How to screen for critical soft skills

30 behavioral interview questions to identify high-potential candidates



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Why do behavioral interview questions matter?



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Asking behavioral questions is a good way to spot candidates who'll excel.

While every interview is a little different, it helps to have a go-to list of questions on hand. This can save you time and make your interviews more consistent, reducing the potential for bias in your hiring process.

We surveyed nearly 1,300 hiring managers about the soft skills they look for and the behavioral questions they ask. Read on to discover their top questions and what to listen for in candidates' answers.

57%

of talent professionals say they struggle to assess soft skills accurately.[1]

1 | LinkedIn, Global Talent Trends 2019

6 soft skills to reveal potential

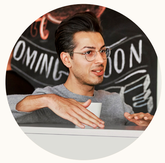
The soft skills that matter most vary among roles and companies, but there's often overlap. To find out which skills are most consistent in high-potential candidates and successful hires, we asked hiring managers what they typically look for.

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Here are the top 6 skills they identified and ranked in order of importance:



1 | Adaptabity



2 | Culture add



3 | Collaboration



4 | Leadership



5 | Growth potential



6 | Prioritization



69% of hiring managers say the most important soft skill they screen for is adaptability.[2]

Adaptability

Adaptability is essential for thriving in a rapidly changing work environment.

Given that 54% of employees may require significant reskilling or upskilling over the next few years to keep pace with new technology and evolving business needs, adaptability is essential.[3]

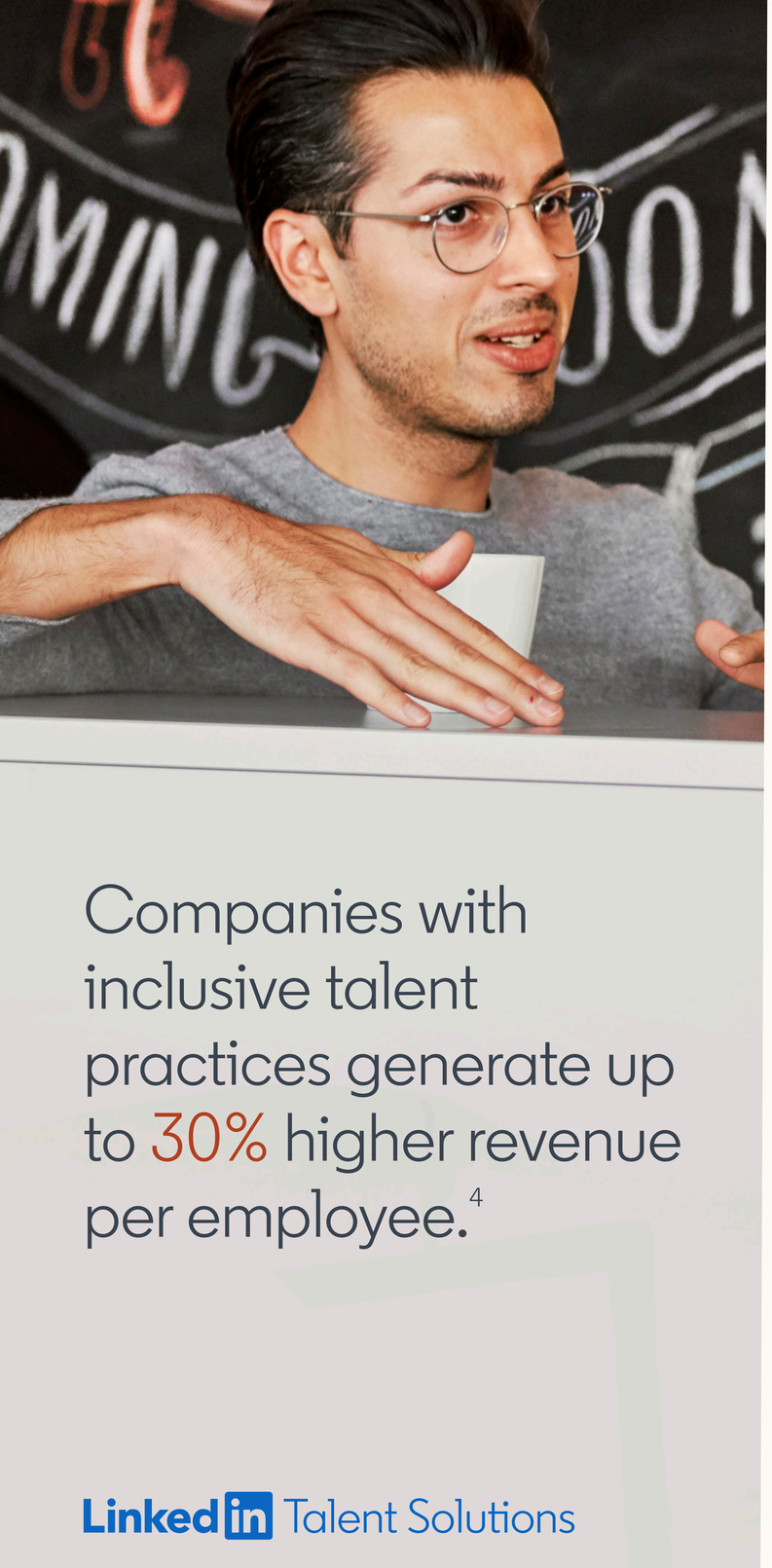
Employees who are adaptable are more likely to achieve better outcomes as priorities shift or setbacks occur, since they're already comfortable making strategic adjustments.

