

Do You Have Any Questions?

by Carole Martin

At the conclusion of a job interview you may be asked, "Do you have any questions?" A common answer is, "No, I think you've covered everything very well." This is the wrong answer. You have passed up your opportunity to ask some critical questions could help you decide whether you want to work for this company.

But, what questions are appropriate? When Marianne was asked if she had any questions at the conclusion of her first interview, she began asking about sick time and vacation days and when she would be able to start taking them. The interviewer was taken aback. "Is this what this woman cares about? Time off? This doesn't sound like someone who will come in and get the work done," the interviewer thought to himself. Clearly, Marianne had asked inappropriate questions.

Timing Is Key

The first round of interviews is about discovery, learning about the job and the company, not the benefits or raises. Good questions to ask in the first round are about the job content, and the company's culture and future.

David had prepared ahead of time and was ready when the manager asked if he had any questions. David asked, "What types of projects would be forthcoming over the next six months?" The manager was eager to tell David about prospects for future business and the plans for future growth. This discussion prompted more questions from David. The interview ended after a lively exchange and on a very upbeat note. David's questions were appropriate and timely.

The interview should be an exchange of information: What does the company want, and what do you have to offer? But it is also important to discuss what the company has to offer, and what you want. It is essential to express an interest in the company and the work being done. By asking questions, you will demonstrate investigative skills, illustrate you are particular about the company you work for and that you are not going to take just any offer.

It is also important to consider whom you are talking to. The human resources person is the one likely to know about job descriptions, qualities being sought and the morale or company culture. The hiring manager, your future boss, is the person to ask about the department, the team you will be working with and the job's challenges.

What About the Bennies?

But what about those other questions about benefits, stock options and time off? As the interview process unfolds, there will be time to ask about the benefits and practical matters. Often the human resources department will provide you with a brochure or information packet. Obviously, you will need this information to assess an offer, but all in good time.

What You Should Not Ask in the First Rounds of Interviewing

- Don't ask about salary, stock options, vacation, holiday schedule or benefits.
- Don't ask questions that have already been answered in the interview, just for the sake of asking something.

- Don't grill the interviewer. It's OK to ask about the person's background, but only as an interested party, not an interrogator.

Questions You Should Ask in the First Rounds of Interviewing

- May I see a copy of the job description?
- Why has the job become available?
- What qualities are you seeking in the person for this job?
- What is the next step?
- When will you make your selection?

Prepare five or six questions before the interview and take them with you. When the time comes for you to ask questions, take out your list. This will show good preparation on your part. This time is a valuable opportunity for you to get the information you need to help you make an informed decision.

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