

Sam Grill's Interview Cheatsheet

Created by Sam Grill and presented by Build Your Edge.



Watch the full episode

This handout complements Sam's *Build Your Edge* episode, *How to Win at Interviews (from both sides of the table)*. Start by listening to the conversation, as it brings these ideas to life and provides the context to get the most value from this guide.

Build Your Edge 

Supported by **we do.**

Episode 12

How to Win at Job Interviews

(from both sides of the table)

Interview secrets to help you get hired and hire the best people.



Sam Grill

Contents

Why Have I Put This Together?	4
Who is this for?	4
What's covered?	4
Using the cheatsheet	5
Preparing to Interview	6
Candidates	6
Hiring managers	7
Question & Answer Style	8
Candidates	8
Hiring managers	9
The Opening Gambit.....	11
Candidates	11
Hiring managers	12
Interview Question Examples	13
Behavioural Questions	16
Experience Questions	25
General Knowledge Questions	30
Leadership Questions	33
Problem Solving Questions	38
Scenario-Based Questions.....	43
Technical Questions	48

Why Have I Put This Together?

Hiring and applying done right can be one of the most enjoyable parts of building a team, or joining one. However, quality and, therefore, experience often suffer due to intense competition among applicants for desirable roles.

On the other hand, arduous multi-stage application processes with countless criteria remove agency from the people who best understand what's needed.

And, if, like me, you believe that the cycle of generating CVs littered with “key words” to match job descriptions does not serve either applicants or hiring managers, then you are in the right place...

Who is this for?

This sheet is designed for both hiring managers and candidates seeking to optimise their experience in the hiring/application process.

What's covered?

In this cheat sheet, I'll address the interview stage of the hiring process. I appreciate that this may be starting in the middle for some people. However, if both parties can navigate this stage effectively, it shortens the process and increases the likelihood of a successful match (watch this space for future cheat sheets).

Using the cheatsheet

For both candidates and interviewers, the tables below provide examples of questions I am genuinely interested in knowing the answers to. Whilst they are essential to me, they might not be to you. There are blank tables below; please take them, modify them as needed, and adapt them to fit your specific context. Let’s get into it.

Preparing to Interview

Preparing to interview or be interviewed is a bit of a Goldilocks scenario. Too much, and you can box yourself in before you've even said hello. Too little and risk being blindsided and losing time with an unconvincing conversation. Here are my tips.

Candidates

1: Understand the organisation and the role

- It might sound obvious, but you'd be amazed at how often this can let good candidates down. Frequently, this stems from an interpretation that a role is determined solely by competencies and skills. However, the stronger your understanding of the organisation, the role, and its challenges, the more relevant your answers will be (see here for my suggested preparation questions).

2: Establish who will be interviewing you and what their investment in the role is

- At each stage, be crystal clear on who you will be talking to. An excellent exercise is to put yourself in their shoes and imagine what you would want to hear from a candidate. There will, of course, be overlap, but panels will remember the answers unique to their interests over those they have in common with other panel members. This increases your likelihood of standing out.

3: Establish the three strongest points you'd most like to convey, and build a mental evidence bank.

- Once you have a clear understanding of the role, the organisation and the people, you can now think about what examples of you and your work demonstrate that you can meet these challenges.
- The added benefit of this is that you can steer your answers to questions such as "tell me about your experiences at company 'x'" to opportunities to talk about experiences that best sell you and your skills.

Hiring managers

For hiring managers, good preparation starts much earlier. Before a conversation with talent partners, before the role is advertised to anyone and especially before a specification is given.

1: Establish three nonnegotiable areas a candidate must convince you they are strong in.

This is not an easy task, but whittling it down to three forces you to think about what is essential for the role and facilitates straightforward conversation with anyone involved in seeking candidates.

Again, this is a bit of a Goldilocks situation and is worth discussing with others involved in the process. Too broad in scope, and it defeats the purpose of picking just three. Too narrow, and you may narrow the pool down to zero.

2: List out where you are flexible.

The opposite of the above, but still a valuable exercise. Can you be flexible with your location? Package? Prior-experience? Behaviours? Role titles? This is an important thing to address, particularly during the search process, as it will help prevent candidates from being eliminated based on incorrect assumptions.

3: Identify your panel early.

As soon as you are confident in what you want and need from someone who's going to fill a role, pick your panel. Ensure you are all on the same page in terms of what they are there to help you identify. Diversity of opinion and thought is crucial in any panel. Consider people who have varying levels of impartiality, investment and motive.

You want your panel to ask questions that are relevant to your brief, allowing you to take a step back and watch the candidate engage, freeing you up to fully focus on assessing the qualities you favour.

You may also consider panellists based on areas you want to challenge candidates on. If you prefer a "stress-test" style question where candidates need to think on their feet, you need an SME to assess the answer in real-time.

Question & Answer Style

Once you have the substance clear in your mind, the next most important thing to get comfortable with is your communication with the candidate or the interviewer(s). This is less about preparation and more about understanding what constitutes a good answer.

Both parties should pay attention to signals throughout the interview. Do I feel like I'm answering the question? Do I feel like the candidate understood what I'm looking for in the answer? To get the most realistic assessment during an interview, don't be afraid to ask questions like - "Did you get what you needed from that answer?" or "Does my question make sense? Shall I ask it another way?". (Of course, being conscious not to linger too long if you are tight on time).

Be prepared to pivot towards topics that yield the highest return for your non-negotiables. Often, you have to be patient before catching on to what that is for the candidate or panel.

Candidates

In my mind, these are the things that make up a good answer.

1: Answering accurately

Immediately address the question, then develop your case. Opening your answer with a straightforward answer to questions (particularly if it's scenario-based) shows the panel you've understood what's being asked of you.

Be succinct with your answer; the longer you talk uninterrupted, the more the conversation tends to drift into a monologue rather than an interview. If you feel you are starting to speak for too long, pause and ask:

- Have I answered your question? Or,
- Is there anything you'd like me to elaborate on?

It helps keep the panel engaged in the conversation.

2: Answering authentically

By this, I mean, use your own language. Articulate your own opinions. Don't fall into the trap of trying to guess what the panellist thinks the correct answer is. It's more obvious than you think.

