

The Best Questions to Ask in the Interview

By Laura Morsch, CareerBuilder.com writer

An interview is meant to be a two-way street. The hiring manager is interviewing you to determine whether you're the best fit for the job. At the same time, you should be asking questions to determine whether you would be happy in the position or with the company.

But once nerves take over, it's easy to forget your role. After all, you're meeting on the employer's schedule in an unfamiliar office. After listening to the interviewer's monologue about the company and role, you're asked a barrage of questions about your background and future plans " all the while praying that you're delivering the "right" answers.

By the time the employer asks if you have any questions, it's easy to be so drained and nervous you can only stammer out, "Nope."

Not asking questions, however, is passing up a chance to stand out from the competition.

"This is a great opportunity to set you apart in a positive way from other people being considered for the job," says Eddie Payne, division manager of professional staffing for recruiting firm FGP International. "Employers say they are interested in candidates who ask quality questions and make intelligent conversation based on what they know about the organization."

Before the interview, prepare a list of questions that demonstrate your knowledge of the company and interest in the position. Some good topics to cover include:

The company

Dave Stanford, executive vice president of client services for contingency and contract staffing firm Winter, Wyman Companies suggests asking:

- What do you see ahead for your company in the next five years?
- How do you see the future for this industry?
- What do you consider to be your firm's most important assets?
- What can you tell me about your new product or plans for growth?
- How do you rate your competition?

The position's history

Asking about why the position is vacant can provide insight into the company and the potential for advancement. According to Annie Stevens and Greg Gostanian, managing partners at executive and career development firm ClearRock, good questions include:

- What happened to the last person who held this job?
- What were the major strengths and weaknesses of the last person who held this job?
- What types of skills do you NOT already have onboard that you're looking to fill with a new hire?

The department

Asking about your department's workers and role in the company can help you understand more about the company's culture and hierarchy. Stanford suggests asking:

- What is the overall structure of the company and how does your department fit the structure?
- What are the career paths in this department?

- What have been the department's successes in the last couple of years?
- How do you view your group/division/department?

The job's responsibilities

To avoid any confusion later on, it pays to gain a solid understanding of the position. FGP International's Eddie Payne recommends inquiring:

- What would you consider to be the most important aspects of this job?
- What are the skills and attributes you value most for someone being hired for this position?
- Where have successful employees previously in this position progressed to within the company?
- Could you describe a typical day or week in this position? The typical client or customer I would be dealing with?

The expectations

To determine how and when you will be evaluated, Payne recommends asking:

- What are the most immediate challenges of the position that need to be addressed in the first three months?
- What are the performance expectations of this position over the first 12 months?
- How will I be evaluated at XYZ company, and how often?

The next steps

At the end of the interview, don't forget to ask:

- What are the next steps in the interview process?

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