



Interview Questions to Help Identify Complainers and Contributors

Below are several interview questions used by human resource professionals that help them determine who might be a chronic Complainer instead of a Contributor. Choose the questions that fit you and your organization best and be consistent in asking similar questions when interviewing applicants or people who wish to transfer or seek a promotion. In particular, you are watching and listening to see if someone is self-aware, is a problem solver, and takes responsibility for his or her own actions and mistakes or participates in the blame game.

General Questions about Working Style, Preferences and Handling Stress

- What do/did you like least about your current/last job?
- Do you prefer to work under supervision or on your own?
- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What top three things motivate you?
- What does open-door policy mean to you?
- Where do you see yourself in five or so years?
- Give me an example, or describe a time, you worked under pressure. How did you handle the stress?

“Use follow-up questions to determine if they were part of problem solving process or just complained about it.”

Questions about Working with Others

- If I were to call your previous manager for a reference, what would they tell me?
- What would your supervisor say about your ability to work well with others?
- What qualities do you seek in your leaders/managers?
- What would your previous employers tell me about you?
- What would your previous co-workers tell me about you?

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- What would your supervisor say about your response to supervision?
- Describe what makes you successful on a team?
- Do you enjoy working on teams? If so, why?

Questions about Taking Responsibility for Failure or When Blamed

- Tell me about three times when you failed.
 - How did it happen?
 - What did you do to correct it?

“Hopefully you'll get past the one or two failures that people package to look good.”
- What would you describe as your biggest failure?
- Tell me about a time when you were blamed for someone else's work?
- Tell me about a time when you failed and it wasn't your fault.

Questions about Conflict and Conflict Resolution

- Describe your temperament.

“To dig further, consider giving yourself as an example and ask, ‘If I upset or anger you, how would you handle the situation and what would you say to me?’”
- How do you handle a co-worker who will not do his/her fair share?
- How did you handle a difficult co-worker, or one you did not get along with? What would you change or do different if ever in the same situation?
- How did you handle a supervisor you did not get along with?

Questions about Professionalism and Ethics

- What would you do if you see or know a co-worker is violating work rules/policies?
- If someone told you something about another co-worker, what would you do or say?



Managerial Candidates

In addition to the questions above, you may want to consider asking these additional questions of candidates for management roles.

Questions about Leadership Style

- Describe the best leader you ever had. How has that leader affected your leadership behavior?
- Give me an example of a process, project, or idea you presented that was implemented?
- How do you interact with HR, or the HR department?
- When do you seek HR's assistance or guidance?
- When do you seek help from your boss or supervisor?
- What is your greatest accomplishment in a supervising/managing role?

Questions about Coaching and Counseling Style

- How do you handle an employee that is difficult and or resistant to participating on team projects or does not contribute their share on projects?
- How do you handle an employee that does not agree with you?
- What qualities do you determine are essential for the success of your employees?
- How do you provide feedback to your employee?
- How do you correct an employee when they do something inappropriate?
- What is your definition of progressive discipline?

Questions about Handling Conflict, Failure and Disappointment

- Have you ever disagreed with your superiors and how do let him/her know? If so, describe how you continue working with him/her on assigned projects/assignments?
- What is your biggest failure as a supervisor/manager?



- Describe a time you had to complete a difficult project but were not provided the resources you wanted or thought you should have to complete the project? Did you complete the project timely? What was the outcome?
- Describe a time when you did not successfully complete a project as expected? What did you learn from the processes/outcome?

Rationale for questions

Many of the HR professionals offered their thoughts to support questions and how they are applied. Here are their general comments about determining a candidate's professionalism and deciding if you have a Complainer or a Contributor.

"If a candidate can own up to mistakes and take positive steps forward, he or she may bring a good dynamic to the team. This behavior also informs you whether the candidate takes his or her role seriously and looks to the benefit of his or her organization. In addition, the language used in responses plays a role."

"Look at the body language of the candidate and also listen to the response given. If the body language changes from responding to one question as opposed to others, it may trigger you to delve further into the response. Also, listen for a response that appears to be more 'them versus me.' Realize in interviewing people that their thoughts tend to become their behaviors. Paying attention to what candidates are not verbally saying is key in making your decisions."

Thank you to the HR Professionals who participated in my Walk, Talk & Negotiate Like a CEO programs at the HR Southwest Conference and the CVB HR Summit. Several offered questions and their rationale for using them to avoid Complainers.

AND THE DISCLAIMER: These questions are provided as examples but no one is suggesting that you use them. Under no circumstances is any of the above to be considered legal or employment advice. (Nope, not a smidge of legal advice here.)