

20 Questions to Ask During an Interview

1. What's the biggest change your group has gone through in the last year? How has the recession impacted your group?
2. One year from now, if I get the job, what will earn me a "gold star"? 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?
5. How do your sales / marketing / finance / technology / operations work here?
6. What type of people are successful here? What type of people are not?
7. What's one thing that's key to your 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 best and worst working relationships with other groups in the company?
10. What keeps you up at night? What's your biggest worry?
11. What's the timeline for making a decision? When should I get back in touch with you?
12. Why is this position open? Who was previously in this role / why did you decide to create it?
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 is the hoped-for purpose of it, and what actually happens when you put it into practice? What are the positives and negatives of your reward system, and 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 have a very successful 2011, what would that look like? What will have happened over the next 12 months? How does this position help achieve that?
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 here? Is there a time of year that it's all hands on deck and we're pulling all-nighters, or is it pretty consistent throughout the year? How about during the week, is it pretty evenly spread throughout the week, 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. What types of attributes are common to the people who are considered heroes at your company? What types of attributes 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 the flame-outs?

And always remember our favorite "bonus" question: "What can I do to help you (my future boss) get a gold star in the next year?"