

How to Acknowledge Your Weaknesses in an Interview – Tip 16

You are in an interview and the interviewer has asked you about your top skills. You feel great that you described your best ones and told a story that demonstrates your skills. Then you are asked “What are your most significant weaknesses?” The dreaded question! You know you must respond but how do you do it with a positive spin? You don't!

Everyone has weaknesses, including the interviewer. They know what their weaknesses are and they know you have weaknesses too and they also know that you should know what they are. If you try to put a positive spin on the subject by describing a characteristic that you think shows you in a positive way but you try to describe it as a weakness, such as being “hard-working” or “over-achieving”, an experienced interviewer will think you are not being forthright. I've actually had executives ponder the question and then state that they couldn't think of any! If you respond by being noncommittal, you will not be taken seriously.

If, somehow, the interviewer still likes you, they may stop the interview and very candidly explain that they need to understand your strengths and weaknesses so they can determine whether your strengths are what they need and whether or not your weaknesses are a problem that they can't accommodate. If you are not open about your weaknesses, think forward to their possibly hiring you and later finding that you have a weakness you should have told them about. What impact do you think that could have on your future prospects with them?

One of the main characteristics of good leaders and managers is high emotional intelligence (EQ). People with high EQ know what they are best at doing and what they are not best at doing. They also know how to use others effectively to either handle the areas that are not their strengths or to help them recognize when their actions are having a negative impact on others. While they do not “overcome” their weaknesses, they have learned how to deal with them effectively.

For example, if one of your weaknesses is impatience, you might describe it as follows:

“I tend to be impatient with others who don't understand what I am trying to achieve. So, I tell people in advance that I know one of my weaknesses is a lack of patience. If they ever encounter my being unnecessarily impatient, they need to tell me. That will remind me to stop and have a conversation with them so that I can better understand the issues.”

When the interviewer hears the description of the weakness, they will now be comfortable that you know your strengths and weaknesses and have learned how to compensate for your weaknesses.

The interviewer will also feel comfortable that you have good EQ. You understand who you are, your limitations, and how your actions impact others – all positive characteristics of an effective leader or manager.

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