The 16 Most Revealing Interview Questions

By Bob Norton

Helping You Break Through Barriers You Can't See

This is a Sample Chapter From a Book In the Secrets of a Serial Entrepreneur™ Series

C·LEVEL ENTERPRISES
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The 16 Most Revealing Interview Questions

These questions are in no particular order, as they should be customized to the particular position and person. You want to mix up the tougher ones with more social, calming questions so people do not feel they are getting the first degree.

Always do your questions first and theirs second, by saying up front you have some questions first and then will answer any questions they have about the position and company later. This way they cannot "sell" specifically to your needs and you can know how much to reveal, and about what position, in case they are more appropriate for something other than the one they came in for. You are in charge and should control the first interview completely. Only after they have proven that they are a viable candidate should you start revealing potentially sensitive company information. If this person is not a good candidate you can terminate the interview earlier and save everyone time. Real candidates will need and deserve this sensitive information, but you would not want this to be generally available. Good candidates will often try to control the flow of the interview and learn more early. You need to gently prod them to return to your questions first, so they cannot answer every question specifically to your need, but must answer for them more honestly about themselves.

Please walk me through a typical day at your current/previous job and tell about your boss and your relationship with them?
Tests their resume against their title and actual duties. Did they have a title above or below their actual position? Probes their level of supervision by their boss and how much autonomy they we given? Show what level they think on – daily or longer-term objectives.

Tell me about the people you hired in your last position? How long did they stay? What percentage worked out?

Tests knowledge of turn-over, training and honesty too (since no one has a 100% success rate).

What adjectives would your references use to describe you?

Keep it short and can be compared to actual reference comments to see how self-aware they are about their strengths and weaknesses?

What are the biggest strengths you will bring to this organization? (a classic but important)

Purposely open ended to all them to sell their abilities. Looking for specifics and past accomplishments

What are the things you do not like to do, or not want to work on?

A test for honesty and self-awareness. Also a less threatening way to ask about weaknesses. We all have weaknesses, are they willing to take a risk, be honest and explain where they might need help? Are there requirements of this position that require certain personality types or traits that they may, or may not have?

The "Anti-refs" Question (One of the BEST and most revealing spend some time digging in.)

Think of someone you have had problems with in your career, as we all do, who you would NEVER use as a reference. Tell me the adjectives (to keep short) they might use to describe you and why they had this perception? Then we can discuss how you dealt with the situation.

This is a great backdoor to the weaknesses questions and far more effective. It is very open-ended and often brings them to deal with a hidden event or problem. Gets potential reference points they will not volunteer and companies or environments where they may struggle. Test honesty? Tests their ability to deal with difficult situations? Tests their impressions of the resolution of the problem(s) and if the company's mission still got done in spite of personal issues. This also gives you specific things to ask references about, with implied disclosure, that force more honest answers.

Tell me what are the first five things you would do if you got this position?

Tests the level they think at, how they go about solving problems, how quickly they will dig in. How much research and investigation they will do before implementing changes to be sensitive to the organization, history and other company specific issues.

What accomplishment in your career to date are you most proud of?

What level is the accomplishment at? Is it big or small?

Where would you like to be in 3-5 years in your career? What would you like to be earning?

Shows ambition, ability to think ahead and plan and tests their plans against the companies goals for the person and position.

Tell me how you would go about _____ (installing a new system, implement a new procedure)?

This is a position specific question to test specific technical or managerial knowledge. Too many people do not ask specific deep technical questions, because they do not know them or are worried about offending. You need a few domain knowledge

questions that are deep, technical and esoteric enough to prove they understand their technical landscape.

What do you think are the most important five (3-7) things for you to be successful in this position?

Candidate will most often site what they believe to be their strengths, which may or may not agree with your corporate priorities and goals.

What are some things your current employer could do differently to be more successful?

Sour grapes or constructive criticism? What is the level they are thinking at small or large ideas?

If nothing but complaints they could be a malcontent, who took no action to improve the situation, or would have a negative impact on company morale.

Why are you interested in this job? What do you know about our company?

Genuine interest here or just another job? Shows knowledge of your company - Did they do their homework on your company what level of information did they focus on and consider important? Do they talk about a career path that makes sense within your company?

What have been the biggest failure and frustrations in your career?

