

LAND THE JOB

Jeff Bezos' 3-question rule for hiring new Amazon employees—and how to answer them right

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It takes a lot more than an impressive resume to land a job at Amazon.

Even in its early years, when the online retailer had just 2,100 employees, founder and CEO Jeff Bezos was fastidious about hiring the strongest employees possible.

In fact, according to Nicholas Lovejoy, who joined the company as its fifth employee in 1995, Bezos would grill every candidate himself. “One of his mottos was that each time we hired someone, he or she should raise the bar for the next hire,” Lovejoy said in a 1999 interview with *Wired*.

Jeff Bezos' 3-question hiring test

Today, given his busy schedule and Amazon's rapid growth, it's unlikely that Bezos — who has a current net worth of \$192 billion, according to *Forbes* — has the time to meet with every candidate.

But, to ensure that the company would retain its high standards, Bezos outlined three key questions for leaders to consider before hiring new employees in his 1998 letter to shareholders.

Although written 22 years ago, these are timeless questions that both hiring managers and candidates should think about before any job interview:

1. “Will you admire this person?”

“If you think about the people you’ve admired in your life, they are probably people you’ve been able to learn from or take an example from,” Bezos wrote in the letter, adding that he’s always tried to work only with people he admires.

Interview tip for candidates: I’ve interviewed hundreds of people throughout my career, and two admirable traits that I consistently look for are integrity and leadership.

I do this by asking them to describe a time they’ve had to handle a difficult situation. I essentially want to know: Did they use diplomacy? What were their intentions? Can they be trusted? What does their thought process say about them as a person?

2. “Will this person raise the average level of effectiveness of the group they’re entering?”

“The bar has to continuously go up,” Bezos wrote in his letter.

The problem is, it can be difficult for hiring managers to tell if a candidate, once hired, will remain engaged and eager to grow with the company for years to come.

“Long-term thinking is a core value cemented in Amazon’s history since our inception,” according to Amazon’s Day One blog. (And it’s true: Some of Amazon’s most successful business areas, like Amazon Prime and Amazon Web Services, launched many years ago.)

Interview tip for candidates: To fight entropy, Bezos always asked candidates how they visualize the company five years from now. “At that point,” he wrote, “each of us should look around and say, ‘The standards are so high now — boy, I’m glad I got in when I did!’”

Before your interview, research the company’s values and be prepared to talk about how you plan to exceed expectations and goals as the company grows.

3. “Along what dimension might this person be a superstar?”

In addition to their skills and experience, Bezos said it’s important to consider a candidate’s individual talents.

“One person here is a National Spelling Bee champion,” he wrote. “I suspect it doesn’t help her in her everyday work, but it does make working here more fun if you can occasionally snag her in the hall with a quick challenge: ‘Onomatopoeia!’”

Superstar employees can be mavericks, radical and a little rebellious, too — and although these types may be “a little bit annoying” and “not always the easiest to get along with,” Bezos said in a 2018 interview, “you want them at your organization” because they encourage innovative thinking.

Interview tip for candidates: Having extracurricular activities, odd hobbies and unique skills that are unrelated to your job gives you edge and shows you can offer different perspectives. Put these on your resume and find ways to bring them up during the interview.

I also love hearing stories about how a candidate successfully implemented a creative solution to a problem, or about how they contributed to the company culture in a way that helped make the workplace more fun and interesting.

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