

GET THE JOB

Answering Tough Questions

Nobody really knows where they'll be in five years. You'll be asked anyway.

Interviews allow hiring managers to get a broader idea of who you are than any resume could ever provide. This question in particular allows them to understand your goals.

WHAT THEY'RE LOOKING FOR

The question of where you see yourself in five years is meant to measure both motivation and planning skills, and to gauge how you match with the prospective role. Companies want to know what value you'll bring as a person, beyond your experience, and how determined you are to keep learning and achieving. Your answer also frames your place in the company, as a valuable team member or perhaps an emerging leader.

People who think too little — or too much — about moving into management can find themselves on the outside looking in when a hiring decision is made. The five-year query goes directly to the heart of that decision. If you're under-qualified or under-experienced and argue you should be the CEO in a



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handful of years, your answer has illustrated a certain professional immaturity. Veteran employees with a lengthy job history but no ambition to move up may be signaling a lack of engagement or work ethic.

HOW TO ANSWER

Start with a key goal or two,

connecting these benchmarks with qualities you're trying to convey to the hiring manager. Then transition to how you plan to get there and why it's important to you. Conclude by stating how this all fits into your large career arc. Don't make a joke, imply that you don't intend to be with the company that long or make it

clear that you've never really considered the question before. Maybe you've realized that this isn't your dream job. Or maybe you just don't know where you'd like to be in five years. It's OK to say that, but it won't create the clearest pathway to being hired.

Instead, try to tailor your job search so that it fits into

the real answer. If that's not immediately possible, consider how this position can help you build needed and desired experience for later. Deeper understanding of this job, or this company, could eventually open doors to other employment opportunities that better fit your goals. Maybe it's just a chance to grow personally, as a professional or as a manager. That can become a cornerstone of your long-term plan in the meantime.

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Too often the question of where you'd like to be five years is considered from an external point of view. But the answer is about more than looking good during a job interview with a prospective employer. Set realistic career expectations, and you'll sell them on your candidacy — while also laying out an achievable set of benchmarks for yourself.

Where you see yourself in five years could, if approached the right way, become your professional destiny. For instance, if you're a naturally ambitious person, some jobs may simply be too unfulfilling to pursue. If the position doesn't align with or advance your larger professional goals, then you may need to keep looking.