30 Behavioral Interview Questions

to Identify High-Potential Candidates

Table of contents

Why behavioral interview questions matter

Great businesses are built on people. People who not only have the right skills and experience, but who have the potential to do great things in the role, the team and in the company.

However, screening candidates for potential is the toughest part of an interview. Oftentimes you assess someone's potential by looking at their soft skills and unique perspectives. Yet in a 30 minute conversation, it's really difficult to fully understand the person behind the profile.

The good news is that behavioral interview questions are a proven way to reveal a person's potential, specifically their ability to adapt, grow, collaborate, prioritize, lead, and strengthen company culture. By looking at their past behavior as well as their skills and experience, you'll instinctively know if they have all the qualities you need in your next hire.

To help you be more efficient and effective, we surveyed nearly 1,300 hiring managers for their top behavioral interview questions. Scroll through for the best questions to ask, and tips to glean the answers you need.
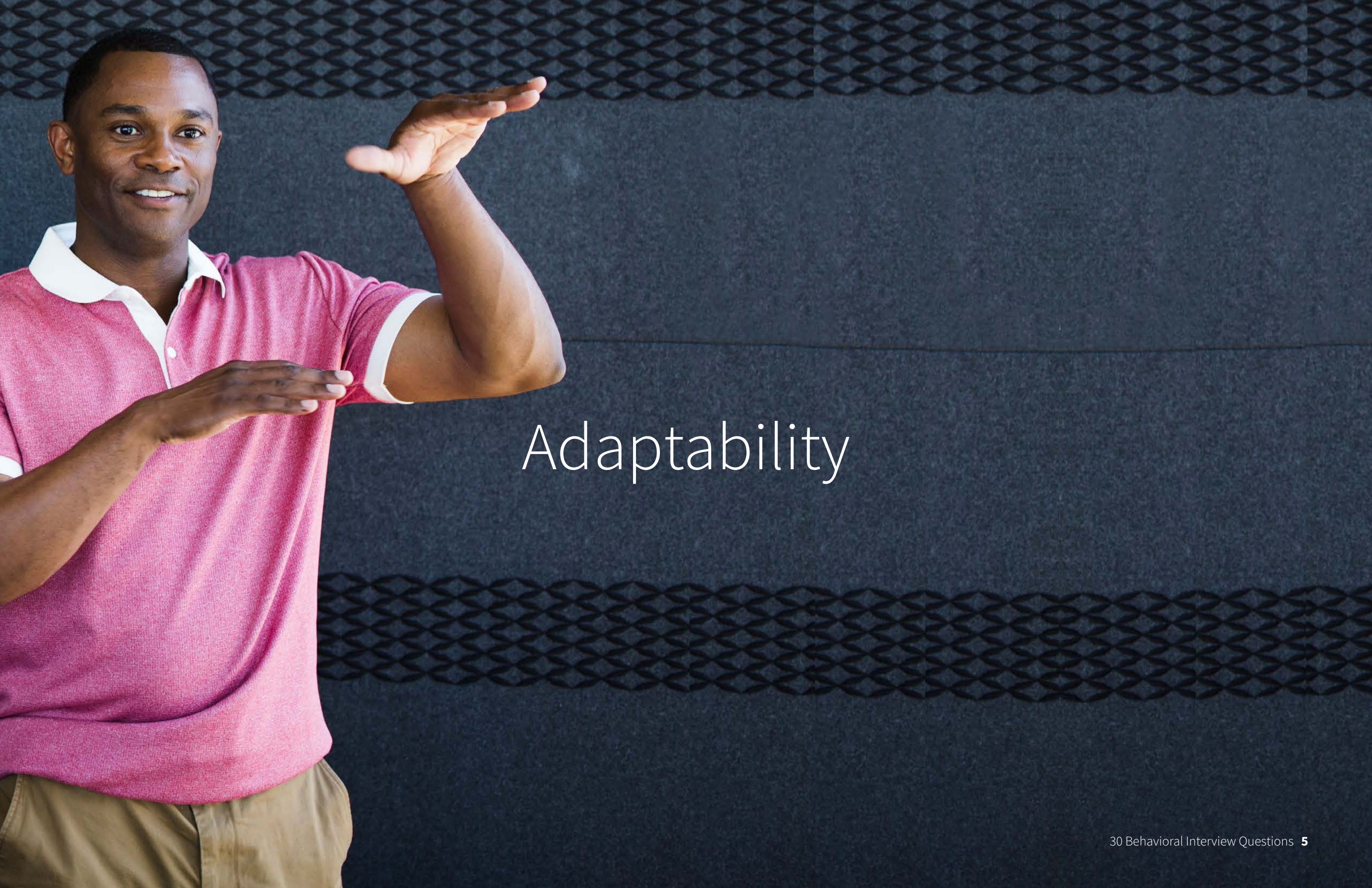
6 soft skills that reflect potential

