

Interviews:

A Two-Way Street

When an interviewer asks if you have any questions at the end of a job interview, this is your chance to gain further information that will help you assess if this is the right role and organisation for you. Remember you are interviewing them as a potential employer.

It's also a final opportunity to showcase your knowledge, reinforce your interest and suitability, and leave them with a lasting and positive impression.

Not all questions are equal, however. To make a positive impact, the questions you ask at a job interview need to demonstrate that you're really thinking about the needs of the organisation, and that you know your area and what to look for, thus positioning yourself as a true expert in your field. While the questions should be tailored to the role, there are a number of interview questions to ask that are relevant and useful:

1. Why is the position vacant?

It's always interesting to know why the position became available. Did the previous employee leave or is it a newly created role? Knowing this will help you understand if you will be stepping into someone else's shoes or carving out the role from scratch. If the previous employee left, did they leave for another organisation, were they made redundant or promoted? The reason provided will give you clues about possible challenges in the role as well as the organisational culture and career path.

It can also be helpful to know how long the position has been vacant. If it has been open for a while, why have they found it so hard to fill – could it be that their expectations are too high, other candidates have turned down the offer, or their recruitment process is a shambles? Like a house that has been on the market for too long, a protracted job vacancy can act as a red flag: buyer beware.

2. What would your ideal candidate be like and how would they succeed in the role?

This question coaxes the interviewer to reveal exactly what they're looking for and lets you better understand if you're the right fit. If any qualities or skills are mentioned that you haven't already covered, this is your opportunity to highlight them before the interview finishes.

This question will also reveal how the organisation measures success – is it all about delivering on KPIs or do they value other qualities and achievements? As a prospective employee, it's important to understand what the organisation's expectations will be.

3. What are the company's key priorities over the next five years?

This question is particularly relevant for anyone in a mid-to-senior role as the answer will provide insight into where the organisation is heading (or hopes to head) and what role you could play in that. Ask about specific financial or digital goals relevant to your role – for example, the target sales growth, market share or website traffic they hope to achieve. Do you have specific experience, skills or knowledge that could help them achieve their goals? If so, your interviewer will definitely want to know about it.



4. Can you tell me about the team and manager I'll be working with?

Interpersonal relationships and cultural fit are key to success in any role, so any information about the people you'll be working closely with will be extremely useful. Is it a large team or small, do team members work closely together, does your manager have a consultative or autocratic management style? This information will help you determine if you're likely to work well with them or not. If you're interviewing for a management position with direct reports, information about the nature of the team you'll be inheriting will also be invaluable.

5. What do you consider the biggest challenges in this role?

It's important to be prepared for the more challenging aspects of the job – are they challenges you'll be happy to take on? For example, you may discover that one of the toughest aspects of the role is dealing with difficult stakeholders. If managing relationships and being persuasive are your strengths, you may welcome this challenge and should emphasise this. Always be on the lookout for opportunities to show how you are uniquely suited to meet the challenges of the organisation.

6. How would you describe the working culture here?

It's often hard to gauge a company's culture from the outside, so there's nothing like feedback from someone on the inside. While the interviewer will present the organisation in the best light, the words used to describe the culture will give you a taste of what to expect – for example, dynamic, innovative, open, collaborative, entrepreneurial, results-focused – these terms provide insight into what qualities the organisation values, and whether you would feel comfortable in that environment.

7. What does the career path for this role look like?

This question will elucidate whether the organisation offers a clear and structured career path and if the career path aligns with your professional goals – and that, in turn, will help you assess if you could have a longer term future there. Is there a logical progression with room for vertical movement and management potential? Hudson, for example, offers two clear career paths to its consultants, giving them the choice to direct their career according to their preference.

8. What training do you offer to support your employees' career development?

This question uncovers whether the organisation demonstrates a commitment to employee development with formal training and development programs, so you can continue learning and progressing in your career. It will also show the interviewer that you're ambitious and keen to keep learning and moving forward.

9. What do you most enjoy about working here?

This is a very good question to ask in an interview – because it invites your interviewer to connect with you more personally, enables you to get a better insight into the culture of the place and clarifies the key benefits of working there. If they struggle to reply, that might be a valuable warning sign.

9. What are the next steps?

This is a good question to finish off with. It shows you're keen for the role and ready to move forward to the next stage. The interviewer might give an indication of where they're at in the recruitment process, and this will help you manage your expectations and know when to follow up if you haven't heard back. If they say they will make a decision the following week, wait until then before calling or emailing about their decision – but you can still follow up with a polite thank-you note reiterating your interest in the role.

