

Do You Have any Questions?

by Carole Martin

Surprisingly, the most common answer to this question is "no." Not only is this the wrong answer, but it's also a missed opportunity to find out information about the company. It is important for you to ask questions -- not just any questions, but those relating to the job, the company and the industry.

Consider this: Two candidates are interviewing for an inside sales position.

Henry asks, "I was wondering about benefits, and when they would become effective? Also, what is the yearly vacation allowance? And, does the company match on the 401k plan?"

Assuming this is the first interview, it is premature to ask about benefits. "What's in it for me?" questions can be interpreted as self-centered and a sign of your lack of interest in the job.

The next candidate, Chris, says, "No, I think you just about covered everything I wanted to know. I'm sure I'll have more questions if I get the job."

This is a very passive response that doesn't demonstrate interest or imagination. Once you get the job -- if you get it -- may be too late to ask questions.

It is important to ask questions to learn about the company and the job's challenges. In some cases, the interviewer will be listening for the types of questions you ask. The best questions will come as a result of your listening to what is asked during the interview.

A good response to the interviewer asking, "Do you have any questions?" would be: "Yes, I do. From what you've been asking during the interview, it sounds like you have a problem with customer retention. Can you tell me a little more about the current situation and what the first challenges would be for the new person?"

This answer shows interest in what the problem is and how you could be the possible solution. It is also an opportunity to get a sense of what will be expected.

Be Prepared

What information do you need to decide whether to work at this company? Make a list of at least 10 questions to take with you to the interview. Depending on who is interviewing you, your questions should vary.

- If you are interviewing with the hiring manager, ask questions about the job, the desired qualities and the challenges.
- If you are interviewing with the human resources manager, ask about the company and the department.

- If you are interviewing with management, ask about the industry and future projections. This is your chance to demonstrate your industry knowledge.

Timing Is Important

You will have to use your judgment about the number of questions you ask and when to ask them. Think of this as a conversation. There will be an appropriate time to ask certain types of questions, like those about benefits and vacation. To be on the safe side, it is best to concentrate on questions about the job's responsibilities and how you fit the position until you get the actual offer.

When you begin to think of the interview as a two-way process, you will see it is important for you to find out as much as possible about the company. Questions will give you the opportunity to find out if this is a good place for you to work before you say Yes"."