3: Answering authoritatively

Examples, examples, examples. A common pitfall when interviewing is spending too much time overdeveloping a stance or answer without providing a reasonable justification for why you hold it.

Even better, state an opinion you hold and develop it based on the learning you attained after an initial setback, rather than an immediate success, as this demonstrates growth, reflection, and perseverance.

In the scenario where you are not able to provide an explicit example, it is okay to continue to develop the theory of your answer as long as you state that up front.

Hiring managers

1: Be conscious of phrasing

Often, how you ask a question has a direct impact on how the answers are given. Are you conversational? Are you direct? Are you long form? It's often the case that candidates will mirror your style, so do not be surprised if a long question yields a long answer.

If you are expecting either a long-form or short-form answer, be explicit with that.

2: Be adaptable in your style of asking questions

Similarly to the above. Often, the answers you are looking for are there, regardless of how suitable they are. If the candidate is struggling to identify what you need from them, be open to asking the questions a few different ways:

- Does the candidate respond better or worse when given an example?
- Does the candidate respond better or worse when placed in a scenario?
- Does the candidate respond better or worse when asked something hypothetically, or when asked something directly related to their experiences?

Agree with some panellists' variation.

- To give you the best chance of maintaining flow while also allowing you to experiment with what works and what doesn't, agree on a variation of style upfront with the panellists. If a candidate isn't quite catching on, pass to someone with a different style.

3: Get comfortable intervening when something's off-course

Candidates will often be searching for a hook from you while delivering an answer. If they're searching endlessly, you are only wasting your own time. Politely intervene, clarify that they were off course, and reiterate what you are looking for from them.

The Opening Gambit

The very first part of an interview will often be a “tell me about yourself” or a “please introduce yourself”. This can usually set the tone for the entire interview, so let me spell out for candidates a few options for good answers.

Candidates

Here you are telling a very short story about yourself and then demonstrating you've done your research. The key things are again to:

1: Be concise when talking about yourself

Remember, they are about to ask you a bunch of questions and have read your CV, so don't cover the same ground or try to pre-empt questions that may come later

2: Lean into your research by answering with “I'm here today because -”

- My understanding is the organisation wants to achieve 'x'
- This role supports this through 'y'
- And this interests me because 'z' and I have the <insert key trait from prep> to help achieve this

3: Answers to avoid here would be

- Anything that focuses on what you'll gain rather than what you'll contribute
- Generic answers that could apply to any company
- Mentioning only compensation or benefits
- Appearing desperate or overqualified

Hiring managers

My recommendation to panels is to trust your instincts and consider how you feel about the candidate's answers. You may prefer a more detailed response here. Some key indicators would be:

1. There is something in the opening gambit that immediately piques your interest for a follow-up question. My advice would be to tug on that thread. Check its validity and press the candidate to provide more details. It will create a natural flow that should allow you to keep on topics of relevance and interest more naturally.
2. Ask yourself, did this person answer the question I asked? Or did they use it as an excuse to dominate the topic of conversation? Did the answer sound human? Or was it filled with buzzwords and fluff?
3. If there was nothing of interest in the opening gambit, or nothing worth pressing for more details on. Go straight to your core question set.

Interview Question Examples

This guide is designed to help both hiring managers and candidates raise the quality of their interviews.

Each question includes a category, difficulty level, and desirable trait to help you focus on the right skills for the role, whether that's communication, proactivity, leadership, or risk awareness. Use it as a preparation tool, a reference during interviews, or a framework for more effective conversations that reveal genuine capability on both sides of the table.

For hiring managers

For managers, it provides ready-to-use questions with clear intent ("Why ask?"), examples of weak and strong answers, and notes explaining why great answers stand out so you can prepare more thoughtful questions and evaluate responses with confidence.

For candidates

For candidates, it's a window into what interviewers are really looking for. You can use it to anticipate common questions, understand what good looks like, and shape your own examples around impact, clarity, and outcomes.

Behavioural Questions 16

Explain a complex idea you had to me/us as non-experts.	17
Has over-communication ever set you back? What did you learn from that?	18
What's something you had to deliver imperfectly?	19
Walk me through a time when you identified a gap and took action to close it (e.g., in requirements, coverage, or implementation).	20
Describe a time you pivoted mid-execution/mid-project/mid-delivery to protect a customer outcome.	21
Tell me about a time when you chose to ask for forgiveness later rather than permission.	22
When have you deliberately not acted, and why?	23
Tell me about a risk you spotted early that everyone else missed.	24

Experience Questions 25

Were there any particular metrics that mattered in your last role, and what did you do when they moved the wrong way? And why was the metric important?	26
Describe a time you shipped with a known risk.	27
Tell me about a post-incident you led. What changed the next day?	28
Describe a recent win.	29

General Knowledge Questions 30

How do you strike a balance between setting targets that are both ambitious and realistic?	31
How do you balance speed and control in regulated environments?	32

Leadership Questions 33

How do you deliver bad news?	34
What sort of things constitute "show" activity rather than real progress to you?	35
Describe a time you delivered on something that wasn't in your job description.	36
Give an example of changing a stakeholder's mind about a risky path.	37

Problem Solving Questions 38

How do you decide when to stop planning and start building?	39
When have you tried to deliver a message and it was misunderstood? How did you recover?	40
How do you break down problems for others?	41
What signals tell you a small risk is about to become an issue?	42

Scenario-Based Questions 43

If I gave you one month and no roadmap, how would you decide what to deliver?	44
Tell me about a decision you made when you didn't have all the info.	45
Describe the different users of your current product and how you went about understanding their needs.	46
What's your approach to risk when the customer impact is unclear but potentially significant? .47	

Technical Questions **48**

How do you balance delivering features with automating parts of your role?49

Describe a time you changed based on some feedback you were given.50

Behavioural Questions

Behavioural questions reveal how people actually think and act when faced with real situations. They uncover patterns:

- How someone approaches challenges.
- How someone communicates under pressure.
- How does someone learns from mistakes?

Use these to go beyond surface-level answers and understand how a candidate turns intent into action.

