Ace Your Amazon Interview: 6 Keys and 5 Pitfalls to Avoid

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About the author

Andrew Franklin is founder and CEO of [Nail Your Job Interview](#) and author of bestselling [How to Get a Job at Amazon](#) in the Amazon Kindle Store. Based in the Pacific Northwest, Andrew is a consumer internet and ecommerce executive with a passion for career development, coaching, and helping others achieve their dreams. He is a former Amazon hiring manager, and currently an Elite Interview Coach who has helped hundreds of job applicants to land jobs at top firms such as Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Apple, Salesforce.com, etc. Here, he shares his experience working at Amazon and how to land a job offer there.

6 Keys to ace your amazon interview

I've spent the past several years helping numerous people prepare for interviews and land jobs at Amazon. As a former Amazon hiring manager with first-hand experience in interviewing and making hiring decisions, I understand and appreciate the unique challenges of the Amazon interview process. In this article, I'm giving you my personal experience and insights for nailing the interview and getting hired.

But first: Amazon is amazing, but it's not an easy work environment. In August 2015, The New York Times published a controversial article about Amazon's culture and work environment: [Inside Amazon: Wrestling Big Ideas in a Bruising Workplace](#). Although I don't agree with everything in the article, there is a lot of truth there. Amazon can be an amazing stepping stone to jump-start your career, but you need to understand what you're getting into. There are landmines in many places, both during the interview process and once you start working there. The time I spent at Amazon was the most important of my career. I learned to be an owner and a driver. I developed thick skin, mental toughness, bias for action, a strong sense of urgency, an analytical and driven approach, and insane customer focus. These skills have become invaluable to me as I progress in my career to become an executive. I would not trade my Amazon experience for anything else. The Amazon way really works.

I've seen several patterns of success — and some common pitfalls — as I've helped people get hired at Amazon. I wrote a book to share my knowledge and make sure you know exactly what you're getting yourself into. Here are several key highlights to help you nail your job interview with Amazon:

1. Stay the course

Amazon's recruiting process is chaotic and disorganized, and it's not uncommon for interviews to get rescheduled once or twice. Be patient. Don't get distracted or frustrated.

2. Know the principles

Study the [Amazon Leadership Principles](#) — they're critical. You might be the most technically competent candidate, but if you cannot demonstrate your cultural fit, you won't land a job at Amazon.

3. Trust the framework

In my book, I lay out a five-pillar strategic framework to prepare for the Amazon interview. Trust the framework and put it into action. It really works.

4. Do your homework

Study each interviewer's LinkedIn profile and other social profiles (e.g., Twitter, YouTube, Facebook). You want to know more about them than what they know about you.

5. Know the products

Understand from the customer's perspective how to improve Amazon's products and services. If you are applying for a position on the Amazon Marketplace team, get a seller account and start selling. If you are applying for a position in AWS, you should open a free AWS account and play with the various web services. Know the products.

6. Work your contacts

Job leads come from all places, but the best lead is from people you know. Have you partnered with Amazon in the past? Have you done any previous business with any Amazon employees? They can be the very best source of referrals for two reasons: They know the quality of your work, and they likely work in an industry or vertical similar to yours.

Need extra inspiration?

Here is a common pattern I saw among all my clients who landed offers at Amazon: Their preparation was thorough, their approach was sound, and their work ethics were unbelievable. If you need a little extra push and inspiration, you should read this Business Insider article about Kobe Bryant's insane work ethics. The great ones put in the work.

To learn about my five-pillar strategic framework and comprehensive guide to land an offer at Amazon, check out my book, How to Get a Job at Amazon, in the Kindle Store.

5 PITFALLS TO AVOID WHEN TRYING TO GET A JOB AT AMAZON

Many Amazon job applicants reach out to me for coaching after getting rejected multiple times. They don't understand what went wrong—they prepared for common interview questions, memorized Amazon leadership principles and talked to current Amazon employees to get insider tips. But they still did not get offers.

Almost without exception, they fall into one or several patterns. This post highlights five common pitfalls to avoid if you're trying to get hired at Amazon.

