



P R O F E S S I O N A L S

## The Questions You Should and Shouldn't Ask In A Job Interview

by [Jacquelyn Smith](#), Forbes Staff

A job interview is a two-way street. The employer asks questions to determine if the interviewee is an ideal fit for the job, and the smart candidate uses the interview to assess how she would fit in, if she would be able to do her best work there, and how well aligned her goals are with those of the employer.

"Candidates must ask questions to determine if the job fits their career path and objectives," says Lynn Taylor, a workplace expert and author of *Tame Your Terrible Office Tyrant*. "The fact that this is a two-way interview is often lost on many job candidates, especially in this period of high unemployment, when it seems like employers hold all the cards. While you don't want to be too choosy, you must be prepared in advance to ask any and all questions that will lead to the best possible match for you."

So while you need to use the interview to convince the employer that you are the best candidate for the job, you also need to be convinced that the job and the company would be a great fit for you. "There is only one way for you to determine if the job is for you, and that's to ask the interviewer the right questions," says Andy Teach, a corporate veteran and author of *From Graduation to Corporation: The Practical Guide to Climbing the Corporate Ladder One Rung at a Time*.

Rosemary Haefner, vice president of Human Resources at CareerBuilder, agrees. "You are interviewing the employer just as much as that employer is interviewing you. Asking questions can give you a better sense of the company's growth opportunities and culture, the manager's leadership style, and whether that organization is the right fit for you."

There will come a time in the interview—usually toward the end—when the employer gives you the opportunity to ask questions. Not everyone takes it. "Candidates sometimes freeze and are caught off-guard when they have the floor," Taylor says. Sometimes it's because they truly feel that they've gotten all of the information they need to help them make a decision about whether or not the job is for them, Teach adds. "Other candidates may feel that they don't want to be seen as being annoying by asking too many questions in the interview. Some candidates realize by the end of the interview that they are not interested in the job and therefore don't need to ask any more questions. If you're not interested in the job, it's perfectly acceptable not to ask any final questions. However, if you are interested in the job and don't have any final questions, you risk being perceived as someone who is not truly interested, and that's too big a risk to take," he says.

Alexandra Levit, the author of *Blind Spots: The 10 Business Myths You Can't Afford to Believe on Your New Path to Success*, says if you decline the offer to ask questions you are missing a perfect opportunity to show that you've done your homework on the organization and given a lot of thought to your potential role. "Asking intelligent questions leaves the interviewer with a powerful impression of your value."

Haefner says when CareerBuilder surveyed more than 3,000 employers for a study completed in December 2011, it found that 35% of hiring managers reported that not asking good questions is one of the most detrimental mistakes job candidates make during interviews. "If you don't have questions, this could potentially send the message that you may not be that interested in the position or show a lack of confidence," she says.

So when the tables are turned and you're invited to ask questions, do it. "Remember that hiring managers appreciate an engaged conversation and value an inquisitive mind," Taylor says. This may be your best chance to determine whether the job or the company is right for you.

"Asking the right questions also shows the interviewer that you've prepared carefully and are serious about the opportunity," Levit says. It also says that you are savvy enough to take the additional opportunity to sell yourself. And finally, questions allow you to showcase your knowledge about the company and its industry, and to steer the interview into areas where you excel, Haefner adds.

Asking questions will only work to your advantage if they are the right ones. "I think hiring managers expect people to have thought through questions before for the interview," says Anita Attridge, a Five O'Clock Club career and executive coach. "Asking a bad question is worse than asking none at all."

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Lesson learned: Plan ahead and use caution when you take the floor in an interview.

Questions you should ask in an interview:

- How would you describe the company's culture and leadership philosophy?
- Can you please show me some examples of projects that I'd be working on?
- What is the single largest problem facing your staff, and would I be in a position to help you solve this problem?
- What specific qualities and skills are you looking for in the job candidate?
- Is this a new position, or did someone leave? If someone left, why did they leave or what did they go on to do?
- What is the typical career trajectory for a person in this position?
- What would you say are the three most important skills needed to excel in this position?
- Who would be my manager, and will I have the opportunity to meet him or her?
- Why do you like working here?
- What does a typical day or week look like for the person in this position? Is there travel, flextime, etc?
- How do you see this position contributing to the success of the organization?
- What do you think distinguishes this company from its competitors, both from a public and employee perspective?
- Does the company offer continued education and professional training?
- How can I best contribute to the department?
- What particular achievements would equate to success at this job? What would success look like?
- Are you most interested in a candidate who works independently, on a team, cross-functionally, or through a combination of them all? Can you give me an example?
- What is your ideal communication style with your staff? Do you meet regularly with your team, rely heavily on e-mail, use status reports or work primarily through other means?
- How do you see me as a candidate for the job in comparison with an ideal candidate?
- Do you have any concerns about me or about my qualifications that may prevent you from selecting me for the job?
- What is the next step? When do you think you will be making a decision?

Questions to avoid in an interview:

- Never ask for information you could have easily found with a quick Google search.
- Never ask if you can change the job details, the schedule, or the salary.
- Never ask many questions about the interviewer's background.
- Never ask about pay, time off, benefits, etc. (Wait until later in the process to inquire about these things.)
- Never ask "What does your company do?"
- Never ask "If I'm hired, when can I start applying for other positions in the company?"
- Never ask how quickly you can be promoted.
- Never ask "Do you do background checks?"
- Never ask about gossip you've heard.
- Never ask if the company monitors e-mail or Internet usage.