INTRODUCTION

When you look for a job, you know that employers evaluate you at every step of the process. They decide if your resume is perfectly aligned to their needs and assess if you demonstrate just the right tone in your cover letter. They'll ask if the receptionist was impressed when you signed in for the interview, and evaluate how quickly your thank you note arrived after the meeting.

Employers study your qualifications and skills to determine if you are a good fit for their needs. Similarly, you should make a point to evaluate them and their organizations during your search. Once you've addressed the questions you need to ask yourself before starting your job search, you'll want to identify a list of good interview questions to ask employers.

Consider posing these questions during networking meetings. Consider taking these questions to interviews to help you learn what you need to know to reveal. This will help you find out if the organization is a good fit for you. You will also gain information to improve your chances of getting the job you desire.

1. What skills are most important to succeed in this company or this position?

In an informational meeting, this question is exploratory in nature, but if you're in an interview, you'll already know a lot about the job, so you can frame this inquiry based on information you have. For example, "The job description emphasizes team leadership and management skills; do you think those are the most crucial for success in this job?" This alerts the person interviewing you to the fact that you know what they are saying about the job, but it offers him or her the opportunity to detail a more specific vision of the position. You'll be able to focus your comments and follow up based on the answers you hear.

2. What types of people are most successful in this role?

While this question is similar to the skills question, it focuses more on personality traits than specific skills. If the response is, "Someone who is very independent and likes to work alone," and you're more of a team player, you'll know exactly what's in store if you take this job.
3. Who is in charge?

While you won't ask this question so directly, you need to know who is in charge and your direct line of reporting. A good boss can make a job, a bad one can break it. Ideally, in an interview, it will be clear who the boss is, but don't assume the person interviewing you will actually be your supervisor unless you ask. Clarify the reporting structure so you know what to expect if you join the organization.

Consider it a red flag if you are far along into the interview process and you have not met your prospective supervisor. It may mean he or she is too busy to have the time to supervise and mentor you, or it could mean he or she doesn't give a favorable first impression.

4. What are the key goals for the new hire for this position immediately? In the long term?

It's always good to know what's expected so you can hit the ground running. The answer to this question should provide insights regarding skills necessary to do the job, which is great fodder for thank you notes after the interview. You may also learn if the position represents a shift in the company's strategy or if it's "business as usual" and that you'd be expected to follow the path already created.

5. A question that indicates you've done research prior to the interview.

Always ask a question that gives you a chance to feature your research about the organization. This makes it clear to the interviewer that you are serious about the job, and it may give you a leg up on all the candidates who just showed up without any planning or research. For example, "I was reading your recent press releases, and I noticed you're launching a lot of products geared toward Generation Y. Is this a strategy you anticipate continuing in the future?" A follow-up response could elaborate on why you are well qualified to address that target market.

6. Tell me about your experiences here.

It's always a good idea to encourage your interviewer to talk about him or herself. Most people enjoy the opportunity to share their own stories, and if you are a good listener, you can leave the interviewer with a positive feeling about you. On the other hand, make sure you don't start yawning if the stories go on a little too long!