

— ELEVEN QUESTIONS

The emotional intelligence interviewing guide

Hire for the skills that shape a culture, not just the ones on the résumé.

Four skills, eleven questions, one page each



These questions gather evidence about a candidate's emotional and social competence. Each one comes with what to listen for and room to write. Ask the question, stay quiet, and let the follow-ups come from what they actually say.

QUESTIONS 1 - 3

Self-awareness

Can they name what they feel while they are feeling it — and tell the truth about what they are not good at?

QUESTIONS 4 - 5

Self-management

Under pressure and through change, what do they do with the feeling once they have named it?

QUESTIONS 6 - 7

Social awareness

Do they read a room, notice when it shifts, and hear what is underneath the words?

QUESTIONS 8 - 11

Relationship management

When it is hard between two people, can they stay in the room and get the work done anyway?

QUESTION 01

SELF-AWARENESS

Tell me about a time when you felt confident in your abilities.

What was the situation? Why did you feel confident? How did you know? What was the result?

LISTEN FOR

Genuine confidence, plus recognition that different situations or people can shift it. Modesty or inexperience may show up — but not at the expense of self-belief.

NOTES

QUESTION 02

SELF-AWARENESS

Think of a situation at work where you felt angry or frustrated — whether or not you showed it.

How did you know you were feeling that way? What did you say or do? What impact did you have on the others involved?

LISTEN FOR

Someone who recognizes their emotions as they happen and sees how people and situations shape their state. The strongest also name the effect their behavior had on others.

NOTES

QUESTION 03

SELF-AWARENESS

Everyone is better at some things than others. What is something that isn't one of your strengths?

What have you done in your professional life to accommodate for it?

LISTEN FOR

Willingness to admit a shortcoming. Watch how they handle the stress of the question — and listen for how they manage the weakness, not just that they have one.

NOTES

QUESTION 04

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Tell me about a stressful situation you faced.

Walk me through it, and through how you responded.

LISTEN FOR

Someone who resists the urge to act or speak when it will not help. High EQ tolerates frustration without getting upset and works to make the most of a bad situation.

NOTES

QUESTION 05

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Tell me about a time you faced a significant change.

What was the nature of the change, and how did you react?

LISTEN FOR

Someone who accepted the change early rather than resisting it for months, handled the situation well, and managed the stress that came with it.

NOTES

QUESTION 06

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Have you ever walked into a group and noticed the mood in the room?

Tell me about it. And a time the mood changed — what was it before, what was it after, and how did you notice?

LISTEN FOR

Skill at reading what a group is feeling. A good candidate can describe how the mood moved and which cues they followed to track it.

NOTES

QUESTION 07

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Tell me about a time you gave someone feedback — and a time someone gave feedback to you.

What were the situations? What you said or did, and what the other person said or did?

LISTEN FOR

Someone who hears the words and also the tone and body language, asks questions to understand the other side, and is open to feedback themselves.

NOTES

QUESTION 08

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Think of a meeting where you knew everyone well. How did you interact with them?

Now tell me how that differs from how you interact with people you don't know well.

LISTEN FOR

Withdrawing completely is a red flag. A good candidate adapts their style with people they don't know — without avoiding the interaction or losing confidence.

NOTES

QUESTION 09

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Describe a difficult conversation you faced at work.

What was it? What did you do? What was the result?

LISTEN FOR

Someone who addresses the situation rather than working around it, explains their own side clearly, and listens attentively to the other position.

NOTES

QUESTION 10

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

How would your colleagues, manager, and team describe the way you communicate?

Give me an example or two.

LISTEN FOR

Someone who gets along well with others and communicates clearly — and who can describe how they learn about people in order to work with them better.

NOTES

QUESTION 11

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Think of a challenging working relationship. What was your part in the difficulty, and what was theirs?

What did you do to address the relationship or make it more successful?

LISTEN FOR

Someone who made the most of a hard relationship: the work still got done, and the other person's needs were met as far as possible without abandoning their own.

NOTES

Hire for the inner work, not the polish

Compare notes across interviewers before you compare candidates — the pattern you each noticed is the evidence. Big Self's coaches, workshops, and AI companion, Emma, can help you build the muscle on the team you already have.

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