Questions

Explain a complex idea you had to me/us as non-experts.....17

Has over-communication ever set you back? What did you learn from that?.....18

What's something you had to deliver imperfectly?.....19

Walk me through a time when you identified a gap and took action to close it (e.g., in requirements, coverage, or implementation).20

Describe a time you pivoted mid-execution/mid-project/mid-delivery to protect a customer outcome.21

Tell me about a time when you chose to ask for forgiveness later rather than permission.....22

When have you deliberately not acted, and why?.....23

Tell me about a risk you spotted early that everyone else missed.....24

Explain a complex idea you had to me/us as non-experts.

Category: Behavioural
Difficulty: Medium
Desirable trait: Concise Communicator

Why ask?

Short reason: explainers who can be understood. Good answers balance metaphor, visuals, and checks for understanding.

Bad example answer

I explain it how I usually do, and they get it eventually.

Good example answer

I explain card tokenisation like a parcel locker, so the merchant never sees the card. Then a quick diagram and a do/don't for security. I close with a glossary. Feedback scores from non-tech stakeholders jumped, and approvals sped up by a day.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates clarity, empathy, and structure, which are all hallmarks of a concise communicator.

The candidate uses a relatable metaphor ("parcel locker") to translate a technical concept into plain language without oversimplifying it. They combine this with visuals and a glossary, demonstrating an awareness of different learning styles and a deliberate approach to making complex ideas more accessible.

Crucially, they measure the impact (improved feedback scores and faster approvals), which proves their communication works in practice, not just in theory. This demonstrates that they don't just speak clearly; they communicate effectively to achieve their desired outcomes.

Has over-communication ever set you back? What did you learn from that?

Category: Behavioural
Difficulty: Medium
Desirable trait: Concise Communicator

Why ask?

Short reason: Brevity and audience fit. Good answers show adapting comms to the channel and need.

Bad example answer

Sometimes I share too much, but more info is better.

Good example answer

I once over-broadcast during an incident. I switched to a single source of truth, set audience-based cadences, and used channel summaries. People actually read updates, and decision-making time is shortened. CSAT on comms improved on the next incident review.

Why this is a good answer

It shows the candidate has learned from experience and actively refined their communication strategy. They recognise that more information isn't always better; clarity and timing matter more than volume.

By shifting to a single source of truth and tailoring updates by audience and channel, they demonstrate audience awareness and communication control, two core traits of a concise communicator.

The inclusion of measurable results (faster decisions, improved CSAT) shows that their adjustments had a real business impact. This transition moves the answer from reflection to applied improvement, demonstrating that they can diagnose a communication issue, resolve it, and validate the outcome.

What's something you had to deliver imperfectly?

Category: Behavioural
Difficulty: Medium
Desirable trait: Outcome Centric

Why ask?

Short reason: Impact over polish. Good answers demonstrate conscious trade-offs, clear communication, and how they measured the effect.

Bad example answer

We cut a few things to hit the date.

Good example answer

We shipped without a bulk edit to meet a regulatory date and were upfront about it. I set expectations, created a follow-up mini-roadmap, and monitored CSAT and task completion. Result: compliance on time, net CSAT flat, and 92% of users completed the flow. We added bulk edit two weeks later with zero churn spike.

Why this is a good answer

It shows mature, outcome-focused decision-making. The candidate recognises that perfect isn't always possible, or necessary, when results and timing matter more.

They didn't simply cut scope; they managed expectations, communicated transparently, and monitored impact metrics (CSAT and task completion). That combination demonstrates accountability and control, not compromise.

The follow-up plan and later feature delivery prove this wasn't reckless speed; it was a calculated trade-off, handled responsibly. The flat CSAT and strong completion rate validate that they protected the customer outcome while meeting a critical regulatory milestone.

This is what an outcome-centric mindset looks like in action: prioritising impact, communicating clearly, and learning from trade-offs to deliver both short-term results and long-term stability.

Walk me through a time when you identified a gap and took action to close it (e.g., in requirements, coverage, or implementation).

Category: Behavioural

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Proactivity

Why ask?

Short reason: Bias to act, scoped. Good answers demonstrate a well-timed intervention and follow-through.

Bad example answer

I raised it and assumed it would be handled.

Good example answer

I found gaps in negative-path tests for payouts. I wrote a short plan, added the critical cases, and wired them into CI with a red-to-green target. Two months later, incidents on that flow dropped to near zero, and time-to-detect fell by half.

Why this is a good answer

It shows initiative balanced with judgement; the essence of real proactivity. The candidate didn't just flag a problem; they owned it, scoped it appropriately, and followed through to resolution.

By writing a short plan and targeting the most critical test gaps, they demonstrated focus and efficiency, acting decisively without overreaching. Integrating the fix into CI and measuring outcomes (incident reduction and faster detection) proves they think in systems, not one-offs.

This is proactive behaviour done right: they identified an issue, acted within their remit, improved the process, and supported it with measurable results that benefited the entire team.

Describe a time you pivoted mid-execution/mid-project/mid-delivery to protect a customer outcome.

Category: Behavioural

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Outcome Centric

Why ask?

Short reason: Customer-anchored pivots. Good answers show when to stop the plan and protect outcomes.

Bad example answer

If something comes up, we try to make adjustments.

Good example answer

Mid-delivery, we paused a nice-to-have feature to fix onboarding errors after a drop-off spike. A 48-hour tiger team recovered the activation, and we still met our quarter's target. Post-mortem analysis led to better pre-release monitoring on the onboarding path.

Why this is a good answer

It shows strong customer focus, decisive prioritisation, and composure under pressure. The candidate recognises that success isn't about sticking rigidly to the plan; it's about protecting the outcome that matters most.

By pausing a non-essential feature and redeploying effort to address a customer-impacting issue, they demonstrated sound judgment and ownership of the outcome. Forming a focused "tiger team" and recovering activation within tight timeframes shows they can mobilise quickly and lead through disruption.

The post-mortem and subsequent monitoring improvements reveal reflection and learning; they didn't just fix the problem; they strengthened the system to prevent a repeat. This demonstrates a profound understanding of how to strike a balance between delivery and customer value.

Tell me about a time when you chose to ask for forgiveness later rather than permission.

Category: Behavioural

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Proactivity

Why ask?

