What You Should Ask During an Interview

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Most job seekers spend a lot of time thinking about the questions they’ll be asked during an interview. But there’s one they often don’t give much thought to, yet it’s one of the most important ones they’re likely to hear: “So, do you have any questions for me?”

Don’t let this simple query stump you. It offers what may be your best opportunity to set yourself apart from other applicants. Asking smart, thought-provoking questions allows you to show you’ve done your research and steer the conversation in a way that emphasizes what you can bring to the job. And this will move you closer to landing the position you’re targeting.

Following are some questions to consider – and some of the reasons they’re worth asking:

**Can you tell me what my average day would be like?**

Interviewers often sell the high points of a position but gloss over the more mundane aspects. This question provides an opening for the interviewer to go off script (perhaps without realizing it), allowing you to get the real story about what you’d have to do if you land the job. The last thing you want is to be unsure about the duties of a position and end up overwhelmed — or under-challenged — once you’re on board.

**Why is this position open?**

This is a more direct way of exploring opportunities for growth within a firm. If you find out the previous jobholder has been promoted, this can lead to a discussion of your prospects for advancement. On the other hand, if you learn that a junior attorney didn’t want to wait any longer to be tapped as a partner, this will give you an opening to learn more about the firm’s philosophy on partnership.

If you find out that the previous employee was terminated or left because the job was a poor fit, you can tactfully inquire as to why the arrangement wasn’t a good one. For you to be successful in the job, you need to know about any past problems associated with the position. At the very least, hearing the answer to this question will give you more insight into the way the firm views the position and possibly the importance placed on it.
What type of person has excelled in this position (or at your firm) in the past?

A variation on the previous question, this one signals that you’re envisioning yourself in the job and eager to understand what it takes to flourish in the role. And, assuming the hiring manager would be your boss, the response you receive can offer insight into the attributes the person values in those he or she manages. Asking about attributes of a successful employee in the firm may also show that you’re aware of the importance of being a good fit with the culture of an organization.

While researching your firm, I learned that it recently [fill in the blank]. Can you tell me more about this development?

Interviewers will take the fact that you’ve done your homework as a sign that you’re genuinely interested in the opportunity. This question also might elicit surprising candor from the hiring manager, allowing you to really get a sense of underlying issues at the firm. The details that emerge in these less-scripted moments can provide a gold mine of information that will help you make a decision if you’re extended an offer.

What keeps you working here?

This gives the interviewer a chance to offer a personal take on the company. Pay close attention to the tone of the response, as well as to what is said. Satisfied employees who love their jobs won’t have to struggle to come up with reasons they enjoy their work. A tepid response, however, may speak volumes.

After meeting with me today and learning more about my qualifications, do you have any concerns about hiring me?

By asking this, you’ll demonstrate that you’re receptive to candid feedback about your suitability for the job. It will also give you an opportunity to address on the spot any qualms or questions the hiring manager may have.

What are the next steps in the hiring process?

This question allows you to find out when the company plans to make a decision and when you should follow up. The interviewer’s response may also give you insight into his or her interest in hiring you. Keep the door open for further communication by asking the interviewer for a direct phone number and the best time to call before you leave.

An Inside-Out Approach

Above all, consider what you’re looking for in a job and adapt your questions accordingly. Remember that the interview is designed to help the hiring manager and applicant learn about one another and determine if the position is a good fit. Asking smart
questions will not only show your passion for the role but also give you better insight into both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

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