

ANSWERING “WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?”

Interviewer: What are your weaknesses?

Brad: I have a sneaking feeling you don't get excited to answer that question. Most students don't say...

Interviewee: Yeah! The weakness question, my favorite.

Brad: I'll be honest, it's a tough one to answer. And sadly, most students mess it up. In my days as a recruiting director, I certainly asked this question of a number of students and I got a range of responses. A majority of candidates, roughly three out of four, would answer that question the exact same way. I'd say...

Interviewer: What are your weakness?

Brad: They'd get a sly look on their face, and very confidently all basically say the exact same thing. Go ahead, take a guess. I bet you know what they'd say, because it's probably what you would say.

Interviewee: Well, my weakness is I work too hard.

Brad: Inside you're chuckling to yourself.

Interviewee: I just took a strength – working too hard – and disguised it as a weakness. And this idiot recruiting director, who's interviewed over 1,000 students, has never heard that one before. I might as well spend that signing bonus now.

Brad: I'm sorry. You work too hard or you're a perfectionist; those are the weakest, cheapest answers in the history of interviewing. We old recruiting directors are a little smarter than you think. The best way to answer that question is to be honest. What a crazy concept! I should say relatively honest. Let me explain: Take an actual weakness, talk about how you identified it, how you're working on it, and why it's important for you to correct it. Let's take a look at an example.

Interviewer: What are your weaknesses?

Interviewee: One of the things I tend to do right now is I procrastinate. And to be honest I put things off that I don't enjoy doing; I'm sure like a lot of students. So whether that means studying for a test, or preparing a paper or even cleaning my room, I put those things off until the last minute. Right now, the only one it affects is me. So, if I don't get the best grade on the test, or I have a messy room, it only really is my deal. But moving forward, especially when I'm working for a company, I know that I'm not going to be able to procrastinate because it will affect everybody on the team. At the beginning

of the week now I write down all the things I need to do. I take the things I don't enjoy doing and put them on the top of the list. And I won't let myself go to number two, let's say, until I finish number one. Now I'm not perfect yet, but it has really sort of helped me recognize how to manage my time, and helped me avoid procrastinating so much.

Brad: Now that can work for most weaknesses. Being more organized, being more patient, being less of a procrastinator, managing your time more effectively. All can work. Your career center can give you some more tips on crafting a great answer. And while this can work for most weaknesses, there are some red flags.

Interviewee: I'm horrible at math. I'm not a morning person. I hate people.

Brad: My example wouldn't have been nearly as good if I had just said "I'm a horrible procrastinator". What's important is not just the weakness, but how you talk about it. Good luck.