

Top Executive Recruiters Agree There Are Only Three True Job Interview Questions



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The only three true job interview questions are:

1. Can you do the job?
2. Will you love the job?
3. Can we tolerate working with you?

That's it. Those three. Think back, every question you've ever posed to others or had asked of you in a job interview is a subset of a deeper in-depth follow-up to one of these three key questions. Each question potentially may be asked using different words, but every question, however it is phrased, is just a variation on one of these topics: Strengths, Motivation, and Fit.



Can You Do the Job? – Strengths

Executive Search firm Heidrick & Struggles CEO, Kevin Kelly explained to me that it's not just about the technical skills, but also about leadership and interpersonal strengths. Technical skills help you climb the ladder. As you get there, managing up, down and across become more important.

You can't tell by looking at a piece of paper what some of the strengths and weaknesses really are...We ask for specific examples of not only what's been successful but what they've done that hasn't gone well or a task they they've, quite frankly, failed at and how they learned from that experience and what they'd do different in a new scenario.

Not only is it important to look at the technical skill set they have...but also the strengths on what I call the EQ side of the equation in terms of getting along and dealing or interacting with people.

Will You Love the Job? -Motivation

Cornerstone International Group CEO, Bill Guy emphasizes the changing nature of motivation,

...younger employees do not wish to get paid merely for working hard—just the reverse: they will work hard because they enjoy their environment and the challenges associated with their work... Executives who embrace this new management style are attracting and retaining better employees.

Can We Tolerate Working With You? – Fit

Continuing on with our conversation, Heidrick’s Kelly went on to explain the importance of cultural fit:

A lot of it is cultural fit and whether they are going to fit well into the organization... The perception is that when (senior leaders) come into the firm, a totally new environment, they know everything. And they could do little things such as send emails in a voicemail culture that tend to negatively snowball over time. Feedback or onboarding is critical. If you don’t get that feedback, you will get turnover later on.

He made the same point earlier in an interview with [Smart Business](#), referencing Heidrick’s internal study of 20,000 searches.

40 percent of senior executives leave organizations or are fired or pushed out within 18 months. It’s not because they’re dumb; it’s because a lot of times culturally they may not fit in with the organization or it’s not clearly articulated to them as they joined.

Preparing for Interviews

If you’re the one doing the interviewing, get clear on what strengths, motivational and fit insights you’re looking for before you go into your interviews.

If you’re the one being interviewed, prepare by thinking through examples that illustrate your **strengths**, what **motivates** you about the organization and role you’re interviewing for, and the **fit** between your own preferences and the organization’s **Behaviors, Relationships, Attitudes, Values, and Environment (BRAVE)**. But remember that interviews are exercises in solution selling. They are not about you.

Think of the interview process as a chance for you to show your ability to solve the organization and interviewer’s problem. That’s why you need to highlight strengths in the areas most important to the interviewers, talk about how you would be motivated by the role’s challenges, and discuss why you would be a BRAVE fit with the organization’s culture.

This is a big part of step 1 of *The New Leader’s Playbook*: Position Yourself for Success

There are several components of this including positioning yourself for a leadership role, selling before you buy, mapping and avoiding the most common land mines, uncovering hidden risks in the organization, role, and fit, and choosing the right approach for your transition type.