



**Recruiter Roundtable: The 'Weakness' Question:**  
**Tips for Handling One of the Worst Interview Questions**

*The Recruiter Roundtable is a monthly feature that collects career and job-seeking advice from a group of recruiting experts throughout the United States. The question we put before our panel this month is:*

**Being asked about one's own "biggest weaknesses" in a job interview is considered (by many job-seekers, at least) one of the worst interview questions. Do you ask candidates this, and how would you recommend candidates answer this question in a job interview without being phony?**

**Be Upfront**

There are times when I ask job candidates this question. It's not that I want to nitpick or make people feel uncomfortable, but rather I want to see in which areas they feel they need to improve and what they are doing about it. In order to advance professionally, we all need to be able to honestly identify not just our strengths but also our weaknesses and how we can upgrade in these areas.

I recommend that job candidates be upfront during interviews. Don't say you have "no weaknesses" or "work too hard." Instead, tell hiring managers what you are working on improving and what you've done to build your skills in these areas.

One thing to keep in mind: If one of your weaknesses is directly related to the position and could potentially take you out of the running, the opportunity may not be right for you. -- *DeLynn Senna, executive director of North American permanent placement services, Robert Half International*

**Let the Job Description Guide You**

First, make sure you truly understand the job duties before the interview starts. Match the job duties with your strengths. What is a strength you have that someone may consider as a weakness?

For example, if you apply to a sales job, your weakness could be "not quick to close": "I really take a lot of time to listen to a customer before I provide recommendations. A lot of sales people are quick to answer, but I spend time making sure I understand the customer's needs." Sales people need to be good listeners although they don't always come across that way.

Another example is if you applied to a very detail-oriented job, your weakness is you are a perfectionist. The hiring manager needs someone that pays close attention to the little things.

In summary, a weakness on one hand is a strength on the other. -- *Amanda Mertz, lead recruiter, Wells Fargo Home and Consumer Finance Group*

**Will It Match Your References?**

The importance of this question is often not the candidate's answer per se, but whether or not the candidate's references respond in a similar manner. In short, it is a way for employers to assess the candidate's awareness of his or her own strengths and weaknesses. -- *Yves Lermusi, CEO, Checkster*

### **Choose Wisely**

This is definitely a popular question that we often ask, and a lot of our clients also like to include when interviewing candidates. While "weakness" is a harsh word, remember that nobody is perfect, and we all have areas of development that we need to work on.

Employers are cognizant of this and ask the question for two reasons -- first, to make sure your weakness isn't a skill they need someone to have mastery of immediately, and second, to see how you handle yourself under pressure and when asked tough questions.

We advise our candidates to be honest and focus on a weakness that is not one of the top three qualities required for the job. Also, be sure to describe how you've already taken steps and made strides in strengthening this skill, showing your ability and desire to constantly learn and grow. -- *Kathy Gans, Senior Vice President, Ajilon Professional Staffing*