1. You're trying to land an Amazon offer while making a career transition

Here are two typical scenarios:
- You're a project manager at your current company, and you have few technical skills. You applied for a technical program manager (TPM) position at Amazon. Amazon requires TPMs to pass Software Development Engineer 1 (SDE 1) bar. You need to be able to answer college-level data structure and algorithm questions. Project management is part of what a TPM does, but the TPM role is broader than classic project management. It's difficult for project managers to move into TPM roles at Amazon unless they have a strong technical background.
- You're a software developer or QA engineer at your company. You're tired of coding and want out of engineering. You applied for TPM position at Amazon, but there's one problem—you've never done any TPM. You do have strong technical skills, but the TPM role also requires project management, requirement writing, and interpersonal skills. If

you want to move from software development to TPM, you should first make the transition inside your current company. It's difficult to switch companies and roles at the same time.

Key takeaway: Amazon doesn't have time to train people. It operates in a highly competitive, fast-moving environment. If you need to make a career transition from one type of role to another, make the transition at your current company. Then apply for a similar role at Amazon.

2. You didn't answer the Amazon leadership principle questions well

You memorized Amazon leadership principles. When asked a behavioral question, you immediately tried to figure out which leadership principle was relevant to the question. You even mentioned the principles several times.

The problem is likely that your approach was mechanical and blatant. The key to answering leadership principle questions is to tell a compelling story that demonstrates your character, leadership qualities, and communication skills. If you possess the leadership principles, they will be demonstrated as you tell the story. Don't blatantly announce that you have all of these qualities; it doesn't mean anything anyway, unless you can provide specific and compelling examples.

Key takeaway: Follow the five-key framework in my book, How to Get a Job at Amazon, to prepare for the Amazon leadership questions. Tell compelling, specific stories that demonstrate your character and skills. Don't sound mechanical and blatant in your answers.

3. You have little or no technical and/or domain experience

Let's say you come from a completely different industry. You have few technical skills and no relevant domain knowledge. Maybe you're a city planner with 30 years of experience who wants to become a TPM, or a power plant consultant who wants to join the Amazon Marketplace team. I like to encourage folks to dream big and try new things. However, if you're serious about getting a job at Amazon, stay within your core competency. Unlike Google, which focuses more on general cognitive abilities, Amazon likes to hire people with tons of relevant experience. In fact, the more relevant your experience is to the Amazon role you're applying for, the easier it will be to receive an offer.

Amazon's business is moving at breakneck speed. It needs people who are ready to contribute on day one. There's no patience for people to develop and mature. If your goal is do something different from your current role but you still want to work for Amazon, I suggest you take a role inside Amazon that is similar to your current role. You can switch to a different role later. It's much easier to switch once you're inside Amazon.

Key takeaway: Find your sweet spot and know your strength. Leverage your relevant technical and domain experience. Target Amazon openings where you can start adding value on day one—this makes it easier to land an offer.

4. You didn't communicate well

Amazon interviewers are busy people. They need you to get to the point. Unfortunately, many job applicants have a stream-of-consciousness communication style; it's like a massive download of what's on their mind. Or, they keep talking without pausing to read the other person's reaction.

Adopt a more structured communication style. State your key points upfront and then provide examples. Use such words and phrases as "first, second, third, in conclusion, what I learned," etc., to structure your answer. If you're not used to talking in a structured way, consider writing down your answers, and then ask a friend to conduct a mock interview with you. Your communication style can make or break your interview.

Key takeaway: Structure, clarity, and brevity—focus on improving your communication in these three areas. Write down your answers and practice. Communication is a learned skill. You can make meaningful improvement in a short time if you work at it.

5. You don't understand Amazon from an end-user perspective

"What is your favorite Amazon feature?" "How would you improve Amazon?" Most applicants expect these questions, but they don't do enough homework to answer them thoroughly.

Customer obsession is a critical part of Amazon culture. You must demonstrate your customer focus. To answer these questions, think through your own experience of using various Amazon products and services. Which one is your favorite? Why do you like it so much? What makes it different from competing products or services? Come up with unique insights that demonstrate your blend of skills, critical thinking, and customer focus. An answer such as, "I like Amazon search, because I can find all the products I want" is not a very good answer. It's too generic and offers no insight into your thought process.

