How to answer motivation-based interview questions

Motivation-based interview questions seek to uncover the drive and enthusiasm behind a job application. This type of question is asked to find out more about your reasons for applying and whether your values and those of the organisation align.

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Motivational questions are crucial in the job interviews that Jodette Cleary is involved with. The Chief People Officer from hipages says motivation and drive are often sub-conscious but play an important role in predicting job satisfaction. "Motivational questions can appear basic, but they are proven in revealing patterns in a person's motivation or drive," she says. "Answers to these questions serve as a good indicator of whether the job is going to fit a candidate or not."

How to answer motivational questions

"Motivation questions are aimed at understanding why a person wants to work at your organisation," says Sarah Beck, SEEK's Director of Talent Acquisition. Beck uses this type of question to see if candidates' values fit those of the company. "I ask these questions to find out if an individual's motivation for joining is about the purpose of the organisation or the benefits on offer. I want people who are genuinely motivated to work in a purpose-led organisation."

1. Why are you interested in working at this organisation?

Cleary says preparation is very important in answering this question. "If I interview a candidate who has not explicitly expressed what it is about our company and the role that excites them, I am left feeling that regardless of their skill levels, that they have not spent time really thinking about what they want, and how they identified this role was a great fit for them," she says.

An ideal answer would match your skills and qualities with the values and needs of the role and the organisation. "I want to know what has attracted you to our organisation, if you understand our culture and if you are coming to work for us for the right reason," adds Erin Murray, HR Manager with the McGrath Foundation.

2. How would your colleagues describe you in three words?

This motivational question allows the interviewers to get a sense of how you perceive yourself, it lets them compare your self-assessment with how your referees describe you,

and helps them judge whether your qualities or attributes would be a good fit for the organisation.

Work through the qualities and give examples of how that attribute has contributed to an organisation.

You could say:

“My colleagues would say that I am hardworking and keep going until goals get met. Together with several team members I was responsible for running a workshop for our clients. I was the first person there and set up the room and welcomed clients. The clients found the workshop so beneficial that they stayed for extra time after the session ended. I waited with them and locked up afterwards as I could see this was beneficial for forging strong client relationships.”

3. How would you describe the work environment or culture you’re most productive and happy in?

Interviewers and hiring managers know that people are happiest and most productive when they work within an environment or culture that suits them. Ensuring that you have thoroughly researched the organisation before your interview will enable you to know that the work environment they are offering is one in which you’re confident you will thrive.

You could say:

“I would be most productive and happy in a work environment or culture that centres around working as a team, but yet recognises what individuals have to offer. I notice that your offices are open plan, and I like this way of working, as I believe it encourages collaboration and openness.”

While this is not an exhaustive list of motivational questions that may get asked in an interview, you can see that interviewers ask motivational questions because they want to know about your drive and enthusiasm. The best responses to these questions acknowledge your internal and external motivations and the work environment in which you are most productive and happy.

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