Brings out attitudes about failure, risk, and self-responsibility versus just blaming others and outside factors.

Why have you decided to leave your current/previous position?

Dig deeply into this with follow-up questions on their answers? Whatever is driving this person is critical to how they see the world. What did they do to try to correct what was driving them away? Was it out of their control, or possibly projection of their own issues and weaknesses?

What risks did you take in your last position?

Studies indicate that people who take risk are generally more successful than those who do not!

Discussion on this can be very revealing. In early-stage organizations you will not want to hire people who are not too risk averse, as they may jump at the first new opportunity after learning how up and down things can be.

In my opinion these are some of the best and most revealing interviewing questions. More should be added with job or industry specific questions and this can be done with a forty-five minute interview. Use the small question for people in the same position and process so you can compare apples to apples and have some consistency.

I also always note the number of employees and/or revenue of each company on their resume, as skills are often company size specific. Someone in a small company inevitably has more scope and responsibility for a task than at a big company, where the duties are more likely divided up between several specialists. Claim of success need to be understood in terms of actual contribution. ("Every success has many mothers/fathers, but failure is an orphan".)

Always understand their salary requirements and commute distance if they are a strong candidate, as these can vary enormously by candidate and be major factors visa vie your

ability to close the deal. Remember salary is more often a function of ego and background than value or effectiveness. A high salary request does not make a better candidate, though the best candidates know their value in the marketplace.

No decision has more impact than a hiring decision, as they will make many, many decision for you and the organization from that point forward. It has been estimated that the cost of a bad hiring decision can be as high as three times the salary in senior positions. So take your time and do it right never compromise due to time constraints, but get a temporary solution until you have the best candidate available.

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These books are all written by Bob Norton, a serial entrepreneur for over 25 years and a CEO for more than 15 years. Mr. Norton is one of the leading authorities in the world on entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship and growing businesses rapidly. He has participated in eight startup companies, grown two to over $100 million in sales and several have dominated their respective markets. He has also worked for two multi-billion dollar corporations running product development efforts. His experience goes across all size companies, and many types of businesses in various industries. During his career Mr. Norton has helped created over $1 billion in new shareholder value just while at those companies. Mr. Norton provides expertise on growing small and medium size companies more rapidly using eleven different proprietary tools and methodologies for business design, development and optimization, which he has developed over the last fifteen years. Many ideas are also contributed from over 1,000 business books in his personal library. He also runs the premier CEO and Entrepreneur Boot Camp in the U.S. today, which is design to cut years off the learning curve of CEOs and entrepreneurs and turn them into world-class CEOs. This exclusive event teaches practical business design and optimization systems in an intensive 3-day training program for any CEO or entrepreneur.

Mr. Norton has appeared on CNBC, Good Morning America and many other regional and national media like Inc. magazine. He provides advice to entrepreneurs and CEOs through consulting, speaking, writing and seminars. He frequently speaks at corporations, associations, and universities on business topics.

These books are targeted at particular problems and stages of development where early-stage ventures commonly encounter critical issues while moving from raw startup with an idea to becoming an established company. They are guaranteed to improve any

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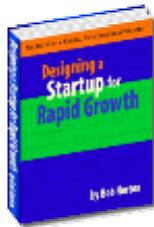
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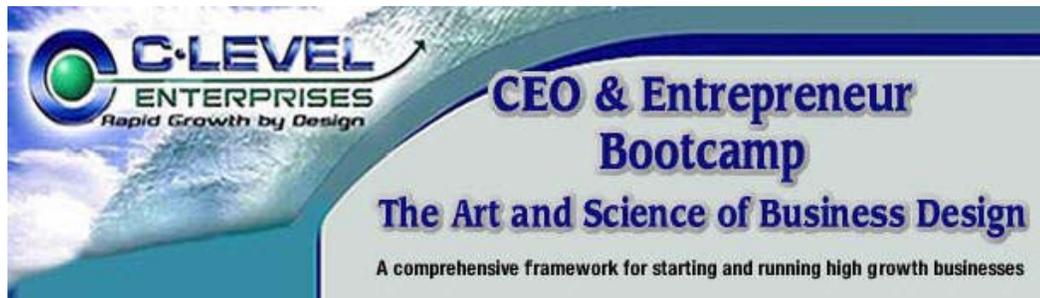
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