

7 essential questions to ask in an interview

By Michael Kingston, CareerBuilder.com, January 10, 2014

At the end of an interview, you have the opportunity to pose your carefully prepared questions to the hiring manager. Since you're under enough pressure already, here's a ready-made list of essential questions to ask in an interview:

1. Why is this position vacant?

It's important to understand not only why the job is open but for how long it's been vacant. The majority of vacancies are the result of an internal promotion or the departure of the previous post holder and are normally filled within a reasonable timeframe. If the job's been open for several months, you need to know why. Did a previous candidate turn it down? If so, you need to know why before you leap into a potential lion's den. Are the expectations of the job unrealistic? Is the compensation inadequate? If the job is a newly created one, you have an ideal opportunity to blaze your own trail.

2. What have your most successful candidates brought to the company?

Another way of phrasing this is to ask about the characteristics of the company's top talent. This question is a statement of intent about your determination to join the company's elite performers. You may wish to emphasize your skills and achievements relevant to the role prior to posing this question. The answer will also give you an indication of company culture and help you to decide whether or not this job is the one for you.

3. What does success look like in the first 90 days?

Ambitious candidates are eager to hit the ground running, and this question puts you among that group. Again it will reveal the type of company you may be joining. If expectations for the first 90 days are unrealistic, what will the role look like after six months?

4. What challenges will the candidate face in the first 90 days?

Potential challenges may prevent you from achieving your agreed objectives in the first few months, so you need to be aware of them. Again, this question indicates your determination to succeed. It also gives the hiring manager the chance to come clean about the potential for internal conflict (and provides further insight into company culture).

5. What challenges is the company currently facing?

Is the company making money? Has it had major layoffs in the past five years? How does it respond to a constantly evolving economic climate? How does it adapt to technological change? All of these issues are important to you as a potential new employee. If you were released from a recent job due to downsizing, you need to be confident that any company you move to is financially secure.

6. How do you retain your top talent?

Successful companies implement career development programs for their employees with a clearly defined career path. This question reminds the hiring manager you are serious both in your application and your long-term commitment -- but that commitment needs to go both ways.

7. Why do you work for this company?

A hesitant or vague response should raise a red flag. You need to be confident that the company you are moving to rewards its staff and provides the opportunity for you to achieve your long-term goals.