

## Handling the Interview Stumper: What's Your Biggest Weakness?

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For most people, just talking about their strengths in an interview can be pretty challenging.

But talking about your weaknesses in a way that doesn't sink your hiring prospects can feel even *more* challenging. Most of us can come up with plenty of weaknesses, but which one is okay to mention in an interview situation that won't immediately doom you to the "rejects" pile?

One way to approach your response is to consider what an interviewer is trying to learn from the weaknesses question. Essentially, the goal is to not to make you feel unbelievable awkward, but rather to understand how well you know yourself (your self-awareness skills). Then, they'll want to know how you would plan to address that weakness, or what steps you've taken to start working on it.

So what should you say (or not)?

### **First, avoid the obvious clichés**

Things like "I'm a perfectionist," "I tend to work too hard," and "I have very high performance standards and find it difficult when others don't have those same standards" immediately peg you as someone who is either 1) an insufferable jerk or 2) an applicant trying to say whatever he/she thinks the interviewer wants to hear.

Instead, it's important that you be honest in your answer and that the weakness you identify be of the "real world" type. So how do you combine revealing a real weakness within a framework that allows you to still convince your interviewer that your weakness isn't a deal-killer?

### **Second, identify the weakness *and* your solution**

Everyone (including your interviewer) has professional weaknesses; those who are self-aware are able to recognize those weaknesses and then develop ways to work on them.

So, for example, you might say that one of your weaknesses is an occasional tendency to become overwhelmed when working on a task with numerous complex activities. Then you could provide an example of how this weakness played out in the past and the negative results you recognized.

The next part of the conversation would entail you explaining how, when you realized this issue, you undertook several actions to improve your performance under similar circumstances. This might have been taking project management training, learning advanced organizing skills, or working with a mentor who helped you improve your approach to managing complex projects.

### **Third, attitude is everything**

It's okay to indicate that you're still working on your improvement goals and may have a ways to go. But be clear that you view improving the weakness you've mentioned as your personal responsibility, rather than simply a personal quirk that you don't see any need to address. As mega-entrepreneur Richard Branson has said, "Do not be embarrassed by your failures, learn from them and try again." Make sure your interviewers know that you may not be perfect, but you're committed to continually learning, improving, and growing as a professional.

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