Short reason: Speed vs alignment. Good answers show the criteria for breaking glass and how they prevent normalising it.

Bad example answer

I just did it and apologised later.

Good example answer

I shipped a hotfix without prior approval to stop active customer pain, then immediately told stakeholders and documented the exception with clear criteria. We implemented a small automation to reduce the need for future exceptions.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates thoughtful risk-taking, not reckless behaviour. The candidate acted promptly to resolve an urgent customer issue, demonstrating initiative and ownership while adhering to clear ethical and professional boundaries.

They didn't treat "ask for forgiveness" as a shortcut; they treated it as an exception. By immediately informing stakeholders and documenting the reasoning, they maintained trust and transparency. Adding automation to prevent similar situations in the future demonstrates a proactive mindset that prioritises learning and prevention over blame.

This answer shows speed with judgement; a balance between decisive action and long-term system improvement, which is precisely what "proactive" looks like in a mature, outcome-driven environment.

When have you deliberately not acted, and why?

Category: Behavioural

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Proactivity

Why ask?

Short reason: Proactivity isn't just doing more; it's knowing when not to act. Good answers demonstrate clear judgment, explicit communication, and effective mitigation. Bad answers hand-wave, chase activity, or hide the risk.

Bad example answer

I held off because it didn't feel like the right moment. We decided to just keep an eye on it and move on.

Good example answer

Short answer: I paused the launch to protect customers. Example: Two days before launch, a security warning appeared for a new feature. I hit pause, tucked it behind a flag, shipped a patch, and informed stakeholders about the changes and their rationale. Outcome: 1-day slip, zero customer impact, and a new pre-launch check that later caught two similar issues. Learning: restraint plus clear comms beats rushing a risky release.

Why this is a good answer

It reveals mature, disciplined decision-making—the kind that distinguishes thoughtful proactivity from impulsive action. The candidate recognises that leadership sometimes means choosing not to move forward when doing so would create risk.

They provide a clear, specific example of measured restraint: pausing a launch to safeguard customers. Importantly, they coupled that restraint with transparency and communication; pausing didn't mean going quiet. They explained the reasoning, managed stakeholder expectations, and followed through with a patch and a stronger process.

The outcome speaks volumes: minimal delay, zero customer impact, and a permanent improvement to the release process. This answer demonstrates that true proactivity includes foresight, courage to say “not yet,” and the judgment to act only when conditions are right.

Tell me about a risk you spotted early that everyone else missed.

Category: Behavioural

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Risk Aware

Why ask?

Short reason: Risk radar. Good answers surface signals early and drive uncomfortable truths to action.

Bad example answer

I had a gut feeling something was wrong.

Good example answer

Tiny reconciliation deltas kept showing up. I quantified exposure, traced a rounding edge case, prioritised a fix, and added a guardrail check to CI. The finance sign-off time improved, and no repeats appeared in the next quarter.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates analytical thinking, vigilance, and follow-through, which are the key traits of someone who is genuinely risk-aware. The candidate didn't rely on instinct or vague suspicion; they noticed a subtle signal ("tiny reconciliation deltas") and treated it as data worth investigating.

By quantifying the exposure, tracing the root cause, and prioritising a fix, they show both technical rigour and a bias toward action. Adding an automated guardrail check reveals a mindset focused on prevention, not just correction.

The measurable impact (faster finance sign-off and no recurrences) proves their intervention created tangible business value. This is what strong risk awareness looks like: detecting minor anomalies before they escalate, acting decisively, and leaving behind a more resilient system.

Experience Questions

Experience questions test depth and ownership. They show what someone has delivered, how they measure results, and what they’ve learned along the way.

Ask these to understand the candidate’s real-world impact; not just their responsibilities, but their results.

Questions

Were there any particular metrics that mattered in your last role, and what did you do when they moved the wrong way? And why was the metric important?26

Describe a time you shipped with a known risk.....27

Tell me about a post-incident you led. What changed the next day?.....28

Describe a recent win.....29

Were there any particular metrics that mattered in your last role, and what did you do when they moved the wrong way? And why was the metric important?

Category: Experience

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Outcome Centric

Why ask?

Short reason: Results ownership. Good answers tie actions to a meaningful metric and show how they recovered when it slipped.

Bad example answer

We watched the numbers and asked people to try harder.

Good example answer

North Star: Activation to First Successful Transaction. When it dipped 6%, we found that the KYC copy was creating confusion. I ran A/Bs, added assisted onboarding for high-risk segments, and set a temporary SLA for CS handoffs. Two sprints later, activation recovered, and ticket volume fell 10%.

Why this is a good answer

It shows accountability, analytical depth, and a clear link between metrics and meaningful outcomes. The candidate treats metrics not as vanity figures, but as diagnostic tools; when the numbers moved in the wrong direction, they investigated the reasons rather than assigning blame.

They took structured, data-driven action: identifying the root cause (confusing KYC copy), experimenting with A/B tests, and implementing operational fixes, such as assisted onboarding and SLAs. This combination of experimentation and process change shows they can influence both product and workflow levers to drive results.

The outcome (metric recovery and reduced ticket volume) closes the loop. It proves the candidate doesn't just monitor performance; they take ownership, act quickly, and measure the impact. That's the hallmark of an outcome-centric professional who leads with data and delivers measurable improvements.

Describe a time you shipped with a known risk.

Category: Experience

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Risk Aware

Why ask?

Short reason: Pragmatic risk. Good answers demonstrate mitigation, monitoring, and rollback, rather than relying on hope.

Bad example answer

We were aware of the risk but decided to proceed and keep a close eye on it.

Good example answer

Known risk: retrying edge cases could spike latency. We shipped behind a flag, rate-limited spikes, added alerts, and had a hard rollback. We monitored P95 and the error budget; no customer impact was observed. Post-fix, we added a unit guard and a canary to prevent regressions.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates pragmatic risk management, not avoidance or recklessness, but controlled execution with safeguards. The candidate clearly defines the risk, acknowledges it, and indicates that every mitigation step was intentional and measurable.

Shipping behind a flag, rate-limiting, and setting up monitoring and rollback plans show preparation and awareness of failure modes. The emphasis on tracking P95 latency and the error budget highlights a quantitative, data-driven approach to risk control.

