

10 Clever Questions You Should Ask Every Job Candidate

By Russell Riendeau, PhD

Traditional interview questions oriented around performance, duties and responsibility are important, but the answers often obscure a person's commitment or [emotional intelligence](#) required for the job. By asking new questions, you'll be amazed at what you can find out. The findings can help you make better hiring decisions, lower turnover and significantly reduce your hiring costs.

Here are behavioral-based, legal-friendly questions designed to flush out deeper and more complex behaviors and [thinking patterns](#) of a candidate for hire.

What would really surprise me about you? What else?

This question allows candidates to reveal a different side of themselves. Look for confidence, willingness and candor. The second question ("What else?") gives the candidate another chance to reveal more if they gave a conservative first response.

What's your real motivation to change jobs? No, the real reason?

Look for motives other than money — money is rarely the real reason. See if the candidate places blame, is "seeking asylum" elsewhere, or can't handle the pressure, the boss or the pace. These are signs of immaturity, poor-decision making skills or lack of true selling ability. Ask the question to see if you're hearing the whole story.

What's your philosophy on goal setting?

The more detailed answer you get, the more you'll see if the candidate values setting and achieving goals. Ask for examples of goals they have set and how they measured them. A blend of intrinsic and extrinsic goals will show emotional balance and another sign of maturity in prioritizing ability.

What reading material would I find on your coffee table, nightstand or kitchen table

The answer to this question will show intellect, curiosity, variety of interests, breath of life experience, dedication to learning, or lack of these traits. The candidate's response will give insights as to how well he or she follows your industry and field of work.

Tell me a story about when you were placed in an ethical dilemma and what happened?

This question reveals morals, ethics, integrity and problem-solving skills. If the candidate places blame on others, it may indicate tendencies towards poor judgment, unrealistic attitudes, non-genuine or secretive personality.

How did you earn money while in college?

This question offers a good indicator of the candidate's entrepreneurial skills. If they ran a formal or informal business in college, they are most likely resourceful, driven, have strong social skills and street smarts. These candidates tend to be good at sales, marketing, customer service or other roles that require proactive behaviors.

Draw me a pie chart showing how you spend an eight-hour day.

Watch for organization, clear communications and accurate calculations. Their response shows you their presentation and communication skills. Are those skills in line with what you need?

What's your favorite success story and failure story?

A person willing to share failures tends to be self-confident, mature and has a sense of true self and place in the world. In success stories, look for credit given to team effort and personal drive in relation to goal setting. Bragging of solo efforts may suggest arrogance, inflated sense of self, lack of self-confidence or lack of interest in being a team player.

Do you want to be a millionaire? Why? What are you doing to prepare for it?

Look for an overall balanced approach to wealth and lifestyle choice and for consistency relative to other questions around goal setting. Does the candidate have a valid, compelling motive for a yes or no to wealth accumulation?

Have you ever created a 30, 60, 90-day strategic plan?

If the candidate has created strategic plans, how many months were they required to plan out into the future? Is this commensurate with the requirements of position you're offering? Ask about a specific plan and watch for ability to articulate and define time frames and goals. Many people can speak about planning, so ask candidate to illustrate the plan using visual aids, graphs, charts, etc.

Russ Riendeau is senior partner with [New Frontier Search Company](#) an executive search firm.

Conversation with Russ Riendeau: “How to get the Job you want, not the job that’s left”

1. Describe the job that you want
 - a. Have a clear vision and description of what you want
 - b. Be able to discern from a listing if it is a fit
2. Give them a compelling argument
 - a. Show what you have done
 - b. Show what know
 - c. Show who you are
 - d. Show why you make the most sense
3. Show that marketing is in your life
 - a. Interests on LinkedIn
 - b. Join industry or field groups
 - c. Be ready with interesting concepts, news, and ideas

How to stand out when searching for jobs:

- Ask a research Librarian for lists of companies
- Reach out to Marketing managers, not HR
- Send email, make phone calls, even snail mail
- Organizations with professional members
 - Columbus chamber of Commerce
 - Listed members expect to be contacted

What to bring to an Interview:

- Briefcase with resume and business cards and all that
- Successful projects and work
- Prepared case studies or white papers
- Examples of work from past experiences
 - screenshots of webpages, reports
- List of interesting resources
 - Newspaper articles, links to TED talks, list of reading
- Plastic closures, example from growing up with business people

How to improve business acumen:

- Use resources for development
 - Google Analytics Certificate, SEO resources
- Read business related publications
 - Wall Street Journal
- Follow interesting companies, groups or people
 - American Marketing Association

Business book suggestions:

- The persuasion code

- Spin selling
 - The Outliers
 - Influence: psychology of persuasion
 - Essentialism
 - Freakenomics
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Questions for Career Next Moves

By Russell Riendeau, PhD

Here's a list of questions to get you started on this fun journey. The questions below are intense, revealing, confusing (for anybody that is willing to dig deeper into one's self) and will allow you to know more about yourself than most people are ever willing to accept or commit to learning. The key is to be honest with yourself when answering them—in writing. Allow yourself to be vulnerable to the accepting what you don't know; admitting what areas you need more guidance or may have to pay to get the knowledge you need to be successful. You don't have to show these answers to anybody, including me, if you don't want to. It is for your personal purposes, so be candid with what you allow yourself to reveal and accept. I'm not judging any thought, impression or decision you have, but simply trying to ask the appropriate question so you can be sure you approach this with the appropriate insights, energy and reality.

