

Career goals interview questions

During interviews, ask candidates **career goals interview questions** to learn whether their professional aspirations match your open role and business objectives.

Why ask about candidates' career goals in interviews

Interview questions about candidates' career goals help you:

- **Make better hiring decisions.** It's best to select candidates whose long-term goals match your business objectives.
- **Increase [job offer acceptance rates](#).** Candidates want to work at companies that are interested in their long-term goals and invest in their development.
- **Build complete candidate profiles.** Get to know candidates better by gathering information about their aspirations, motives and training needs.
- **Create a [talent acquisition strategy](#).** Identify candidates who'd be a potential fit for other roles within your company, currently or in the future.

In most cases, candidates won't describe career goals that are unrelated to the role you're hiring for. Ask targeted interview questions to learn about their goals and how they plan to achieve them.

Job-related goals could be about:

- **Covering knowledge or experience gaps**
 - Example: *"As I'm kickstarting my career in web design, I'd like to gain more experience, work on X software and eventually take on challenging projects."*
- **Learning about new disciplines**
 - Example: *"Being in sales, I think that learning more about marketing techniques and psychology will help me better understand consumer behavior."*
- **Acquiring skills**
 - Example: *"I want to master my public-speaking skills as I see myself becoming a company representative during events."*
- **Building a career path**
 - Example: *"In the next five years, I want to expand my knowledge of Swift and build mobile apps as part of a team."*

Here's how to ask about candidates' professional goals:

Examples of career goals interview questions

- What would you like to learn more about in your field of expertise?
- Do you plan to pursue additional education? If so, what field would you choose?
- What are your future career goals and what do you plan to do to achieve them? (e.g. in the next five years)
- What skills or knowledge would make you better at your current role?
- What made you look for a new job?
- What are you looking for in your next position?
- Do you think this position aligns with your professional goals? In which ways?
- Do you prefer becoming an expert in your field or broadening your knowledge of different disciplines? Why?
- Given the option, what project would you choose: one that matches your current skills and knowledge and requires you leading a team, or one where you'll work on something less familiar but you'll be able to collaborate with colleagues?
- What do you do to achieve your professional goals?
- What would getting this job mean to you? (e.g. professionally and personally)

How to assess candidates' answers in career goals interview questions

- Discuss career goals during interviews and use them as a starting point for building employee learning and development programs. If you decide to hire a candidate, design their [career paths](#) based on what motivates them.
- Don't confuse career goals with climbing the ladder. Some employees want to gain new knowledge or cultivate skills that'll help them improve in what they're already doing. Check whether these goals are relevant to your open role.
- A desire to pursue studies in the future should not be a reason to disqualify candidates. Instead, ask good candidates follow up questions to learn why they're interested in this area of studies and mention ways that your company can help, if applicable (e.g. sponsor part of the studies or provide tickets to relevant conferences.)
- Keep in mind that [careers are not linear](#). If candidates' professional aspirations seem at first sight irrelevant to their studies or experience so far, don't raise a red flag. Instead, try to learn more about their motives. Employees with mixed academic and work backgrounds are often standout workers: they're curious, [adaptive](#) and risk-takers.

Red flags

- **Their answers don't align with business goals.** If candidates want to take a different direction in their career that doesn't align with the position you're hiring for, you might struggle retaining them in the long run.
- **They lack aspiration.** Good employees seek to develop themselves, despite their level of knowledge and experience. Candidates who struggle to set goals, whether short-term or

long-term, are likely to be [disengaged](#) in their position.

- **They offer canned, clichéd answers.** Candidates might expect a “Where do you see yourself in five years” question and try to impress you with prepared responses. Aim for more specific questions and look for people who will openly discuss their goals, instead of just saying what you’d want to hear.
- **They provide vague or unrealistic career goals.** While it’s natural for recent graduates to have an unclear idea of what they want to do with their future, it might be a warning sign for more experienced professionals. Also, if their plans aren’t realistic (e.g. “*I want to increase sales revenue by 50% in my first month*”) that’s an indicator they mightn’t have a good understanding of the industry or their abilities.

Don’t miss: [The best interview questions to ask candidates.](#)