2 | LinkedIn, The Most Popular Interview Questions to Reveal Key Soft Skills 3 | World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2018

5 questions to help you screen for adaptability

Most Popular

1	2	3	4	5
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?	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.	Recall a time when you were assigned a task outside of your job description. How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?	Tell me about the biggest change you have had to deal with? How did you adapt to that change?	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 outcomes.
What to listen for → Excitement about tackling new challenges and willingness to leave their comfort zone, knowing they'll learn something valuable from the experience.	What to listen for → Eagerness to explore new ways of working and improve based on what they learn; if they discovered a better way; whether they embraced the change.	What to listen for → Understanding that their job may evolve and willingness to try something new and take the necessary steps to ensure that they were successful.	What to listen for → Acceptance that change is inevitable. That they focused on how they could adapt successfully, evaluating a new situation and finding the support they needed.	What to listen for → Willingness to be flexible when it's required. Ability to reflect on what they learned from the experience, both good and bad.



Companies with inclusive talent practices generate up to 30% higher revenue per employee.[4]

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Culture add

Culture adds have the potential to do great things at your company.

They should be fundamentally aligned with your company's mission and core values. But finding the right person for the job doesn't mean finding someone who's exactly like everyone else.

That's why many hiring managers have stopped evaluating for "culture fit" and are now asking themselves whether candidates are a "culture add"—someone who doesn't just preserve your existing culture, but helps it evolve and grow.

4 | Deloitte Insights, Diversity and inclusion: The reality gap

5 questions to help you screen for culture adds

Most Popular

1	2	3	4	5
What are the three things that are most important to you in a job?	Tell me about a time in the last week when you've been satisfied, energized, and productive at work. What were you doing?	What's the most interesting thing about you that's not on your resume?	What would make you choose our company over others?	What's the biggest misconception your coworkers have about you and why do they think that?
What to listen for → Alignment between what's most important to them and what the role and company have to offer.	What to listen for → An indication that the work environment and day-to-day responsibilities are right for them.	What to listen for → Signs that a candidate brings something new and unexpected to your culture, even if it's unrelated to their specific role.	What to listen for → Thoughtful, honest answers that tell you what they're really thinking—not what they think you want to hear.	What to listen for → Self-reflection and transparency. The best answers will demonstrate that the candidate is open with the people around them.



50% of great collaborators also tend to be top performers.[5]

Collaboration

When a role requires teamwork, strong collaboration skills make a big difference.

Done right, collaboration improves productivity, morale, and order. But when people aren't good at collaborating, they can create roadblocks for colleagues.

In a role where your new hire will need to work well with others, assessing for collaboration can help you find someone who will succeed and drive others toward greater success.

5 | Harvard Business Review, Collaborative Overlord

5 questions to help you screen for collaboration

Most Popular

1	2	3	4	5
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?	Tell me about a time when you were communicating with someone and they did not understand you. What did you do?	Tell me about one of your favorite experiences working with a team and the contributions you made.	Describe the best partner or supervisor you've worked with. What part of their management style appealed to you?	Can you share an experience where a project dramatically shifted direction at the last minute? What did you do?
What to listen for → A willingness to try to see things from the other person's perspective by identifying the cause of the tension and finding ways to improve the relationship.	What to listen for → Patience. Great collaborators take the time to make sure they're being understood and can adjust their style to align with others.	What to listen for → Energy and motivation via teamwork. A healthy mix of "I" and "we" statements to communicate both individual and team contributions.	What to listen for → An understanding of their own working style and what kind of personalities they work best with.	What to listen for → Focus on keeping the team aligned and comfort with tapping coworkers for additional help when a project demands it.