Key takeaway: Prepare thorough answers to such questions beforehand. Choose answers that offer unique insights and help the interviewers understand who you are.

Conclusion

An Amazon job interview is intense and unique. To get hired, you must be both flexible and prepared. By avoiding these five common pitfalls, you'll be much better-positioned to land an offer. Use my best-selling Kindle book, How to Get a Job at Amazon, to help you prepare.

You're NOT too old to get a job at Amazon: 5 Tips for the over-40 crowd

"Am I too old for Amazon?"

This is a common question I get from coaching clients in their 40s and 50s who feel insecure about their chances of landing a job at Amazon. Here's the short answer:

No, you're not too old. Amazon is not perfect, but it's as much a meritocracy as any other tech company. If you have the right skills and you're a good culture fit, age will not be a barrier for you to get a job at Amazon. I've helped many folks in their 40s and 50s land such jobs as software development engineer, software development manager, AWS solution architect and more. And I have plenty of experience and advice on the matter, which I'm sharing with you in this post.

If you're over 40 and considering interviewing for a position at Amazon, read this.

1. Respect Amazon's interview process

As someone with 20- or 30-plus years of experience, you might feel it's an insult for Amazon interviewers to ask you basic algorithm and data structure questions. If you want to get a job there, you'll need to respect the Amazon recruiting machine. Just like younger applicants, you should be prepared to answer data structure and algorithm questions.

When it comes to questions about your experience, choose more recent and relevant experience. What you've done 20 years ago might have little relevance to today's work environment.

However, emphasize that with your experience, you can be particularly valuable to serve as a mentor and a coach to younger employees. Write down career lessons you have learned. Start a blog. Publish a book. Demonstrate that you are willing to serve as a mentor who can help younger employees accelerate their careers.

2. Be realistic about job title and level

Amazon has a flat organizational structure. You must be willing to work for managers who are many years younger and less experienced than you. Job title deflation is an issue at Amazon due to this flat structure, but if you're open to a lower job title and level, you'll have a lot more

opportunities (having a lesser title doesn't mean you'll be under compensated, however — Amazon salaries, sign-on bonuses and stocks are competitive).

Be upfront and transparent with Amazon recruiters about your job level expectation. You can tell them that at this stage of your career, you're willing to take a lesser role, because you want to focus on what you enjoy doing and what you're good at. As a manager, I'd be more than happy to have someone who is overqualified on my team. You'll make my life easier.

3. Keep up with the latest in Amazon technology

It's a no-brainer that you should be an Amazon Prime member. You should watch Amazon Video. You should know Amazon devices like the Fire Stick and Amazon Echo. If you are applying for a position in AWS, open a free AWS account and play with the various services. Read Amazon Web Service blogs and case studies. There is so much information out there on Amazon innovations; make sure to stay current on the latest technology, features and functionality.

4. Take care of yourself

Age is just a number. You have so much experience and expertise to contribute to the world — but, you need to have the energy and mental sharpness to sustain it.

I have worked with and managed several older workers. The really good ones are some of the best colleagues I have ever worked with. They're highly skilled, experienced and savvy. They are also at a stage of their career that they don't feel like they need to prove themselves. The mix of self-confidence, humility and life experience makes it a joy to work with them.

On the other hand, I have also worked with older colleagues whom I secretly wished would retire soon. Almost without exception, these folks tend to be 10-20 years behind the times in terms of skills and industry knowledge. Most of them also have developed memory issues. They simply forget things.

None of us will stay young forever. Exercise regularly, eat healthy and remain sharp. Tom Brady of the New England Patriots is still performing at a very high level at age 40 because he put in tremendous effort to stay healthy and fit. To have a successful and long career, take care of your health.

5. Establish the proper mindset to stay young

You're not too old! Don't buy into what you read in the media. Just to give you a few examples:
- Sam Walton founded Walmart when he was 44
- Julia Child published her first cook at age 50

- Ray Kroc started McDonald's at age 52
- Colonel Sanders franchised Kentucky Fried Chicken when he was 62
- Warren Buffet is still working at age 87 — and his partner Charlie Munger is too, at age 94

The great ones get better as they age. You have so much experience, expertise and savvy to give to this world!

