

"Where Do You See Yourself in Five Years?"

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It's a job-interview standard. The interviewer nearly always asks you "Where do you see yourself in five years?". We've been hearing this lame question since I was a rugrat watching *The Beverly Hillbillies*, or longer. Why do I think "Where do you see yourself in five years?" is a lame interview question? Here are my reasons:

Who knows where they're going to be in five years?

The planning horizon has shortened for all of us. No one has that much visibility. Planning your life that far out based on today's data when the central lesson of this century may be "You never know what's going to happen next!" would be out of touch and irresponsible.

If we've learned one thing about the new-millennium workplace, it's that the new information hitting us on all sides is more important than whatever we thought we knew five years or even two years ago.

It's an intrusive question.

It takes cheek to ask "Where do you see yourself in five years?" when a hiring manager isn't committing to keeping you employed five months or even five weeks from now.

Full-time salaried employment has become the least secure form of employment there is. As a job-seeker you'd be forgiven for wondering "How is it your business where I'll be in five years, when you're not offering me a five-year employment guarantee?"

The five-years question springs from the 19th century mindset where life, like business, is linear and predictable. In that mindset we consider people Adult and Responsible based on their adherence to ancient rules about diligence, obedience, advancement and the Puritan Work Ethic.

This is an awful standard to apply to today's business world, or modern life itself.

It's good for us to know what we want, and yet what we want might not map easily to our day job or place on the corporate ladder, which is sawdust now anyway.

We may have life goals that don't intersect with a neat and tidy career path with whichever employer we're talking to today. Should we share those personal life plans at an interview, when they might be divergent from the 'ideal path' imagined by our possible next boss?

Should we lie and say "I want to be right here, working for you, my dear next manager!" when asked the Five Years question? The question comes from the same place as the awful questions "What's your greatest weakness?" and "With all the talented candidates, why should we hire you?"

All three questions are obnoxious and presumptuous.

They come from the *Employers Rule and Job Applicants are Dogmeat* school of thought.

Most of us have internalized this frame, or mental model, over the years. We've drunk toxic lemonade that has helped us believe lies like "Employers get to choose, so job-seekers must grovel." We've bought into the fiction that talented candidates are everywhere you look. That isn't true, and we know it.

Employers are apoplectic over the Talent Shortage, a made-up cocktail of delusion and hubris. The Talent Shortage makes a sweet and convenient fantasy for hiring managers who can't understand why their job openings go unfilled.

Managers who have not kept pace with the talent market are frustrated that they can't find brilliant, hard-working people to perform boring, latitude-free job assignments for peanuts and at all hours of the day and night.

What the heck! they holler. *It's a national scandal - a Talent Shortage! Where are my nearly-free, grateful, nose-to-the-grindstone employees?*

It's time to tell the truth about the talent market. Employers need sharp people at least as badly as people need jobs. The more you believe in your own value, the more other people will see it too.

Sheepie grovelling job-seekers complain about the broken job search mechanism at least in part because they buy into the frame "I am one of many, a supplicant."

They can't see how that cripples them in their dealings with employers. That's why I write columns like this to remind people that they have much more to offer than what's on their resumes. They have to feel it first. Then, everyone will see it!

Who will value you when you don't value yourself?

A manager who asks the question "Where do you see yourself in five years?" isn't evil. He or she is just asleep at the wheel as so many working people are.

Somebody gave the manager a script and he or she never questioned it. A manager will ask this question without knowing what sort of answer he'd find appealing or thought-provoking, or even whether he wants his thoughts provoked.

The brainless, soul-crushing way we bring people into our organizations is the real scandal.

You get to decide how to answer the question "Where do you see yourself in five years?" and you must decide.

In every interview you'll decide where to turn the Mojo Dial based on how you're feeling that day. If you fall back into Good Little Job Seeker mode, don't be frustrated, just notice how you feel. What was happening in the room to push you into the fear zone?

When you pay attention, in the moment and afterwards, to your feelings and the energy in the room during a job interview, you will learn about yourself. You'll understand the triggers that make you anxious and eager-to-please.

Your body is more important in sensing the energy in the room than your frenzied job-interview brain can be, overwhelmed as it is with incoming data in a job interview.

You can shake a frame for the hiring manager who sleepwalks through a job interview script somebody handed him.

I hope you will do that, if not on your next interview, then the one after that. We are all stepping into our power and the Human Workplace together. We need to reinforce one another, so here's a little backbone-stiffening mojo dose for you!

I'm all for honesty, but "Where do you see yourself in five years?" is a socially inappropriate question.

If you don't see why that is, answer the question "Are you at liberty to turn around and ask the manager 'Where do YOU see yourself in five years?'" If you can already tell that wouldn't be appropriate (and in many places that would be crystal clearly the case), why should you trust the manager enough to open the vault about your life plans?

If you don't want to spill your guts, I don't blame you. I give you license to keep your business to yourself!