Potential can be interpreted many ways, but there are common soft skills and characteristics found among successful hires and high-potential people. Here are the most important soft skills hiring managers look for during interviews (ranked in order of importance):

1 Adaptability

2 Culture add

3 Collaboration

4 Leadership

5 Growth potential

6 Prioritization

Adaptability

How to screen for adaptability

69%

of hiring managers say adaptability is the most important soft skill they screen for. It makes sense - to stay competitive today, your company needs to be able to adapt to a changing economy and business needs. That means you need employees who can adapt as well, and high-potential people often have this ability.

Here are some of the most popular questions to ask:

1   Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something you had never done before. How did you react? What did you learn?

2   Describe a situation in which you embraced a new system, process, technology, or idea at work that was a major departure from the old way of doing things.

3   Recall a time when you were assigned a task outside of your job description. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?

4   Tell me about the biggest change that you have had to deal with. How did you adapt to that change?

5   Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your objectives.

Culture add

How to screen for culture add

When we talk about culture fit, we don't mean falling into a "hire like me" mentality. If all of your employees act and think the same, your company won't thrive.

Instead, look for candidates who share the same beliefs and values as your organization, but also bring diversity of thought and experience that will drive your company forward. We call this a "culture add". Plus, research shows that employees who are a good culture fit are more likely to stay with your company and will have greater performance and job satisfaction.

Here are some of the most popular questions to ask:

1   What are the three things that are most important to you in a job?

2   Tell me about a time in the last week when you've been satisfied, energized, and productive at work. What were you doing?

3   What's the most interesting thing about you that's not on your resume?

4   What would make you chose our company over others?

5   What's the biggest misconception your coworkers have about you and why do they think that?

Collaboration

How to screen for collaboration

Done right, collaboration keeps the business moving at a fast pace. Done wrong, employees find it extremely distracting. When you look at an organization's top collaborative contributors, and look at employees who are recognized as top performers, there is about a

50%*

overlap. So hiring people who can collaborate effectively and work well with others is essential to success.

Here are some of the most popular questions to ask:

1 Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. How did you handle interactions with that person?

2 Tell me about a time when you were communicating with someone and they did not understand you. What did you do?

3 Tell me about one of your favorite experiences working with a team and your contribution.

4 Describe the best partner or supervisor with whom you've worked. What part of their managing style appealed to you?

5 Can you share an experience where a project dramatically shifted directions at the last minute? What did you do?

Leadership

How to screen for leadership

Research shows that organizations with high quality leaders are

13x

more likely to outperform their competition.* During the interview, assess if the candidate can inspire, motivate, and unleash potential in others.

Here are some of the most popular questions to ask:

1 Tell me about the last time something significant didn't go according to plan at work. What was your role? What was the outcome?

2 Describe a situation where you needed to persuade someone to see things your way. What steps did you take? What were the results?

3 Give me an example of a time when you felt you led by example. What did you do and how did others react?

4 Tell me about the toughest decision you had to make in the last six months.

5 Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your coworkers or group? How did you do it? What were the results?

Growth potential

How to screen for growth potential

Today's fast-paced work environments require employees who can do the job now, and have the potential to grow into new roles or leadership positions at your company in the future. After all, if an employee leaves, it costs your company

1.5x

that employee's salary to replace her.* That means that hiring people who have the potential to grow within your company not only saves you the pain of replacing them, but also saves you money.

You can predict if a candidate has what it takes by screening for goal setting and self-motivation. Here are some of the most popular questions to ask:

1   Recall a time when your manager was unavailable when a problem arose. How did you handle the situation? With whom did you consult?

