

What Makes You Unique?

Cheat Sheet

NOTE : In this cheat sheet, we are going to provide you with example answers to this question from three different perspectives or situations. Chances are you fall into one of these categories! Your answer will change slightly depending on the type of position you are interviewing for, whether it be entry-level, middle management or an executive position. Keep in mind that the hiring manager's expectations for the answer will be different depending on the role as well.

Situation 1

ENTRY LEVEL POSITION

You may think that this is an irrelevant question for someone interviewing for an entry-level position... after all, what does it matter if I'm just going to be folding t-shirts at the Gap? The reality is, this question is often more relevant for an entry-level position for a few reasons. For one, most of the applicants will have nearly identical qualifications, meaning this question acts as a way for hiring managers to separate candidates based on unique and interesting abilities. Secondly, since companies are so protective of (and always developing) their corporate culture, they like to identify future "culture carriers" at the early stages. Does this person have any unique and interesting traits or abilities that will be a positive influence on our culture as they advance through the company? So the main thing you want to do is identify unique traits that will complement the core responsibilities of the position while also showing that you will be a great fit culture-wise.

A

"While I understand that the bulk of my day will be spent standing in front of a table folding shirts, it is my belief that being an employee of The Gap (and specifically floor staff) is much more than the physical act of folding. Each discussion with a customer is extremely valuable and requires a certain skill set. What makes me unique is that I have had customer service training from a young age, beginning with my role as a summer camp counsellor at the age of 15. Then, during my college years I worked part-time as a greeter at my local supermarket, helping customers locate the goods they were looking for. I was actually awarded Employee of the Month twice for my contributions to customer service. Both of these positions taught me the value of customer interactions and that is what I hope to bring to the table at The Gap."

Scenario 2

Middle Management

Generally speaking, middle-management positions usually involve some kind of leadership responsibility. You've worked your way up from your entry-level position and are now in charge of one or more other employees. So now you need to show that you are capable of being a leader. With this question, you should be trying to highlight unique qualities that will feed that narrative. In other words, "I'm a great leader because of these unique characteristics."

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"From the job description, I can see how much your company values leadership qualities, particularly in the position I am here interviewing for today. I think that one thing that makes me unique is that I've had a lot of practical experience leading large groups of people. When I was in college, I played college football, and admittedly, I was not one of the better players on the team. However, the head coach saw something in me and made me an assistant coach for the defence... while I was still a player on the team! Not only was I expected to fulfill traditional assistant coach duties (like maintaining reports about our competition and helping organize practices), but I was also relied on to be a vocal motivator to more than 25 defensive players. That season we ranked first in our state on defence, and the head coach would tell you I played a big factor in that. It is my belief this unique experience has set me up well to manage a sales team at The Gap."

Scenario 3

Executive Management Position

Similar to the middle-management position, an Executive Management Position comes with its own unique responsibilities and expectations. When you get to this level, it is expected that you are a highly skilled and versatile individual, and while managing people is a big part of it, there is more to the position than leadership (although it is still very important). You need to have an advanced understanding of all elements of the company AND the industry it operates in, and what societal factors could affect the day-to-day operations of the company (and how to plan for the future considering these factors). Having said this, unique characteristics should reflect a sophisticated understanding of all elements of the company and how your skills are aligned with these elements.

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"I think we can all agree that the retail sector faces many challenges with the emergence of online shopping and other global changes. I feel like I am the right person to guide The Gap through this tumultuous time because of my unique educational background. While I completed a general bachelor of business for my undergrad, I actually did a joint masters in business and information technology. I believe this will allow me to shepherd The Gap's new online sales strategy based on the current IT climate and give us a competitive advantage in our sector. "