

The Five Questions

The interview questions I actually ask, and what I'm listening for

I've sat on a lot of hiring panels for delivery roles. The list of certificates has never once decided the interview. What decides it is whether you can talk about real work in a way the panel believes.

These are the five questions I ask, why I ask them, what a weak answer and a strong answer sound like, and the follow-up I'll hit you with next. Read it once, then practise out loud. That's where it sticks.

Chris Lord, Founder, Digital Delivery Academy

WHY I ASK IT

What I'm really testing

A WEAK ANSWER

Sounds fine, loses the job

A STRONG ANSWER

What wins the offer

THE FOLLOW-UP

Be ready for this one

01

"Walk me through a project you've run, start to finish."

WHY I ASK IT

It's the fastest way I know to tell someone who's studied delivery from someone who's done it. I'm listening for a shape: how it started, what changed, how it landed.

A WEAK ANSWER

A tour of someone else's project, or theory. "A project typically begins with initiation..."

A STRONG ANSWER

Named phases, named documents, named decisions. "I scoped it, here's the plan I built, here's what went sideways in week three and what I did about it."

THE FOLLOW-UP

"If you ran it again tomorrow, what would you do differently?"

02

"Tell me about a time the plan changed underneath you. What did you do first?"

WHY I ASK IT

Plans always change. "What did you do first" is the whole test. Panic reorganises. Professionals assess.

A WEAK ANSWER

"I stayed calm and worked harder." Effort on its own isn't a method.

A STRONG ANSWER

"First I sized it: what does this change actually hit, scope, cost or date? Then I took the impact and a recommendation to the person who owned the decision."

THE FOLLOW-UP

"Who did you tell, and how did they take it?"

03

"Tell me about a decision you made without all the information. How did you defend it?"

WHY I ASK IT

Delivery is judgement under uncertainty. I want to see that you can commit, and that you had evidence behind the call as well as confidence.

A WEAK ANSWER

"I went with my gut and it worked out." Luck can't be defended in a review.

A STRONG ANSWER

"Here's what I knew, here's what I couldn't know, here's the risk I accepted and who I told. I'd make the same call again with the same information."

THE FOLLOW-UP

"What would have made you change your mind?"

04

“Tell me about a change you delivered that people didn’t want. How did you bring them with you?”**WHY I ASK IT**

Most change fails on the people side. I’m listening for whether you understood why they pushed back, and what you changed because of it.

A WEAK ANSWER

“I sent out a comms plan and ran some training.” Announcing a change doesn’t win anyone over.

A STRONG ANSWER

“The warehouse team thought the new system would slow them down. I got two of their supervisors into testing, fixed the three screens they hated, and they trained the rest themselves.”

THE FOLLOW-UP

“Who was the hardest person to win over, and what did it take?”

05

“Why should I trust you with my project over someone who’s been a PM for five years?”**WHY I ASK IT**

Every career changer gets this one, out loud or in the interviewer’s head. It tests whether you can turn what you’ve done into evidence an employer believes.

A WEAK ANSWER

Reeling off your years of experience and your certificates, or apologising for not having the job title yet.

A STRONG ANSWER

One real example in plain business language, the documents to prove it, and an honest gap. “Here’s what I ran, here’s the plan and risk log. My gap is vendor contracts, and here’s how I’m closing it.”

THE FOLLOW-UP

“Give me one thing a five-year PM might get wrong that you wouldn’t.”

PRACTISE BEFORE YOU’RE ASKED · YOUR AI SPARRING PARTNER

Paste this into ChatGPT, Copilot or Claude, add the five questions underneath, and answer out loud. Ten minutes, three evenings running, and you’ll walk into the real one calmer than the person with twice your certificates.

“Act as a hiring manager for a junior project manager role. Ask me the five questions below one at a time. After each answer, tell me honestly what was strong and what was weak, then ask one hard follow-up before moving on. Be direct and don’t soften your feedback.”

Want to practise these live, with me?

Free Live Decision Labs in October: 30 minutes on Zoom, a real project scenario, and you make the calls. It’s the closest thing to question one before the real interview.

Thu 8 Oct, 7pm

Lab 1: Take Control

Thu 15 Oct, 7pm

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Tue 20 Oct, 7pm

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