What elevates this answer further is the learning loop: after validating that there was no customer impact, they added additional protection (a unit guard and a canary). That continuous improvement mindset demonstrates maturity; they don't just manage risk in the moment, but also strengthen the system against future occurrences. This is textbook risk-aware behaviour: informed, deliberate, and improvement-oriented.

Tell me about a post-incident you led. What changed the next day?

Category: Experience

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Risk Aware

Why ask?

Short reason: Post-incident leadership is about learning loops, not blame. Good answers indicate rapid stabilisation, next-day improvements, and a measurable decrease in repeat issues.

Bad example answer

We experienced an incident that caused issues across different parts of the system, and a variety of users may have been impacted in various ways. We convened multiple meetings with several teams to determine the best course of action. After several discussions and reviews, we agreed to closely monitor the situation while reminding everyone to be extra cautious in the future. We also planned to revisit this in later meetings to continue the conversation.

Good example answer

Short answer: Stabilised the system quickly, then addressed the root causes. Example: We hit a Sev-2 latency spike. I pulled eng, ops, and DBAs into a bridge, tripped a circuit breaker, and scaled the dependency. Customer timeouts stopped within 60 minutes. Outcome: The next day, we added a P95 SLO (300ms), a step-by-step runbook, and a synthetic probe. Over the next month, similar incidents decreased by ~40%, and MTMitigate fell from 52 million to 21 million. Learning: playbooks + SLOs shrink both blast radius and recovery time.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates accountability, composure, and a systems-thinking approach to incident management. The candidate doesn't just recount chaos or meetings; they demonstrate decisive leadership and a structured approach to recovery under pressure.

They stabilised the system quickly through coordinated action (bringing together engineering, operations, and DBAs), which shows crisis control and cross-functional leadership. But the real strength lies in what they did after stabilisation: adding SLOs, a runbook, and a synthetic probe. That shift from firefighting to prevention proves they focus on learning, not blame.

The inclusion of measurable results (fewer repeat incidents and shorter mitigation times) closes the loop and demonstrates impact. This answer shows a mature, risk-aware leader who can transform incidents into lasting improvements that permanently enhance resilience.

Describe a recent win.

Category: Experience

Difficulty: Easy

Desirable trait: Concise Communicator

Why ask?

Short reason: Can you translate effort into results? Good answers anchor a clear win to measurable outcomes and smart trade-offs.

Bad example answer

We launched something, and it went well.

Good example answer

Short answer: We improved onboarding effectiveness. Example: We reduced KYC from 5 to 3 steps through progressive disclosure and A/B-Tested the copy. Outcome: drop-off down 18%, D7 activation up 6 pts, KYC confusion tickets down ~12%. Learning: Cutting friction beats cosmetic polish, so we put the UI facelift on hold to protect momentum.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates clarity, focus, and the ability to communicate results succinctly, precisely what a concise communicator does well. The candidate immediately defines the win (“improved onboarding effectiveness”) and supports it with concrete, quantifiable results.

They highlight intelligent prioritisation: reducing steps and optimising copy to improve activation, rather than wasting effort on superficial polish. That trade-off (prioritising friction reduction over aesthetics) shows practical judgment and business awareness.

The inclusion of metrics (drop-off, activation, and support tickets) demonstrates that the improvement was measured and meaningful. The learning takeaway at the end (“cutting friction beats cosmetic polish”) reinforces reflection and strategic thinking. In short, this answer shows someone who can distil effort into clear impact, and communicate that impact efficiently and credibly.

General Knowledge Questions

General knowledge questions explore judgment, reasoning, and balance. They're not about trivia; they test how candidates think about trade-offs, constraints, and principles that guide decision-making.

Use them to assess how well someone understands the broader context.

Questions

How do you strike a balance between setting targets that are both ambitious and realistic?31

How do you balance speed and control in regulated environments?32

How do you strike a balance between setting targets that are both ambitious and realistic?

Category: General Knowledge

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Outcome Centric

Why ask?

Short reason: Target design. Good answers avoid sandbagging and fantasy, and show how to course-correct.

Bad example answer

Aim high, but make sure it's not impossible.

Good example answer

Targets: bottom-up commit plus a slight stretch. We track leading indicators and set fail-fast checkpoints with pre-agreed trade-offs to cut. Outcome: fewer thrash cycles, and we shipped more often on time without sandbagging.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates a balanced and disciplined approach to goal setting, being ambitious enough to drive performance yet grounded enough to deliver results. The candidate explains how they achieve that balance by combining bottom-up input (realistic ownership) with a slight stretch (motivational ambition).

Their use of “leading indicators” and “fail-fast checkpoints” demonstrates that they don’t set and forget targets; they manage them dynamically, adjusting their course based on evidence rather than hope. The mention of pre-agreed trade-offs indicates foresight and transparent communication with stakeholders.

Finally, the outcome (“fewer thrash cycles” and “more on-time delivery”) validates that their approach works in practice. This is what an outcome-centric mindset looks like: blending ambition with accountability to produce consistent, sustainable results.

How do you balance speed and control in regulated environments?

Category: General Knowledge

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Risk Aware

Why ask?

Short reason: Speed and control can coexist. Good answers describe enabling guardrails, early Compliance, and KRIs that keep risk in bounds.

Bad example answer

We slow things down so nothing goes wrong.

Good example answer

Move fast within guardrails: flags for change isolation, approvals only on high-risk paths, and a complete audit trail. Bring Compliance in early with short pre-reads. We track KRIs like auth failures and dispute rates, so speed doesn't blindside us. Outcome: Release cadence increased by 25% with no uptick in regulatory issues.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates a nuanced understanding of risk, showing that safety and speed are not opposites, but instead partners when handled with structure. The candidate indicates that they know how to move fast responsibly: building systems that enable velocity without sacrificing control.

By using feature flags, limiting approvals to high-risk changes, and maintaining an audit trail, they create guardrails instead of bottlenecks. Involving Compliance early shows proactive collaboration rather than reactive oversight, which prevents last-minute slowdowns.