6. Have confidence

With your experience and expertise, you have a lot to bring to Amazon at this stage of your career. With the proper mindset, preparation and skills, you will be able to land a job at Amazon and continue to grow your career. I love helping older tech workers, and if you need coaching, feel free to contact me below.

Amazon Web Services Interview Tips

In the past several months, I have coached several clients to secure offers from Amazon Web Services (AWS) in several roles: Software Development Engineer, Software Development Manager, Business Development Manager, Technical Program Manager (TPM), Solution Architect and Senior Financial Analyst.

AWS is on fire. And it's hiring like crazy. Here is a few key things for you to know about AWS.

- AWS is a cash cow inside Amazon. Amazon retail is operating at a very thin margin. In a lot of ways, AWS is "subsidizing" Amazon's retail/e-commerce business. As a result, AWS division carries a lot of weight inside Amazon. It's the "hot" division inside Amazon with executive attention, resources and power.
- AWS is hiring a lot of Solution Architects and Business Development Managers because Amazon needs to beef up its professional service organizations to help enterprise clients to move to the cloud. These roles are becoming a lot more "sales driven" -- i.e. the traditional consulting metrics such as "utilization rate", deal closing rate, sales and profitability are becoming increasingly important inside AWS organization.
- If you're applying for technical positions in AWS, you should sign up for the various free AWS offerings, and familiarize yourself with AWS technologies.
- If you're applying for Solution Architect or BD positions, you should read the AWS case studies. You need to know use cases and have a framework to apply AWS technology to solve industry/domain specific problems. You might also be asked to prepare for a client facing presentation during your interview process. You need to be comfortable with presenting and selling.

- If you have worked on competing cloud computing platforms such as Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud or EMC Cloud, you should be prepared to share your insights about AWS vs. the competing platforms. Your experience of migrating enterprise clients from on-premise platforms to the cloud will also be valuable.
- Amazon Leadership Principles questions will make or break your candidacy. One common mistake I saw from clients is mechanically trying to map your answers to one or several leadership principles. That's the wrong approach. You need to effectively tell your story and demonstrate your fit with the leadership principles.

How to identify an Amazon interview bar raiser?

A common question I got from my coaching clients is who is the bar raiser and how to identify him/her.

Bar raiser is an unique Amazon construct for the hiring process. It is designed to make sure the next person hired raises the overall talent level of Amazon. Amazon wants to make sure they are hiring people smarter than them.

Bar Raiser has the veto power during the interview process.

Bar raisers are volunteers who have gone through training and participated in hundred of Amazon interviews. They are experienced in identifying individuals who are good fit for Amazon.

How to identify bar raisers? There are several ways. Amazon normally send candidates list of interviewers a few days before onsite interviews. I look for the following signs to identify bar raisers.

1. You will have only one bar raiser in each interview loop
2. She tends to come from outside of your group. Her job might have no direct relation to the job you will be doing
3. She has been at Amazon for a while. It takes time to become a bar raiser. It is a time consuming process. Most bar raisers have been working at Amazon for at least two years or longer.
4. She will focus more on Amazon Leadership Principles questions. She might ask you questions about your past experience, but it is unlikely that she will ask you technical questions.
5. If you have friends who work at Amazon, you can have them look up your interviewers in the Amazon internal phone tool. Amazon bar raiser has a bar raiser badge next to his/her name in the amazon internal phone tool. That is a sure way to find out who is your bar raiser.

Now, I advise my coaching client not to worry too much about bar raiser. It does not help much to try to guess who your bar raiser is and try to customize answers for the bar raiser. You want

to provide the best possible answer regardless of the interviewers. The bar raiser might have higher standard and is more experienced, so you should focus on bring your A game to perform at your best.

How different? Amazon vs. Google Job Interview

Amazon vs. Google Job Interview

Many of you are interviewing with both Amazon and Google. A frequent question I got is how different these two companies' interviews are.

