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Questions You Should – and Shouldn't – Ask in an Interview

By Kelly Eggers



The most critical part of an interview often isn't what you answer, but what you ask.

After preparing for brain teasers, intimidating questions and the gamut of verbal challenges that recruiters and managers favor, candidates often go blank when asked: "Do you have any questions for me?"

And trust us, they will.

We interviewed a banking recruiter and a career coach to find out what to ask when the interview is flipped.

In this position, how will you measure success?

This question shows that you're thinking about the company's culture and excelling in the job, not just landing an offer. "As an addendum to asking how they measure success, you can ask what it takes to be successful, or what the organization values," says Roy Cohen, a New York-based finance career coach.

How has your career unfolded here?

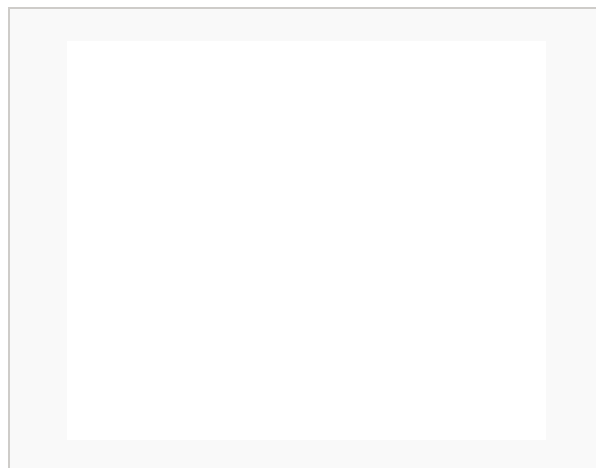
Before you show up for the interview, research the professional history of everyone you're meeting with (Google and LinkedIn are good places to start). This is a perfect opportunity to find out how a manager scaled the ranks within the firm. "Especially if [the interviewer] hasn't talked much about themselves, you should ask them about their background," says Cohen.

I read in the news recently ...

This is not the opportunity to highlight how closely you follow Perez Hilton, rather a great opportunity to showcase your knowledge of industry-relevant current events.

For example, the Fed recently decided to stress-test 19 banks. "Ask how the firm plans to enhance its commercial banking operations in response to the Fed's decision," advises Doug Rickart, a banking division director with finance recruiting firm Robert Half International. "This shows that you're on top of what's going on, and can bring value to the organization."

How was your firm able to close (a recent deal)?



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If framed correctly, this type of question, is a launching pad to once again highlight your own experience. "(It) allows the candidate to bring out the skills they have that will fit well into that groove," says Rickart. "You want to ask questions that will help you point out what sets you apart from other candidates."

What are your priorities for next year, in light of what's happening in the market?

This is a great way to show that you're looking ahead. It also gives you an opportunity to point out how you can play to your strengths if the office is moving in a direction you have prior experience in.

Just as important as what you should ask, however, is knowing what you shouldn't. Here are a few no-no's from the experts:

Don't ask anything related to compensation.

Unless the interviewer brings it up, you should let this one rest -- especially if you're looking at a low-on-the-totem-pole position. There will be plenty of time to discuss pay if you land an offer.

Don't get too personal.

Check LinkedIn to get a general idea of your interviewer's career path, but steer clear of stalker territory. You shouldn't be able to list the first names of their last three bosses or the color of his or her childhood home.

Avoid readily available information.

For example, "where is the company headquartered?" Everyone has access to the corporate websites and newspapers; if you don't know the basics, you'll sound pretty foolish.

Don't be silent.

You should have thoughtful questions prepared for everyone you interview with. "Don't look past one interviewer to focus on the next," says Rickart.

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