

The 20 questions you need to ask in a job interview

by Marc Cenedella, CEO & Founder of The Ladders

What's an interview about? It sure **feels** like it's about you, but it's really not.

An interview is actually **about** how you can help your future boss and future employer succeed. It's **about** finding out what their requirements and hopes are and matching up your background and experience with what they need.

Overlooking these basic facts about the interview is all too easy. There's so much else going on in your work, your life, and in your job search, that you can forget to look at the interview from the interviewer's point of view. And that's a shame, because, after all, you need the interviewer to walk away from the interview thoroughly impressed.

With that in mind, I've updated my collection of my twenty best interview questions below. My aim here is to arm you with easy-to-ask, revealing-to-answer questions for you to take with you into an interview.

The last time I ran these questions back in the Fall, commenter LBRZ wrote in and said:

I have to thank you! I had an interview yesterday and it went great. When I asked about his leadership style and reward system his face lit up like a Christmas tree.

After he answered the question "how can I help you receive your next promotion?", he began to give me advice on how I should negotiate for a higher starting salary.

And that's exactly the point, Readers. By asking these questions, which focus on the needs, traits, and preferences of your future boss and future employer, you're demonstrating that you are somebody who is genuinely interested in their well-being. And the more interest we show in others, the more commitment they show to aiding our cause.

And with that, here are my twenty best questions to ask your interviewer:

1. What's the biggest change your group has gone through in the last year? Does your group feel like the recession is over and things are getting better, or are things still pretty bleak?
2. If I get the job, how do I earn a "gold star" on my performance review? What are the key accomplishments you'd like to see in this role over the next year?
3. What's your (or my future boss') leadership style?
4. About which competitor are you most worried?

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5. How does sales / operations / technology / marketing / finance work around here? (I.e., groups other than the one you're interviewing for.)
6. What type of people are successful here? What type of people are not?
7. What's one thing that's key to this company's success that somebody from outside the company wouldn't know about?
8. How did you get your start in this industry? Why do you stay?
9. What are your group's best and worst working relationships with other groups in the company?
10. What keeps you up at night? What's your biggest worry these days?
11. What's the timeline for making a decision on this position? When should I get back in touch with you?
12. These are tough economic times, and every position is precious when it comes to the budget. Why did you decide to hire somebody for this position instead of the many other roles / jobs you could have hired for? What about this position made you prioritize it over others?
13. What is your reward system? Is it a star system / team-oriented / equity-based / bonus-based / "attaboy!"-based? Why is that your reward system? What do you guys hope to get out of it, and what actually happens when you put it into practice? What are the positives and the negatives of your reward system? If you could change any one thing, what would it be?
14. What information is shared with the employees (revenues, costs, operating metrics)? Is this an open-book shop, or do you play it closer to the vest? How is information shared? How do I get access to the information I need to be successful in this job?
15. If we are going to have a very successful 2013, what will that look like? What will we have done over the next 18 months to make it successful? How does this position help achieve those goals?
16. How does the company / my future boss do performance reviews? How do I make the most of the performance review process to ensure that I'm doing the best I can for the company?
17. What is the rhythm to the work around here? Is there a time of year that it's "all hands on deck" and we're

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pulling all-nighters, or is it pretty consistent throughout the year? How about during the week / month? Is it pretty evenly spread throughout the week / month, or are there crunch days?

18. What type of industry / functional / skills-based experience and background are you looking for in the person who will fill this position? What would the “perfect” candidate look like? How do you assess my experience in comparison? What gaps do you see?

19. In my career, I’ve primarily enjoyed working with big / small / growing / independent / private / public / family-run companies. If that’s the case, how successful will I be at your firm?

20. Who are the heroes at your company? What characteristics do the people who are most celebrated have in common with each other? Conversely, what are the characteristics that are common to the promising people you hired, but who then flamed out and failed or left? As I’m considering whether or not I’d be successful here, how should I think about the experiences of the heroes and of the flame-outs?

A final note. Last time, another commenter, “Lenore”, asked:

My question for you is.....how do you ask questions when you are meeting with more than one interviewer. I met with 3 to 4 interviewers, one at a time. I didn’t want to come off generic by asking each of them the same questions. I guess you can go by their role to determine what questions you are going to ask. Sometimes they are all top executives. I’m guessing there are enough questions to divide amongst them all. I had asked so many questions in an interview once, that I didn’t want to seem redundant. Do you think this is ok?

To which I replied: Great question Lenore. Three options:

- 1) Change the wording a little bit each time so you’re not asking the same question in the same way.
- 2) Mention that “You know, I already asked your colleague about this, and I’d love to hear your thoughts...”
- 3) Divide the list and ask different people different questions, as you suggested.