



P R O F E S S I O N A L S

3 Ways to Answer “What’s Your Biggest Weakness?”

by [Adrian Granzella Larssen](#) — January 10, 2012

When you’re asked “what’s your greatest strength?” in an interview, you’ve got it covered: You showcase your professional skills and talk about how there’s no one better suited for the job. But, “what’s your biggest weakness?” That question can be much tougher to answer.

But it’s not a trick question. What your interviewer is really trying to do—beyond identifying any red flags—is to gauge your self-awareness and honesty. So, “I can’t meet a deadline to save my life” is not an option—but neither is “Nothing! I’m perfect!” A good answer can show how you can overcome challenges, paint you as a committed professional who continues to improve herself, and actually highlight your strengths.

Here are three strategies to ensure that talking about your weakness won’t be the weak spot in your next interview.

1. Show How You’ve Overcome Something

Everyone has areas that could use improvement, but if you can describe how you’ve mitigated yours, you’ll seem strong, capable, and in charge of your professional development. So, think of something that you struggle with but that you’re working to improve. You could explain that you’ve never been strong at public speaking, but over the past few years, you’ve asked for team leadership roles, run successfully meetings, and found tools to help you be more comfortable when addressing a crowd.

Another smart tactic is to describe something that was once a weakness, but that you now can point to as an accomplishment. For example, “I’ve always had to work at math. But I took a course in Excel, and that’s helped me tackle quantitative analysis projects much more easily. In fact, let me show you a report I recently developed.”

2. Address Uncertainties in Your Background

If your background doesn’t completely match up with the requirements in the job description, or if you know that the employer has hesitations about parts of your experience, this question is a great time to address those uncertainties. You can talk about something she already knows is a hurdle, but at the same time, turn it around to highlight your strong points. For example: “It might seem that my biggest weakness in applying for this position is that I don’t have any inside sales experience. But the skills I’ve gained during my five years of fundraising are incredibly relevant to the position—let me tell you why.”

3. Paint a Weakness as a Strength

Choose a shortcoming that can be explained in the most positive light possible. Are you neurotic, stubborn, or incapable of delegating? Instead, try using words that are seen as professional strengths, like dedicated, persistent, or thorough. For example: “I tend to be a perfectionist, so sometimes I have a hard time letting a project leave my hands until it’s absolutely finalized.” This answer addresses an area you need to improve, but explains it in a positive way.

Just be sure to follow it up with how you’ve addressed this “shortcoming,” such as: “But I’ve found that sometimes it’s more effective to get feedback on a project along the way, even if it is not yet complete. I try to strike a balance between getting things done right the first time and being open to others’ input.”

Whatever strategy you choose, the trick is to sound genuine and to end things on a positive note. Rehearse your response so that you can give it easily, and more importantly, concisely—if you spend too much time talking about your flaws, it’s easy to dig yourself into a hole. Get past the “weakness” part of your answer as quickly as possible, so you can get back what’s most important: your (many!) strengths.

500 Linden Oaks • Rochester, NY 14625
(585) 381 7350 • fax (585) 249-7689

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