After you'd gone thru this list of questions and are still talking to me, we can review more ideas and I'll be happy to then, give you more ideas on how to market/promote/sell/standout in your chosen profession and business:

What exactly am I looking for in my job/daily life that I don't have right now?

How would I know my first year was a success?

What do I want my day to look like, feel like, sound like, smell like, taste like?

What do I want others to walk away feeling like after working with me?

In a perfect world what would my day look like?

Am I willing to tell the world "This is what I am doing right now for a career and to make a living!"

Does my personality, culture, family, community accept the services I want to deliver?

What areas will be the most difficult to overcome?

What will I have to do to earn \$58,000 personal income in the 13 months after leaving FFC?

What will the revenue consist of?

Have I written a outline/summary/mission statement/business plan/research analysis of my new business idea? If the answer is No, why have I not yet committed to paper or a word document, my ideas/intentions/inspirations/thoughts, etc.? What is it that has not compelled me to start writing ideas down on paper?

Am I ready? Confused? Unsure as to what I want my business to look like/sound like/feel like? (If yes, don't be concerned, we're all in the same situation starting a business.)

What research have I done to-date to learn more about this idea? Any books purchased? Any youtube videos watched, websites, workshops, magazines, lunches with people in the profession, etc.? Again, if not, why not?

Why am I really, no really, looking at going into my own business?

What will be the real value of being my own boss?

What are my primary and secondary skills and traits that will help me be successful sooner?

What areas of my life do I operate at the genius level?

What is my weakest area of knowledge that needs help to make a successful launch of this business?

What areas of business, sales, marketing, networking, financials, insurance, etc. I need to study to catch up to my competition and be competent?

What are the barriers to entry in my business I want to start?

Why are people successful or not so successful? What common traits/action steps do I see?

What emotional elements do I need to experience for me to be happy and satisfied at the end of the day?

How many hours and what hours do I want to work?

What will I do with the time I'm not working in my business?

What amount of time will I be willing to invest on my business?

What revenue number do I want to achieve in the next 13-month?

What is the average dollar sale for my program/presentation/training/writings, etc.?

How will I charge? Cash, credit, PayPal, deposit, monthly retainer?

What is my guarantee?

Who do I know personally that can help/coach/lead me to overcome missing knowledge to be successful?

Are there others doing what I want to do that will help me? Support me? Or am I on my own?

How will I demonstrate my value to the marketplace and the client when asked the ROI?

Do I have data, facts, testimonials, pictures, case studies, videos to prove my ability/value/reputation?

How much money have I put in the bank to fund the start-up of this business? What will I be willing to invest to make it successful?

Questions ideas for a conversation:

What is your 7-day plan to secure work?

What is your biggest frustration right at this moment?

What are you fearful of today?

How do explain to others why you dropped out of college?

What confuses you about the workplace today?

What are you best at doing? Hands, head, feet, eyes?

Can you fix stuff, build stuff?

How accountable are you on a scale of 1-10?

How do I know I can count on you if I hire you?

If you needed to make \$30 bucks by the end of the day to buy food/gas, what would you do to earn/find the money?

Would you hire yourself if you walked in that door? Why/why not?

What are your best friends doing for money?

Walk me thru your day yesterday?

How proactive do you think you are on a 1-10 scale?

Car fixed? Money for gas? Clothes to wear?

What are you reading/studying to find a job/career/passion?

What really thrills you? Gives you goose bumps when you engage or watch something?

What jobs do you know of that you envy?

How serious about getting into the military on a scale of 1-10?

What are you doing to prepare?

What are your other options?

Where is your action items list and goals?

Do you set goals in writing? Why or why not?

Do you use a daily planner or on screen calendar?

What's in your wallet?

How many calls/emails did you make hunting for a job?

How did you decide who to call?

What friends/family/referrals have you called to get interviews?

Show me your committed to being successful?

The Tough 21: Would Vegas Bet On You To Win, Place or No?

By Russ Riendeau, PhD

Questions Test Real Resolve

Picture yourself at a poolside party, late evening. The warm breeze is satisfying as you're mingling with others on the deck—you wine glass held confidently. You snack on finger foods, admiring the luxuries of the venue, when approached by a wealthy business owner.

