



Turning the Tables: Smart Questions to Ask the Interviewer 3/19/2009

By Michelle Vessel -- Many jobseekers have been taught that interview success depends solely on their ability to answer the questions put to them in an impressively professional and knowledgeable manner. However, while the answers you offer up will play a big part in determining how you come across in an interview, they're really only one piece of the puzzle. In fact, some job search experts say that the questions that you pose in an interview can be equally important in helping you make a positive first impression.

A Two-Way Street

Although the hiring manager clearly has the upper hand in most interview situations, that doesn't mean that he or she should be the only one asking questions. According to Tony Beshara, author of *Acing the Interview: How to Ask and Answer the Questions that Will Get You the Job*, the best interviews are more like lively back-and-forth discussions than one-way interrogations.

By preparing and posing a few pointed questions of your own over the course of the interview, you'll be able to accomplish two important tasks. First, you'll highlight your ability to think on your feet, respond to emerging situations, and analyze information quickly. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the right questions will allow you to get a better sense of what it's like to work for the company – and help you figure out if the position is right for you.

What Should You Ask?

The questions you pose to the hiring manager should include queries you have prepared in advance of the interview, as well as follow-ups relating to topics that come up over the course of the discussion itself. Use these tips and techniques to craft questions that will help you succeed in your next interview.

- **Avoid the obvious.** Although you can definitely boost your profile by posing the right kind of questions, not every query will score points. Don't ask questions to which you already know the answer, or that you should have been able to find out on your own with a little pre-interview research.
- **Involve the interviewer.** Rather than focusing solely on the company as a whole, personalize your questions by targeting the interviewer's experience with the team. Ask the hiring manager to recount favorite experiences or to discuss the company's main strengths and challenges.
- **Delve deeper.** Try to formulate in-depth questions that showcase your analytical ability. Take the information the interviewer provides and use it as a jumping-off point to move towards a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. Rather than responding with surface-level questions, kick things up a notch, focusing on more complex queries that begin with words such as "how" or "why."
- **Put a positive spin on things.** Even when you're asking pointed questions, there's no need to submit your interviewer to the third degree. It's important to come across as enthusiastic and optimistic about the position and the company's prospects, even when you're digging deep for more information. If the company is facing tough market conditions or stiff competition, ask about these challenges in a way that conveys your confidence in the organization's ability to thrive in even the grimmest of circumstances.
- **End with a call to action.** After you've put a number of in-depth, intelligent questions to your interviewer, your last question should always focus on the next steps in the hiring process. Ask about the schedule for making a decision, or whether you can provide any additional information. It's always to your advantage to leave the interview with a clear understanding of what comes next, so take this opportunity to ask a few questions about the way that the process will unfold.

By posing a few questions of your own in your next interview, you can showcase your analytical skills and uncover new insights about the company and the position. If you want to land your dream job, all you have to do is ask!