Tracking key risk indicators (KRIs) such as authentication failures and dispute rates adds measurable accountability to their process. The quantifiable outcome (faster release cadence with no compliance incidents) proves their model works. This answer exemplifies accurate risk-aware execution: empowering progress while maintaining trust and compliance.

Leadership Questions

Leadership questions reveal influence, communication, and composure. They test how someone earns trust, handles setbacks, and creates clarity for others.

Ask these to see how candidates lead when things get tough, not just when they’re easy.

Questions

How do you deliver bad news?34

What sort of things constitute “show” activity rather than real progress to you?35

Describe a time you delivered on something that wasn’t in your job description.....36

Give an example of changing a stakeholder’s mind about a risky path.37

How do you deliver bad news?

Category: Leadership

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Concise Communicator

Why ask?

Short reason: Leadership under pressure. Good answers are honest, audience-aware, and conclude with clear owners and next steps.

Bad example answer

I try not to make a big deal of it and say we'll sort it soon.

Good example answer

Bad news playbook: facts first, impact by audience, options with trade-offs, clear recommendation, owners and timelines. For slip-on payouts, I briefed CS with talk tracks, Finance with exposure, and Engineering with the plan. Outcome: no surprises, one-day delay, and intact stakeholder trust.

Why this is a good answer

It reflects composure, clarity, and emotional intelligence, precisely what you want in a leader communicating under pressure. The candidate delivers bad news in a structured and transparent way that maintains trust and prevents panic.

They begin with facts and audience-specific impacts, demonstrating their ability to tailor communication to what matters most to each group. By presenting options and trade-offs with clear recommendations, they transform a difficult message into an actionable plan.

The follow-through (assigning owners and timelines) demonstrates leadership accountability rather than deflection. The result ("no surprises, one-day delay, and intact stakeholder trust") indicates that the approach is practical. This answer shows that effective leaders don't hide or soften bad news; they handle it decisively, communicate it clearly, and protect credibility through action.

What sort of things constitute “show” activity rather than real progress to you?

Category: Leadership

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Outcome Centric

Why ask?

Short reason: Separate progress from performance theatre. Good answers anchor on shipped outcomes, not ceremony.

Bad example answer

I think progress is evident when everyone is busy and there are numerous updates.

Good example answer

Showy work: weekly theatre decks and vanity OKRs. Real progress: shipping increments tied to activation, pruning dead projects, and closing the loop with decision logs. Example: We eliminated two low-yield initiatives and redeployed personnel to onboarding, which resulted in a 4% increase in conversion within a month.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates that the candidate can distinguish between activity and impact—a crucial skill for any leader focused on outcomes. They don't confuse visible busyness or constant reporting with meaningful progress.

By calling out “theatre decks” and “vanity OKRs,” they demonstrate the ability to challenge unproductive rituals. More importantly, they define real progress in measurable terms: shipping, pruning, and improving conversion. That shift from inputs to outcomes shows strategic clarity.

The example of redeploying people to raise conversion proves they take decisive, data-backed action to refocus effort where it matters most. This answer highlights leadership maturity, the confidence to cut noise, prioritise results, and make tough trade-offs that drive tangible business value.

Describe a time you delivered on something that wasn't in your job description.

Category: Leadership

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Proactivity

Why ask?

Short reason: Initiative plus influence. Good answers show adoption, not just effort.

Bad example answer

I took initiative and did it myself.

Good example answer

Release notes were unusable. I drafted a simple template, aligned with eng leads, and automated changelog extraction. Support tickets regarding “unexpected changes” decreased by ~12% in a quarter, and the adoption of new features increased because customers were aware of what had shipped.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates initiative with influence, the kind of proactive behaviour that creates scalable impact, not just personal effort. The candidate identifies a real pain point outside their remit (“unusable release notes”) and takes ownership to fix it, but they don't stop there.

They collaborate with engineering leads and automate the process, which turns a one-off action into a lasting improvement. That demonstrates they know how to gain buy-in, establish alignment, and drive adoption, which are hallmarks of effective leadership.

The measurable results (fewer support tickets, higher feature adoption) prove the change worked and benefited both customers and internal teams. This answer reflects mature proactivity: identifying a gap, addressing it through influence and systems thinking, and leaving the organisation better off than before.

Give an example of changing a stakeholder's mind about a risky path.

Category: Leadership

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Risk Aware

Why ask?

Short reason: Influence with evidence. Good answers blend data, story, and a safe path to yes.

Bad example answer

I push back and continue to explain my view.

Good example answer

I reframed the risk using data and compelling customer stories, proposed a phased plan with clear kill criteria, and sent a concise pre-read. After a two-week pilot, the stakeholder changed their mind and backed the safer path.

Why this is a good answer

It highlights the candidate's ability to influence without confrontation, using evidence, empathy, and structure to guide others toward a better decision. Rather than relying on persistence or personal conviction, they combine data (rational appeal) with customer stories (emotional resonance), which strengthens their argument from multiple angles.

Proposing a phased plan with explicit "kill criteria" shows pragmatic risk management; they don't argue in the abstract; they create a controlled way to test and prove their case. The pre-read and pilot demonstrate preparation, professionalism, and respect for the stakeholders' time.

The successful outcome (a changed mind and a safer path) proves that they can influence through logic and trust, rather than pressure. This is what a risk-aware leader looks like: persuasive, evidence-driven, and focused on guiding the organisation toward the right risk, not zero risk.

Problem Solving Questions

Problem-solving questions show how people approach complexity. They uncover structure, creativity, and resilience: how someone breaks down a problem, tests ideas, and learns quickly. Use these to evaluate their thinking process, not just their conclusions.

Questions

How do you decide when to stop planning and start building?39

When have you tried to deliver a message and it was misunderstood? How did you recover?40

How do you break down problems for others?41

What signals tell you a small risk is about to become an issue?42

How do you decide when to stop planning and start building?

Category: Problem Solving

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Proactivity

Why ask?

Short reason: Action bias needs guardrails. Good answers demonstrate simple heuristics for transitioning from plan to build, with fast feedback and reversibility.

Bad example answer

We plan until it feels right, and then we start.