Her conversation shifts quickly from the weather to the default conversation starter: What you do for living? Uh-oh.

What would you say? How would you describe your current situation, your future plans? What if she pressed you for examples of your strategy if you began to describe whatever plan you shared? More importantly, what odds would Vegas give that you would leave a positive impression the day after?

Think of it another way: Every conversation you have is an invitation to influence your future. You can either demonstrate your self-awareness by articulating a well thought out, mature plan or you can provide compelling evidence you're not quite sure what your next step will be tomorrow morning. Every impression you leave on someone affects the outcome of the next conversation, the next impression, the next.... The language you use, the message you exact or imply, the physical appearance you present is immediately entered as evidence in the other person's mind. You have set in motion your future options by the impression you just left. And as stinging of an analogy this may appear, we must take it to heart, given the attention span and distractions we all face. When you see behavior, I believe it. When you see my behavior, you will believe it, too.

The Tough 21

So, how do you course correct if you think Vegas will give you terrible odds of succeeding in your quest to become, achieve whatever your worthy goal looks like?

The answer? The Tough 21—The most critical, hard-lined, self-awareness testing, resiliency-minded questions you will need answers for, if you are serious about pursuing success of any kind. Want to raise your odds of succeeding in life? Be sure your answers are strong foolproof.

What do I mean by "success"? Success could mean: finding a new job, pursuing an entirely new career, starting/buying a business, helping your recent college graduate find their path, preparing for a major lifestyle change, a teacher looking to enlighten students, preparing for a big business proposal, trying to secure a promotion, overcoming an addiction or illness, investing in a new venture, etc. If you're a hiring manager, these questions can easily be injected to an interview to flush out thinkers from sinkers; the best from the rest and sort out those with strategy from those expounding philosophy.

In these questions, you will be forced to come face2face with your real self—that tough-minded, stubborn, lazy, smart, clever, sneaky, defiant, lovable, strategic, tactical, analytical, anal, obsessive, risk-adverse, thrill-seeker, energizer, focused, boring, fearful, naïve, independent, dependent, introvert, extrovert, intrinsic, extrinsic, spiritual, calculated, confused self that lies in all of us, as we are forced to act on our desires or defend our inactions. If you are

able to respond to each of these questions—after identifying specifically--what it is you are in pursuit of, you will increase your odds of success by 1000 times. You will also, as a result of answering the questions, know more about your inner-self than the majority of people ever delve into.

This exercise is difficult. It's revealing. It's emotional. It's exhausting. It's inevitable. It's necessary. And it will be the fastest way to earn more money and prove to any person you interview with, any investor you call, any boss you work for, that you study your craft very carefully. The impression you will leave? Lasting.

Conversely, if you decide these questions and suggested action steps are too vague, not relevant to your life goals or your personal situation, then you have either reached a level of success that you deserve or you decided to wing it in your life goals or you are too fearful your plan will not hold up to the scrutiny of logical consequences. Either way, you have learned something valuable about yourself. And others, too, have learned more about you.

The Tough 21 are engineered and intended to lead to you to secure the right tools and strategy for personal achievement. Respect the power in what your answers will reveal.

1. Do you have a written goal of what success will look like 9 months go-time?
2. Do you have a written plan, with check points, course corrections and timelines?
3. Would you be embarrassed to share your plan with someone you respect?
4. Have you read at least 20 related articles, 2 books on the history of this topic, read the top 3 newsletters, been on the top 2 related Associations' websites, had at least 5 conversations with people involved in this arena you are pursuing?
5. Can you describe the strengths and weaknesses of your top 3 competitors or alternatives what you are going to offer?
6. How much of your money have you invested in research to prepare and pursue this venture?
7. Will you be surprised in 6 months if you are not actively involved with this new venture you're pursuing? (If you said "No, I won't be surprised," then your goal is already compromised to fail. You just admitted to yourself you are not fully committed.) Game over.
8. Is this pursuit a worthy goal that allows all around you to benefit without sacrifice?
9. How many man hours of research did you really invest in this decision?
10. What are the compelling primary and secondary motivators/incentives for you to proceed with this idea?
11. Would your research analysis and business plan hold up to deliberation of a skeptical jury?
12. Do you have an advisory board to keep you on target?

13. If no board or others to hold you accountable, who will tell you the truth when you go off course?
14. Would you be proud to show your business plan to your older sister?
15. Would your banker laugh at your plan?
16. Do you have key initiatives to reward progress along the way?
17. Will your spouse or significant other sleep better, after reading your written plan?
18. Did you open a bank account and deposit funds to build reserves for marketing and expenses?
19. Did you swat away the hard work of a SWOT analysis first?
20. Do you believe you have the self-awareness to see your limitations and application skills for this pursuit? Can you prove it to others?
21. Could you show me or anyone your research within 10 minutes?