

20 Interview Questions to Determine Culture Fit



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A few words of guidance

Any time you bring someone new onto your team your company's culture shifts a little bit. You can think of your team as a big pot of soup. If you add carrots, celery, and salt the ingredients will complement each other and improve your company's culture. But adding ice cream risks ruining a good thing.

Knowing whether or not a candidate will improve your company culture, or detract from it, takes exploration during the interview and vetting process.

The following questions are designed to help you determine the culture fit of the candidate; however, not all of these will apply to your open position. Use your judgment in selecting the questions that are best suited or that speak to you. For example, if your role is one with little variety and multi-tasking, then question #4 may not be a good choice to ask. We recommend you choose no more than 5 of these questions for your interview. For compliance purposes, you must ask the same questions of all candidates for the specific role for which you are recruiting.

A few tips:

- Ask these questions with an open mind and curiosity.
- Dig deeper by asking the candidate to tell you more, or how they felt about something they share with you. Questions like, "Tell me more about that", "Wow, how did that make you feel?", or "What did you do next?" are good starters. The key is to be genuine and curious.
- Lastly, the goal is to provide a safe place for candidates to open up and share. This can be a challenge in interviews, as they are inherently full of judgement. So, share yourself as well, have the interview be a two-way conversation, tell stories and relate when it is appropriate.

We hope you find these to be revealing and helpful in learning more about the candidate before you. Happy interviewing!!

1. What is the most exciting project/program you've worked on? or What is something that you are most proud of in your current or prior role? What was your role and what impact did you have?

Insight: With this question we can understand how proactive the candidate was in a prior position. We look for them to take the initiative, and how they solved the issue at hand. It also gives us insight into what they enjoyed or did not enjoy about the project...listen to how they talk about it. Did they get fulfillment, or grow?

2. Give me an example of an important job-related goal you have set for yourself in the past. What did you do to reach this goal? Were you successful? What would you do differently next time?

Insight: Here we are listening for examples showing the candidate pushes forward and always tries to improve and grow towards the next thing. Depending on the role, this doesn't always mean a promotion. It can even be goals they reached to be more efficient in their current role. If the role was one that did not allow for goals like this, ask about a personal goal.

3. What has been the most valuable lesson of your professional career?

Insight: It's not always easy to hear criticism, but a strong candidate will appreciate the feedback, and apply it to improve their skills. So listen for growth, learning, and expansion of skills and strengths in their answers.

4. Can you tell me how you manage competing priorities? How do you change priorities quickly?

Insight: When priorities change rapidly, we want to hear how they handled these changes. Encourage them to describe the steps they take to change priorities, how they handle this situation, and how they manage to stay on track with competing priorities.

5. How would you describe your work style?

Insight: This is a good question for those roles where perhaps there isn't a lot of change in day-to-day tasks. But the candidate's answer will say a lot about how they see tasks, and what they do to accomplish them successfully.

6. What have you done in the past to contribute to a teamwork environment? Give specific examples. Or...Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult colleague. What did you do to build the relationship?

Insight: Here we are trying to determine if this candidate is a team player who is willing to push through uncomfortable conversations to ensure a positive contribution to the team. We also try to figure out what kind of impact they would have on our team.

7. Have you ever felt vulnerable at work, worried or scared about speaking up about something? (wait for the answer) Tell me more about that. What did you do?

Insight: This open-ended question gives the candidate a chance to show us how they handle being uncomfortable - do they stay quiet, do they challenge, do they find respectful ways to speak up and be heard, etc. Depending on your company culture, you can evaluate if this person will fit in with the dynamics around speaking up, vulnerability, and being brave. In addition, if all else is great about this candidate, but it is clear they need coaching with this, you can intentionally create a space for growth. Remember most of us have not worked for

employers where it is safe to speak up, so sometimes all it takes is a little nudge and encouragement.

8. What specifically drew you to apply to our open position?

Insight: Asking a candidate this question gets them to really insert themselves into the team and envision working with the company. It also shows how much research they have done about the company. Are they excited about the same aspects of the company as you? Are they specifically drawn to work for your company, or are they just looking for another job?

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

Insight: Culture fit! This is so important when finding the next piece to your team's puzzle. If the candidate doesn't fit in with the culture at the company, they're not going to be happy and performance will be low. With this question pay attention to who they really are and try to envision them on the team.

10. Do you know what Core Values are? (if yes, then move on to the next question, if not, use the explanation below, it often helps them identify their core values quite quickly). What would you say are your top three core values?

Explanation: Core Values are the things we build our life around, they tend to shape our behavior and decisions. A few clues could be times when you have been very upset, left a job or a relationship, or stood up for something you believe in. When we leave a job or relationship, it is because a core value was violated. Same for when we get irate or become an activist. Does that help you know what your core values might be? (Help with nouns if they need it, there are great lists online by googling "Core Values List", using a list can be helpful as well. It is not easy to think of words under pressure. This is one area where we spend time with our candidates, we are patient and coach them through to the answers that feel most authentic to them.

Insight: The result of this is to see if their values align, match, or compete with the core values of your company. It can reveal a lot about what motivates them into action, guides their decisions and behavior, and what you can do to provide meaning for them in the new role.