Amazon and Google are the top two high tech employers at the moment. They have more applicants than any other tech companies in the world.They both have high hiring bars. But, their culture and hiring practices are very different.

Amazon hires for experience. The more relevant your past experience is, the better. Amazon wants to hire people who can start contributing in day 1. Google cares a little bit less about relevant work experience. Google prefers candidates who possess exceptional General Cognitive Abilities, which means you can think critically and solve big problems.

Amazon Leadership Principles will make or break or your candidacy. There is a lot of great things about Amazon Leadership Principles, but teamwork is not one of the leadership principles. Amazon's internal environment is like a jungle; it's a survival of the fittest environment. You're on your own, and you need to make things happen. Google assess candidate's "googleyness" -- intellectual humility, conscientiousness, a track record of having done interesting things, fun, etc.

"Bar Raiser" is an unique Amazon recruiting construct -- Bar Raiser is a trained interviewer whose job is to make sure the next hire raises the overall level of Amazon talent base. The Bar Raiser has the veto power to reject a candidate. Google's hiring decision requires approval by hiring committee and then VP approval.
Amazon usually makes hiring decision within a week of a candidate's onsite interview. It could take a month or longer for Google to get back to candidates on the hiring decision. Google's hiring process is much more deliberate and methodical.

The hottest division at Amazon is Amazon Web Services (AWS). It's growing like crazy and it has much more profitable than the low-margin retail business. Google's cash cow is its advertising related products. Advertising revenue is still the bread and butter of Google's economic engine.

Internal referral will make it faster for you to get Amazon's attention but it's not required. Google essentially requires each candidate to have an internal referral. You need to have referral from current Google employee who is willing to recommend you.

In summary, Amazon and Google's hiring practice and culture are quite different. You need to study these two companies carefully, and customize your interview preparation for each company.

Should you accept job title deflation at Amazon or Google

Both Amazon and Google have flat organization structure. Unless you're working for comparable companies in size and prestige, your move to Amazon or Google will likely be a lateral move or even a downgrade in job title.

A frequent question I got from my client is if it's worthwhile to accept job title deflation at Amazon or Google.This really boils down to your individual situation. I'd like to provide you a framework to think through this issue.

First, unless you're desperate for a job and you need the money, I would not accept both lower compensation and title deflation. This actually happens more often than you might think. For example, Amazon sometimes offers candidates less money and lesser job title. Amazon recruiter or hiring manager would tell candidates that they were joining a high-growth team, and they would get a chance to move to a higher position after six month to a year if they perform well. I wouldn't buy into what they're telling you. It's very hard to get promoted inside Amazon or Google. You should assume it'll take you at least a couple years before you get your first promotion.

Second, if the compensation is good but the job title is lesser, you need to think about how the Amazon or Google position can serve as a stepping stone for your career.
Will you have broader roles and responsibilities? Sometimes roles at large companies such as Amazon or Google are very narrowly defined. You might be focusing on a much narrow range of deliverable. If this is the case, it might not worth it to make the move.

Will you be working on cutting edge, hot technology, products, or services? For example, Amazon Web Service (AWS) skills are in demand across the industry. If you work at AWS for a couple years in a good role, you can open a lot more doors for yourself down the road. Ultimately, you need to answer the following question about your offer: if I stay for 2 years at Amazon or Google, will this experience increase my career options, upward mobility, and future compensation by at least 20%? If the answer is yes, then your Amazon or Google job will be a good stepping stone for your career.

Third, who will you be working with? Do you respect them? Will you learn a ton from them? I cannot emphasize enough about the importance of working with A-Players. These people will go far in their careers. If you establish good relationships with them, they could really help your careers. You want to be part of the higher-performer circle. However, not every team inside Amazon or Google is equal in talent levels. You want to join the good team with world-class talents.

In conclusion, your move to Amazon or Google should serve as a major career stepping stone an/or provide you higher compensation. You should not join Amazon or Google with less pay and lesser title just for the name/brand recognition. It doesn't worth it.

Why Amazon has VERY HIGH employee turnover rate?

The average tenure of Amazon employees is [less than 2 years](#). I have also seen report that Amazon's median tenure is [1 year.](#) I'm a little bit skeptical about the 1 year number, but it's true that Amazon has very high turnover rate.