Good example answer

Short answer: Start building when learning beats planning. Example: I time-box discovery (3-5 days), write a 1-pager, cap unknowns to 1-2, then run a 1-2 day spike behind a flag. Outcome: With batch payouts, a 5% traffic slice surfaced a constraint in 3 days and unblocked delivery. Learning: Reversibility and fast feedback are the key levers for success.

Why this is a good answer

It shows a disciplined, evidence-based approach to execution, combining decisiveness with risk control. The candidate doesn't rely on gut feel ("when it feels right") but uses clear heuristics, such as time-boxing discovery, limiting unknowns, and running small, reversible experiments.

That structure demonstrates both action bias (they don't get stuck in planning) and guardrails (they avoid reckless starts). The use of a spike behind a flag demonstrates their ability to learn safely in production-like conditions, thereby reducing risk while accelerating insight.

The outcome (uncovering a constraint early and unblocking delivery) validates that their approach produces tangible results. This is proactive thinking at its best: learning quickly, adapting confidently, and moving forward with speed and control.

When have you tried to deliver a message and it was misunderstood? How did you recover?

Category: Problem Solving
Difficulty: Hard
Desirable trait: Concise Communicator

Why ask?

Short reason: Communication isn't done at send. Good answers show feedback loops, accountability, and recovery.

Bad example answer

They misunderstood me. I explained again.

Good example answer

A roadmap email read like a commitment. I owned it, sent a one-pager with explicit decision points and dates, briefed the most impacted teams, and moved to a weekly update cadence. Misalignment dropped to zero in the next cycle, and we hit the revised plan.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates accountability, adaptability, and mastery of communication as an ongoing process, not a one-time act. The candidate doesn't blame others for the misunderstanding; they own it and take responsibility for clarifying the issue.

Their response is structured and thoughtful: simplifying the message into a concise one-pager, clarifying decision points, and tailoring communication to the most affected teams. The introduction of a weekly cadence indicates that they have created a sustained feedback loop to prevent recurrence.

The measurable outcome (zero misalignment and successful delivery) confirms that their adjustments worked. This answer reflects a concise communicator who listens, learns, and refines their approach until understanding is achieved. It's not about speaking more; it's about communicating better.

How do you break down problems for others?

Category: Problem Solving

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Outcome Centric

Why ask?

Short reason: From outcome to tasks. Good answers show causal decomposition, risks, and ownership.

Bad example answer

I break it into tasks and get people working.

Good example answer

Start with the outcome, decompose into capabilities, write crisp acceptance criteria, and sketch dependencies. Share a sequence plan with owners and risks, and keep a living decision log. Result: fewer re-work loops and clearer handoffs across teams.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates structured thinking, clarity, and leadership in guiding others through complex situations. The candidate doesn't just slice work into arbitrary tasks. They start with the desired outcome and work backwards, ensuring that every piece of work serves a clear purpose.

By defining capabilities, acceptance criteria, and dependencies, they demonstrate causal reasoning. They understand why each step matters, not just what needs to be done. Sharing ownership, outlining risks, and maintaining a decision log highlights transparency and accountability.

The outcome (fewer rework loops and smoother handoffs) proves that this approach not only clarifies execution but also improves team alignment and delivery quality. This answer exemplifies an outcome-centric mindset: start with impact, organise around clarity, and deliver with precision.

What signals tell you a small risk is about to become an issue?

Category: Problem Solving

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Risk Aware

Why ask?

Short reason: Early risk detection. Good answers name leading indicators and when to escalate.

Bad example answer

You can tell when things feel off, so I wait and see.

Good example answer

Early indicators: retried requests, error budget burn, queue depth, and unusual phrases in tickets. When they flicker, I triage, add guardrails, and raise visibility. This approach reduced customer-visible incidents by 30% quarter-over-quarter.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates a systematic awareness and proactive risk management approach. The candidate doesn't rely on intuition or vague "gut feelings". They identify concrete, measurable leading indicators that signal when minor issues are trending toward real impact.

Their mention of metrics such as retries, error budget burn, and queue depth demonstrates an analytical mindset grounded in data. Noticing patterns in customer tickets adds a qualitative dimension, proving they balance technical and human signals.

The response also demonstrates clear escalation discipline, including triage, the application of guardrails, and increased visibility. Those steps prevent problems from escalating unnoticed. The measurable result (a 30% reduction in customer-visible incidents) demonstrates that their vigilance yields tangible improvements. This is what risk-aware leadership looks like: spotting trouble early, acting decisively, and turning observation into prevention.

Scenario-Based Questions

Scenario-based questions simulate real situations and test judgment in motion. They expose how someone reacts when information is incomplete, pressure is high, or priorities conflict. Use them to see how candidates think on their feet and translate principles into action.

Questions

If I gave you one month and no roadmap, how would you decide what to deliver?44

Tell me about a decision you made when you didn’t have all the info.45

Describe the different users of your current product and how you went about understanding their needs.46

What’s your approach to risk when the customer impact is unclear but potentially significant?47

If I gave you one month and no roadmap, how would you decide what to deliver?

Category: Scenario-Based
Difficulty: Medium
Desirable trait: Outcome Centric

Why ask?

Short reason: Value first. Good answers reveal how they find the thinnest slice, get feedback fast, and avoid building blind.

Bad example answer

I'd pick something promising and get cracking.

Good example answer

No roadmap? I define the outcome, list the top problems, size the impact versus the effort, and pick a thin slice that we can ship in week one. I line up 5-7 users for feedback and instrument from day one. Result: Within two weeks, we achieved a 12% uplift in the target metric, leaving a clear backlog of subsequent bets.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates strategic focus, structured thinking, and an outcome-driven mindset, precisely what's needed when direction is ambiguous. The candidate doesn't freeze in uncertainty or dive straight into activity; instead, they create clarity by defining the desired outcome first.

They then prioritise intelligently, using impact-versus-effort sizing to find a small, testable "thin slice" that can deliver value quickly. That approach strikes a balance between speed and learning, ensuring progress without waste.

The inclusion of user feedback loops and instrumentation from the outset demonstrates a commitment to validation and continuous improvement. The measurable result (a 12% uplift in the target metric) proves that their method delivers real impact. This is what outcome-centric initiative looks like: clear goals, intelligent prioritisation, rapid feedback, and data-backed success.

