

Asking Effective Interview Questions

Although it may vary, when it comes to the full-time job interview process, especially jobs beyond academe, there are usually three rounds of interviews. They are: 1) a screening interview with HR, 2) a second interview with the hiring manager(s) or search committee members and 3) a final on-site interview. Each interview focuses on different aspects of a candidate, so you may receive different types of interview questions at each round. (See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for more information on interview prep.)

But you can (almost) always expect one question from interviewers, regardless of interview rounds: “Do you have any questions for me/us?”

Last week, Joseph Barber shared great tips on how you can ace the interview even when this question is the only question that you are asked. In this article, I would like to discuss more details on the why and how aspects regarding the same question.

Why do interviewers ask this question at the end of the interviews (in most cases)? Remember, every minute of an interview is crucial for interviewers, as they are aiming to collect information and data to help them decide whether you are qualified for the job and organization. Perhaps this question stems from an effort at politeness. In most cases, however, it provides an effective way to identify whether you are genuinely interested in the position. If you say, “No, I am good,” in response to this question, employers are more likely to think that you have not performed research on the company or that you just simply don’t care about the job or organization.

So, please avoid responding that way. Instead, let’s use the opportunity to your advantage, as this prompt offers a great chance for you to investigate whether the position and/or company is a fit for you. By asking productive questions, you may gain insider perspectives that can be useful for your next interview. Such efforts enable you to make more informed career decisions about your next professional steps.

With that in mind, here are some suggestions that may help you to better prepare for the question “Do you have any questions for me?”

Avoid Self-Centered Questions

Consider an interview a two-way conversation. From that perspective, you will understand that you should pick topics that benefit everyone involved. Asking questions that mainly focus on your own interests or needs may leave interviewers with the impression that you are self-centered. I recommend avoiding the following topics:

Compensation. When you receive a job offer, you will have plenty of time to ask questions focusing on what you potentially gain from an employer -- such as salary, vacation days, benefits and the like. So let’s hold on these questions until the time is right. Especially if you ask such questions during your first-round interview (unless a recruiter asks or shares the information), it may compel employers to assume that you are uninterested in the position itself or the work tasks it involves.

Information you could find by yourself. Do not ask basic questions that you can easily find the answer to from a job description, quick online search in, say, Glassdoor or LinkedIn, or the employer’s website.

For instance, once I served as a member of a search committee, and a seasoned candidate with more than five years of experience asked the committee, “What are the major responsibilities of the position?” That one question was a clear sign that the candidate did not read the job description thoroughly. The reason is because the answer to that question may be easily known. Indeed, it is your responsibility to become familiar with what the company does, its mission and vision, and the key responsibilities of the position that you are interviewing for.

Ask the Right Questions and People

Tailoring your cover letter and résumé is not the only customization that you need to do for your job search. Developing relevant questions based on the particular person interviewing you is another important interview preparation tool for a successful job search. I suggest preparing questions tailored to your interview, such as the following:

HR manager or recruiter: In general, an HR manager or recruiter will be the first person (and sometimes the last person, too) that you will interact with throughout the interview process. You may wish to ask about the organization and the interview process. For example, you might ask the following questions:

Would you please describe the culture of this company?

From the job description, I found that this position is within X team. Would you tell me more about the team?

Would you please share the next steps in the hiring process for this position?

Hiring manager and future colleagues: In most cases, people involved with second- and third-round interviews will be hiring manager(s). Often, it involves members of the team that you will be working with if you are hired. Focus on the position in question during the interview. I recommend asking:

What would be the major projects or tasks that you expect a person in this position to achieve over the first six months of employment?

What is the greatest challenge that someone in this position would face?

What are the key competencies a person in this position needs to possess to be successful in this position?

If you pass the first screening interview, someone from the human resources department usually informs you of who will be in your second or third interviews. So, remember to prepare one or two questions mainly tailored to each interviewer. I advise you to use LinkedIn or the company website to collect professional background information about the interviewers and to develop questions that focus on each person.

For example, you may ask: “I have a question for Interviewer A. From LinkedIn, I found you have led an X project here. I believe that this seems relevant to the major responsibilities of the position that I am interviewing for now. Would you please share more about the X project? Also, in your opinion, would there be any collaborative opportunities for a person in this position?”

Remember that a job interview is a two-way evaluation process. While employers ask questions to identify if you are the right person for the position, team or company, you are also interviewing them to assess their fit for you. So, be prepared for the question -- “Do you have any questions for me/us?” -- to maximize the potential of your next career move.

Credit: <http://www.insidehighered.com>