11. What are three adjectives you would use to describe your work style?

Insight: This question can give insight into executive functioning skills. It is also very telling if someone is self-reflective enough to be able to know the answer. Do they answer in confidence or do they struggle? Neither of these are good or bad, per se, but help to reveal if they lean toward a growth mindset or know themselves well. Only you know if this is important for this role and your company.

12. What superpower will you bring to our company? Or what is your Zone of Genius and how will you apply it to this role and our company?

Insight: We all have some special or unique strength to offer a team. This question draws out the candidate and tells us what they believe is their special genius. Since this question is a little different than a typical interview question, it also tells you the candidate's level of confidence and how quickly they can think on their feet.

13. What roles do kindness, empathy, and humor play at work?

Insight: Here you can see how humanity plays into their work. If you would describe your work environment as a family, then you would want to hear the candidate's answer lean more towards showing empathy or kindness in the workplace. If your company focuses on production and getting the job done well, then perhaps looking for an answer that shows they are focused on their job, and their focus is tempered with these virtues when necessary. These three adjectives can be used as is, or they can be interchanged with company values that are important in your company.

14. If you were given two job offers for the same position but at different companies, what three criteria would you use to make your decision?

Insight: Here we are learning what the candidate values and what is important to them when considering a job offer. It also helps prepare you for any counter offers they may make when offering them a position. This is another good place to dig deeper, if they say money is a major factor, ask for more information – it is rarely about money itself but what money will do for them. Perhaps you will learn money is a priority because they love to travel, or they have a goal of buying a house. By going deeper, you can learn more about what drives them and what matters to them.

15. What role did you usually play on your past teams?

Insight: The answer to this question can tell us who pushes forward as a leader, and who is a steady component to a team. Both are needed and vital to a highly functioning team. This will tell you how, or if, they would fill that hole in your team.

16. What would make you quit a job in the first month?

Insight: This question aligns with the core value question. If a new employee quits, it will most likely be within the first 30 days. By hearing the reasons they give, you can also learn what is important to them as they onboard and integrate with the team. You can then evaluate if your onboarding process is a good fit for the candidate and will set them up for success, or how you can change your process to ensure success.

This last set of questions is intended to help you understand if your role and company are a good fit for the candidate. Finding the right fit hire is a two-way street - even if they would be great for your role and company, it does not mean your role and company are a great fit for them. You need to know this now.

17. If you could create your ideal job, what would it look like? What kinds of things would you be doing every day? Paint me a picture... (If the answer does not quite fit with your position, ask them where this position fits into their ideal job.)

Insight: With their response, their career goals should be obvious. The follow-up question tells us how this position fits into their goals. Does this align with what you have to offer? It is not necessarily a bad thing if your role is a stepping stone to what they want, but you cannot offer them more. It is okay to hire people who are "the right fit, right now". It is not uncommon for employees to outgrow companies, and for companies to outgrow employees. Not everyone has to be a "forever employee".

18. Now paint me a picture of your ideal company culture, what does that look like?

Insight: Does your company culture align with what they are looking for? This is the next level question to the one above. The same guidelines apply, this is for you to determine if your company culture is a good fit for them, can offer them what they need to feel safe, a sense of belonging, and will integrate well with the team.

19. Describe your relationship with coworkers in this ideal job.

Insight: The answer to this question tells you if they prefer to be left alone or are the type to distract others from their work. Their response will also reveal how much they value or need close relationships with their coworkers.

20. Describe the work environment of your ideal job.

Insight: Similar to the question above, but here we mean the physical environment with this question. This tells us what kind of environment they need to be comfortable and successful. Do you, or can you, provide this type of environment?

21. What are you looking for in a supervisor/manager?

Insight: Here, we are listening to see if they describe someone similar to the reporting manager/supervisor. Are you able to determine if the manager is the type of leader they desire and need in order to do their best work, and grow as an employee?

A final word about interviewing candidates

No matter what questions you use, it is wise to do periodic self-check-ins for unconscious bias. No matter who we are, or how aware we are, we all have unconscious bias. For example, perhaps a candidate reminds you of a grade school classmate who annoyed or bullied you. This is bound (and normal) to shape your opinion of this person in front of you.

However, they are not that classmate, and they could be a terrific fit for your team, so we need to bring these biases to the forefront, so we can shed them and see the candidate in a clear, unbiased light.

At Zephyr Recruiting, one way we do this is by paying attention to our internal reactions to the answers the candidates provide and how we feel overall while interacting with them. Do we feel uneasy, laugh a lot, comfortable, skeptical, in alignment, etc.? And then we ask ourselves (from a place of genuine curiosity, not judgement), “Am I feeling this way because of this candidate, or because of a past person I have known, or past experience that is influencing this reaction?” We then listen honestly to our answer. We also rely on each other and get second opinions about what we might be feeling...does my colleague see what I see, feel the same as I do, etc.?

We recommend you bring this into your recruiting process and encourage anyone involved, to do the same.

In closing, we hope these questions have been valuable to you. We would love your feedback and suggestions.

Please connect with us on LinkedIn!

And a word about sharing this tool... If you have colleagues you think would benefit from this information, we graciously ask you to direct them to our website instead of sharing it with them. Thank you!!

Here is to making your next hire a terrific culture fit! And remember, we are here to help you if you need us.

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Thank you



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