

"What is your greatest weakness?"

Many interview guides will tell you to answer this question with a positive trait disguised as a weakness. For example, "I tend to expect others to work as hard as I do," or "I'm a perfectionist." Interviewers have heard these canned answers over and over again, so they're likely to backfire on you. They'll think: (1) You're not being honest about your true weaknesses and are just regurgitating someone's advice; (2) You feel that expecting others to work hard and striving for perfection (or whatever other "disguised" positive traits you use) are weaknesses, which makes you look ignorant, naïve and/or lazy; (3) You don't know how to do an honest self-assessment; or (4) You're delusional and think you don't have any real weaknesses.

State a true weakness! No one is perfect, so don't try to convince anyone (especially yourself) that you don't have one. However, I cannot overemphasize the importance of not listing a key element of the position as a weakness! If you do that, you might as well send yourself the rejection letter. Pick a neutral weakness about something that's not critical to the job.

Then emphasize what you've done to overcome the weakness.

This shows that you are honest, that you recognize areas in which you need to grow, and that you are actively seeking ways to improve yourself.

Sample Answers:

"I've had trouble delegating duties to others because I felt I could do things better and faster myself. This has sometimes backfired because I'd end up with more than I could handle and the quality of my work would suffer. But I've taken courses in time management and effective delegation, so I feel I've made great progress in overcoming this weakness." [NOTE: You would not want to use this example for a supervisory position!]

"I'm very weak in math and have to rely on a calculator even for basic computations. I always have one with me just in case a calculation is needed." [NOTE: You would not want to use this example for an accounting position or one that requires math skills!]