Leadership

Even when you're not interviewing for a leadership role, hire people who can inspire.

Organizations with strong leadership are 13x more likely to outperform their competition.[7]

It's not just the leader's own skills and vision that drive that success—it's their ability to inspire, motivate, and unleash the potential in others.

On the flip side, poor leaders can make their teams less motivated and efficient and more likely to quit.

No matter what seniority level you're hiring for, it never hurts to think about a candidate's leadership potential. After all, you could be hiring the company's future CEO without even realizing it.

6 | Gallup, Employees Want a Lot More From Their Managers 7 | Development Dimensions International, Global Leadership Forecast 2011

5 questions to help you screen for leadership

Most Popular

1	2	3	4	5
Tell me about the last time something significant didn't go according to plan at work. What was your role? What was the outcome?	Describe a situation where you needed to persuade someone to see things your way. What steps did you take? What were the results?	Tell me about a time when you led by example. What did you do and how did others react?	Tell me about the toughest decision you had to make in the last six months.	Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your coworkers or group? How did you do it? What were the results?
What to listen for → Thoughtful reflection and a strong sense of ownership. True leaders don't try to shift the blame to others, but consider what they could have done differently.	What to listen for → Strong leaders establish credibility and use compelling evidence to reinforce their viewpoint, rather than acting like they know best.	What to listen for → Understanding of how their behavior impacts those around them. That they hold themselves to a high standard, and are an inspiration to their team.	What to listen for → Careful consideration of outcomes. Great leaders seek advice when they need it—but they don't shy away from making the final decision.	What to listen for → Assertiveness without being pushy; the ability to create a dialogue and listen to concerns, with the ultimate goal of making everyone happy with the plan.

The cost of replacing an employee is about 1.5x their salary.[8]



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Growth potential

Hire someone with growth potential so they can develop the role and make it their own.

Most candidates are interested in advancing their career, not just doing more of the same.

While it's tempting to find candidates with exactly the same skills and level of experience as the team members you're replacing, hire someone with potential to grow into the role. It will earn you their loyalty—making them more likely to stay for the long haul.

8 | LinkedIn, Why More Employees Are Considering Leaving Their Companies [INFOGRAPHIC]

5 questions to help you screen for growth potential

Most Popular

1	2	3	4	5
Recall a time when your manager was unavailable when a problem arose. How did you handle the situation? Who did you consult with?	Describe a time when you volunteered to expand your knowledge at work, as opposed to being directed to do so.	What would motivate you to make a move from your current role?	When was the last time you asked for direct feedback from a superior? Why?	What's the biggest career goal you've achieved?
What to listen for → The ability to rise to the occasion without stepping on toes. Great candidates respect all stakeholders and explore options before making a decision.	What to listen for → Eagerness to learn and a willingness to ask for the resources. Invest in continuous learning and actively seek out new opportunities.	What to listen for → Signs that the candidate is more invested in growth opportunities than they are in an immediate payoff; that they are interested in being challenged.	What to listen for → That they regularly request feedback. An indication that the candidate sought constant self-improvement in their current/ previous role.	What to listen for → Motivation and drive. The candidate isn't boastful, but they take pride in their achievements and use each one to help them be more successful.



The ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work is ranked as the third most desirable quality in a new hire.[9]

Prioritization

Candidates who've mastered prioritization can juggle key tasks.

Look for people who can manage their time effectively and pay close attention to details to ensure that things don't fall through the cracks. This is especially important in roles that have firm due dates and tight project timelines. When employees know how to prioritize, they're less likely to drop the ball—or to burn themselves out.