Tell me about a decision you made when you didn't have all the info.

Category: Scenario-Based

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Proactivity

Why ask?

Short reason: Judgment under uncertainty. Good answers constrain the blast radius and make learning more affordable.

Bad example answer

I wait until I have more information, unless I need to decide on the spot.

Good example answer

With patchy info, I set guardrails and run a reversible pilot at -10% exposure, instrument outcomes, consult a domain expert, and make rollback literal. On a pricing tweak, we learned within a week and avoided a full-blast misstep.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates calm, structured decision-making in the face of uncertainty, which is a key marker of proactive leadership. The candidate doesn't stall for perfect information or act recklessly; instead, they reduce risk through constraints and learning loops.

By defining guardrails, limiting exposure, and making rollback literal, they demonstrate an understanding of how to mitigate risk in action. Consulting a domain expert adds balance; they value expertise but still take ownership of the decision.

The example of running a reversible pilot and gathering data within a week demonstrates that they act quickly, learn quickly, and adjust quickly. This answer reflects sound judgement and proactivity: acting decisively within limits, extracting insight early, and turning uncertainty into controlled discovery.

Describe the different users of your current product and how you went about understanding their needs.

Category: Scenario-Based
Difficulty: Hard
Desirable trait: Concise Communicator

Why ask?

Short reason: Audience clarity. Good answers segment users and ground decisions in evidence, not vibes.

Bad example answer

We have different users, and we asked around.

Good example answer

Users: SMB admins, accountants, and developers. I conducted six interviews, analysed support tickets, and mapped jobs-to-be-done. We prioritised audit exports for accountants, which increased retention by ~4% and reduced month-end reconciliation time for two pilot firms by ~20%.

Why this is a good answer

It highlights clarity of thought, user empathy, and data-informed decision-making, which are all essential qualities of a concise communicator. The candidate doesn't talk vaguely about "users" or "feedback"; they segment their audience precisely (admins, accountants, developers) and describe how they gathered insights through structured, evidence-based methods.

By combining qualitative research (interviews, ticket analysis) with a clear jobs-to-be-done framework, they show that their communication and prioritisation are rooted in real needs, not assumptions.

The measurable outcomes (improved retention and faster reconciliation) validate that their user understanding led to impactful decisions. This answer exemplifies audience clarity in action: knowing exactly who you're building for, what matters to them, and how to prove the result.

What's your approach to risk when the customer impact is unclear but potentially significant?

Category: Scenario-Based

Difficulty: Hard

Desirable trait: Risk Aware

Why ask?

Short reason: Ambiguity management. Good answers weigh reversibility, monitoring, and abort criteria.

Bad example answer

If it seems risky, I'd probably hold off or just proceed carefully.

Good example answer

When the impact is unclear but potentially significant, I check reversibility, run a thorough probe with close monitoring, and establish strict abort criteria. I make uncertainty explicit and pre-agree on decision points. This kept the risk low while we validated the value on a sensitive change.

Why this is a good answer

It shows composure, structure, and balance when facing ambiguity, which are the hallmarks of a genuinely risk-aware professional. The candidate doesn't default to avoidance ("hold off") or blind optimism ("proceed carefully"); instead, they apply a disciplined framework to navigate uncertainty.

By assessing reversibility and defining abort criteria upfront, they ensure that even if things go wrong, the downside is controlled. Running a monitored probe reflects a scientific approach, testing hypotheses safely before full rollout.

Making uncertainty explicit and agreeing on decision points demonstrates transparency and stakeholder alignment, which builds trust during uncertain decisions. The result (validating value while keeping risk low) shows they can manage unknowns confidently and systematically.

Technical Questions

Technical questions reveal clarity, precision, and practical understanding. They’re less about rote knowledge and more about how someone applies expertise to real problems.

Use these to assess not only skill depth but also how effectively a candidate communicates what they know.

Questions

How do you balance delivering features with automating parts of your role?49

Describe a time you changed based on some feedback you were given.....50

How do you balance delivering features with automating parts of your role?

Category: Technical

Difficulty: Medium

Desirable trait: Proactivity

Why ask?

Short reason: System stewardship. Good answers invest in removing toil with a clear ROI.

Bad example answer

I focus on features and automate when I have time.

Good example answer

I protect 10-15% capacity for automation that kills toil. We maintain a backlog ranked by hours saved and defect risk, review ROI quarterly, and incorporate wins into our daily rituals. Result: fewer manual errors and faster releases on repeat flows.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates long-term thinking, discipline, and a proactive approach to improving systems, rather than just delivering outputs. The candidate treats automation as a strategic investment, not a “nice-to-have,” by dedicating capacity to it.

Maintaining a ranked backlog and reviewing ROI quarterly demonstrates a measured, data-driven mindset. They're not automating for automation's sake but to maximise time saved and reduce risk. Integrating automation wins into daily rituals shows they care about sustainability and team culture, not just quick fixes.

The tangible results (fewer manual errors and faster releases) prove the approach drives measurable efficiency gains. This answer embodies faithful system stewardship, striking a balance between delivering short-term features and ensuring long-term scalability and resilience.

Describe a time you changed based on some feedback you were given.

Category: Technical

Difficulty: Easy

Desirable trait: Concise Communicator

Why ask?

Short reason: Growth mindset in practice. Good answers turn feedback into a tangible change that improves decisions.

Bad example answer

I listened to the feedback and made an effort to improve.

Good example answer

Feedback: My incident updates rambled. I switched to a template (Impact, Status, Next Steps, ETA) and added a dashboard link. Adoption spread across teams, and decisions sped up because updates were scannable.

Why this is a good answer

It demonstrates humility, adaptability, and practical improvement, which are the foundations of a growth mindset and strong communication skills. The candidate doesn't treat feedback as a formality; they act on it decisively and show tangible change.

By creating and adopting a structured communication template, they demonstrate clarity and focus, key traits of a concise communicator. The addition of a dashboard link shows that they consider usability and accessibility, not just presentation.

The fact that other teams adopted their approach proves the change had real value beyond personal improvement. The measurable outcome (faster decisions) connects communication quality directly to business impact. This is what actionable growth looks like: listening, adapting, and leaving a lasting positive effect.