2   Describe a time when you volunteered to expand your knowledge at work, as opposed to being directed to do so.

3   What would motivate you to make a move from your current role?

4   When was the last occasion you asked for direct feedback from a superior? Why?

5   What's the biggest career goal you've ever achieved?

* Why More Employees Are Considering Leaving Their Companies

Prioritization

How to screen for prioritization

When juggling multiple tasks, we have to be able to decide which ones need to be tackled immediately, and which ones can wait. Hiring someone who can't get this right means that key due dates and project timelines can fall through the cracks, ultimately hurting your business. People who can manage their time and prioritize effectively will help your business thrive.

Here are some of the most popular questions to ask:

1   Tell me about a time when you had to juggle several projects at the same time. How did you organize your time? What was the result?

2   Tell me about a project that you planned. How did you organize and schedule the tasks?

3   Describe a time when you felt stressed or overwhelmed. How did you handle it?

4   Give an example of a time when you delegated an important task successfully.

5   How do you determine what amount of time is reasonable for a task?

Creative Questions

Leaders share their most creative questions

To keep things interesting, we collected unconventional questions that top business and talent leaders like to ask. Sprinkle in one of these during your interview. The answer can reveal a lot about the candidate's personality and the way they think.

1
"Why shouldn't I hire you?"

Adam Grant

Wharton professor and best-selling author

2
"How would your manager describe you? Now tell me, how would your best friend describe you?"

Krista Williams

Talent Acquisition Manager at Swarovski

3
"It's 12 p.m. one year from now. What are you doing?"

Angela Bortolussi

Partner at Social Recruiting

4
"Is better to submit a project that's perfect and late, or one that's good and on time?"

Obed Louissant

VP of HR at IBM

5
"On a scale of 1 to 10, how weird are you?"

Tony Hsieh

CEO at Zappos

Get the answers you need

While these interview questions help you identify high-potential candidates and select the best, asking the right questions doesn't guarantee great answers. Push candidates to give you better information by doing the following:

1

Use the S.T.A.R. system: As the candidate answers each question, make sure they describe the Situation, Task, Action, and Result.

2

Don't accept situational responses: When you ask for specific examples, make sure candidates don't give you situational (hypothetical) information.

3

Give them time: Often good answers come after a moment of reflection, so don't rush candidates or write them off if they don't answer quickly.

4

Follow up: Hone in on a specific piece of missing information in their response to dig deeper into the situation.

Be prepared for the reverse interview

After putting candidates in the hot seat, they're ready to turn the tables on you. Give them the info they're hungry for: 70% of candidate say they want more details into the role & responsibilities, followed by how they fit within the team, and information about the company mission and vision*.

Be prepared to answer the following questions:

1

What's the biggest opportunity for this role? What's the most challenging element about this role?

2

What does success look like in this position?

3

If you could describe your team in 3 words, what would they be and why?

4

What type of person works well with this team?

5

How did the company determine its mission?

6

Why do people say _____ about your company?

Can't get enough?

If you're still hungry for interview questions, there's so much more on the LinkedIn Talent Blog, which covers everything you need to know to be great at your job. Scroll through them here, or check out these popular interviewing articles:

3 Interview Questions to Ask Every Marketing Job Candidate

9 Unexpected Interview Questions That Reveal a Lot About Candidates

When Warren Buffett Hires, He Looks For These 3 Key Traits

Recruiters Nominate Their Favorite Phone Interview Questions

What Recruiters Get Wrong When It Comes to Interviews

Methodology

In May 2016, LinkedIn surveyed 1,297 Hiring Managers in the US, Canada, UK, Netherlands, Australia and India. Hiring Managers are defined as those who currently manage people and either recently hired, are currently trying to hire or are planning to hire new people for their team (based on survey responses). Members were selected at random to take our survey and are representative of the LinkedIn sample. The LinkedIn sample (and our analysis) is influenced by how members choose to use the site, which can vary based on professional, social, and regional culture, as well as overall site availability and accessibility. These variances were not accounted for in the analysis.

About the authors

Lydia Abbot

Blog Editor & Associate Content Marketing Manager

Maria Ignatova

Global Content Marketing Lead, Thought Leadership and Insights

Allison Schnidman

Senior Manager, Research Operations

About LinkedIn Talent Solutions

LinkedIn Talent Solutions offers a full range of recruiting solutions to help organizations of all sizes find, attract, and engage the best talent. Founded in 2003, LinkedIn connects the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. With over 500 million members worldwide, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network.

Visit our website

Read the blog

Follow us on LinkedIn

Like us on Facebook

Access presentations on SlideShare

Follow us on Twitter