It's not uncommon for me to hear from my coaching clients who asked me for career advice 6 months after they joined Amazon. I helped these clients to land at Amazon. I want to help them to build and grow a successful career inside Amazon. So I have been working on creating a playbook to help folks to succeed once they start working at Amazon.

Based on my own experience of working at Amazon and what I'm learning from coaching clients, I think there are several reasons behind Amazon's high turnover rate.

First, Amazon has a very unique work environment. It's highly unstructured with very little hand holding. It's like a jungle, and only the fittest survives. To succeed, you need to be very aggressive, independent, and individualistic. The Amazon environment is very different from any other corporate environment. A lot of people underestimate the uniqueness of Amazon's work environment.

Second, org change is very frequent inside amazon. It's not uncommon for a new employee to have 3+ managers during his/her first 18 months at Amazon. If you're not used to rapid manager change, you can get lost in the shuffle. Once you join Amazon, you need very aggressively build your own network and take charge of your own career. To get promoted inside amazon, you need to strategically position yourself and market yourself. It also means you need to identify and find the right combination of manager, team and project to maximize your chance. Some people struggle to deal with the frequent manager changes.

Third, amazon is a result driven work environment the brings a high level of intensity and pressure. Amazon is high pressure. There is a strong escalation culture -- if I don't hear from you, I'll escalate to your manager, and then escalate to your manager's manager. You need to have thick skin to deal with the pressure and interpersonal conflicts. Some people underestimate the stressful nature of working at Amazon.

So, here is the dilemma a large number of new Amazon employees are facing:
- Their compensation package (sign on bonus and stock vesting schedule) serves as a "handcuff" -- they need to spend at least 2 years to get the full sign bonus. Most of the stock vesting starts at third year.
- Teamwork is not an amazon value. The interactions inside amazon can be cut throat and intense. They really want a nicer, and kinder work environment.
- They want to leave, but they don't want to give up the nice sign-on bonus and Restricted Stock Units (RSUs).

I hate to see anyone to be facing the above dilemma. To minimize your pain and maximize your ROI at Amazon, I have a few advice for both prospective amazon employees and new amazon employees.

First, lower your expectation about Amazon. Amazon is one of the most successful companies of our time. But, it has its shares of dysfunctions and politics.

Second, amazon is like a jungle. You need to watch your own interest, and take charge of you own career. Develop the mindset the you're the CEO of your own career. Network aggressively inside amazon. Look for internal opportunities that is the best fit for your skills, and give you the best chance to get promoted.

Third, be ready emotionally and physically to take on a demanding, stressful work environment. If you have a sensitive emotional makeup, you really should ask yourself if you want to take on the extra stress at Amazon. It could be very taxing mentally.
Fourth, observe and learn from long-time Amazon employees who have done well inside the company. Model after their behaviors.

Fifth, be clear about what you want to get out of your amazon experience. What is your endgame for working at Amazon? For most people, Amazon is a nice stepping stone. Amazon will be a great brand to have on your resume and make it easier to get jobs down the road. If this is your plan, then your time at Amazon will only be a few years. You are getting the experience to prepare you for future jobs. This allows you keep things in perspective. Personally, my time at Amazon was one of the most important period of my time. It wasn't easy but it formed the foundation of my future career which enabled me to progress into very senior positions in Corporate America. I learned a ton from my Amazon experience. I wouldn't trade it

for anything. Hope you'll find a way to navigate the Amazon environment to maximize your career progression and learning.

Next Steps -- An Action Plan to help you ace your Amazon interview

1. Read my bestseller How to get a job at Amazon in Kindle store and follow the 5-Pillar framework to prepare for your Amazon interview
2. Download Amazon Interview Questions at NailYourJobInterview.com
3. Want to work with a seasoned interviewed coach? There are two ways we can work together:
   a. live online coaching group bootcamp (4 1-hour live group coaching calls plus private Facebook group for Q&A). Limited number of spots available for each month's cohort.
   b. Intensive 1-on-1 coaching
   c. Sign up at www.NailYourJobInterview.com/coaching