

Asking The Right Question



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ASKING THE *Right Question*

Do you have any questions?

Surprisingly, the most common answer to this question is “no.” Not only is this the wrong answer, but it’s also a missed opportunity to find out information about the company. It is important for you to ask questions. Not just any questions, but those relating to the job, the company and the industry.

Consider two candidates interviewing for an inside sales position, Henry and Chris.

Henry asks, “I was wondering about benefits, and when they would become effective? Also, what is the yearly vacation allowance? And, does the company add to my RRSP contributions?”

Assuming this is the first interview, it is premature to ask about benefits. “What’s in it for me?” questions can be interpreted as self-centered and a sign of your lack of interest in the job.

The next candidate, Chris, says, “No, I think you just about covered everything I wanted to know. I’m sure I’ll have more questions if I get the job.”

This is a very passive response that doesn’t demonstrate interest or imagination. Once you get the job—if you get it—may be too late to ask questions.

It is important to ask questions to learn about the company and the job’s challenges. In some cases, the interviewer will be listening for the types of questions you ask. The best questions will come as a result of your listening to what is asked during the interview.

A good response to the interviewer asking, “Do you have any questions?” would be: “Yes, I do. From what you’ve been asking during the interview, it sounds like you have a problem with customer retention. Can you tell me a little more about the current situation, and what the first challenges would be for a new person?”

This answer shows interest in what their problem is and how you could be the possible solution. It is also an opportunity to get a sense of what will be expected.

Be Prepared

What information do you need to decide whether to work at this company? Make a list of at least five questions to take with you to the interview. Depending on who is interviewing you, your questions should vary.

If you are interviewing with the hiring manager, ask questions about the job, the desired qualities and the challenges:

- What would a typical working day be like in this position?
- What will be the measurements of my success?
- What is the organisational structure of your department?

If you are interviewing with the Human Resources Manager, ask about the company and the department:

- Can you tell me more about the position and the type of person you are seeking?
- What would you consider to be exceptional performance from someone working in this position?
- Who is the manager that I would be working for and what is their management style?

If you are interviewing with management, ask about the industry and future projections. This is your chance to demonstrate your industry knowledge:

- What is your career background? What is your vision for the company in 5 years?
- How long have you worked within this industry?
- What sort of career advancement is available from this position?

If you are interviewing with a third-party recruiter, ask about the company, its culture, and the specific position:

- Is this job opening due to growth or replacement?
- How are you involved in the hiring process?
- How would you describe the corporate culture?

You will have to use your judgment about the number of questions you ask and when to ask them. Think of this as a conversation. There will be an appropriate time to ask certain types of questions, like those about benefits and vacation. To be on the safe side, it is best to concentrate on questions about the job’s responsibilities and how you fit the position until you get the actual offer. We advise that you allow the interviewer to breach the subject of compensation rather than raise it yourself.

When you begin to think of the interview as a two-way process, you will see it is important for you to find out as much as possible about the company. Questions will give you the opportunity to find out if this is a good place for you to work before you say, “Yes.”