9 | NACE's Job Outlook for the Class of 2014 | Here are the soft skills most important to your business

5 questions to help you screen for prioritization

Most Popular

1	2	3	4	5
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?	Tell me about a project that you planned. How did you organize and schedule the tasks?	Describe a time when you felt stressed or overwhelmed. How did you handle it?	Give an example of a time when you delegated an important task successfully.	How do you determine what amount of time is reasonable for a task?
What to listen for → A clear and proactive process for organizing their time, like blocking off their calendar, creating a to-do list, and confirming deadlines.	What to listen for → A methodical approach to planning and strong self-discipline when meeting deadlines and driving a project through to completion.	What to listen for → Signs that planning and prioritization help the candidate to stay calm and focused, but that they also know how to lighten the load by delegating tasks.	What to listen for → An understanding of how to delegate and drive success. Candidates who are great at prioritizing make sure they're clear about deadlines and expectations.	What to listen for → Signs that they think carefully about how they're spending their time and that they seek a healthy middle ground between rushing and perfectionism.

How to get the most out of every interview



Help every candidate perform at their best

Some candidates are just better at interviewing than others. But that doesn't necessarily mean they're the right person for the job.

By helping every candidate show off their best self, you can get a better read on their potential—and make a more informed decision.

Here are some steps you can take to create a more supportive interview process.

Equip them with the STAR method.

The STAR method (situation, task, action, result) allows candidates to answer your questions in a structured way. Here's a template you can send in advance to help them apply this method.

Get template →

Allow them time to answer.

Give candidates a moment to reflect on a question and resist the temptation to interrupt when they're speaking. Make a note of what you want to say so you'll remember to bring it up later.

Ask for specifics.

When you ask behavioral questions, make sure to focus and probe for real-world examples, not hypotheticals.

Follow up.

If a candidate's answer seems incomplete, try to avoid making assumptions. Instead, ask follow-up questions to fill in the blanks and gain a better understanding. You can also use this approach in other situations.



Ask unexpected questions

By asking unexpected questions, you may be able to get a better sense of what candidates sound like when they aren't rehearsed.

That doesn't mean you should ask brainteasers. It just means you should ask them something they probably haven't prepared for so you can watch them think in real time. Here are some unconventional questions asked by top business leaders and talent professionals:

"Why shouldn't I hire you?"

Adam Grant

Wharton Professor and Best-Selling Author

"How would your manager describe you? Your best friend?"

Krista Williams

Global Talent Acquisition Operations Manager at FM Global

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

Angela Bortolussi

Partner at Recruiting Social

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

Obed Louissaint

VP of Talent, Watson Health, and Employee Experience at IBM

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

Tony Hsieh

CEO of Zappos

Here are a few questions you should be prepared to answer:

What's the biggest opportunity for this role?
What's the most challenging aspect of it?

What does success in this position look like?

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

What type of person works well with this team?

How did the company determine its mission?

Why do people say such and such about your company?



Pay attention to what they ask

High-potential candidates are often highly curious and invested in learning more about the company and role. Pay close attention to the questions that they ask you, as this can give you a good idea of their values, interests, and priorities.

Use the right hiring tools throughout your process

When your hiring process is fine-tuned to attract the right talent, the quality of your interviews goes up. To bring the right people in, it helps to have the right tools. LinkedIn can help.

Our full suite of hiring solutions can help you connect with the right candidates faster. After all, the sooner you interview them, the sooner you can extend an offer—reducing the chances that they'll be snapped up elsewhere.

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Recruitment Marketing

Put the right jobs in front of the right people with targeted ads. Once you've got their attention, tell them your company story with an eye-catching Career Page.

Request a demo →

Conclusion

Potential means slightly different things to different companies. But by determining what skills and traits candidates need to be successful at your organization, you can tailor your interview questions to help uncover their true potential and give them a chance to shine.

Methodology

LinkedIn surveyed 1,297 hiring managers in the US, Canada, UK, Netherlands, Australia, and India in May 2016. Hiring managers are defined as those who currently manage people and who 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 were representative of the LinkedIn sample. The LinkedIn sample (and our analysis) was influenced by how members chose 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.

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LinkedIn Talent Solutions offers a full range of hiring and recruiting solutions for every step in the process. We'll help you find and engage the right candidates, build your brand, and make even smarter talent decisions with LinkedIn data and insights.

Founded in 2003, LinkedIn connects the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful. With 706+ million members worldwide, including 75% of the US workforce, LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network.

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LinkedIn Recruiter

LinkedIn Scheduler

Post

Post jobs to reach candidates you won't find anywhere else.

LinkedIn jobs

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Attract

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Career Pages

Work With Us Ads