.

Another way to show that you intend to keep expanding your skills and knowledge is to ask about continuing education opportunities. Does the company routinely offer internal classes or seminars? Does it have tuition assistance or another benefit that allows you to take classes or certificate programs? Inquiring about these resources makes it clear that you are interested in further development.

### **“Do you take initiative?”**

Interviewers want self-starters who take initiative (so much so that it's become a cliché). The best way to demonstrate your effort and commitment is to arrive completely prepared. You should have a very clear idea of what the company does, its history, its strengths, and its weaknesses. If you know people who work for the company (or have worked there in the past), ask them for inside information.

Then, prepare for the interview by practicing your answers to common interview questions. There is a big danger in what Leonid Rozenblit and Frank Keil call “the illusion of explanatory depth,” or our tendency to believe we understand the world better than we actually do. In studies, these researchers found that people had difficulty explaining devices and routines in which they thought they

had expertise. Thus, going into an interview, most of us might assume we can effectively describe key aspects of our work and how it relates to our prospective employers. However, in the moment, we can't.

That is why practice is so important. It helps you to notice gaps in your knowledge while you still have an opportunity to fill them and to recognize places where you stumble, so you can say it the right way when the time comes.

One reason people don't practice interview answers is they worry that overpreparing will make them sound rehearsed rather than spontaneous. But you will probably get several unanticipated questions, so there will be ample opportunity to show off your improvisational skills. In addition, your preparation for the interview will be noted, and that will count significantly in your favor. So, don't skimp on getting ready.

No matter how qualified you are for a position or how prepared you are for the interview, you still might not get the job. If you feel that you developed a good rapport with the interviewer, reach out and ask for feedback. When you make this connection, focus the conversation on what you can do to improve your interview performance. Don't ask the company to justify why you didn't get the job.

Ultimately, the best way to stand out in interviews is to think carefully about what prospective employers really want to know about you before you are hired. From there, you will be able to address concerns before they even have them.

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