

## **Do You Have Any Questions?**

*by Roger Manning*

"Do you have any questions?" ask the interviewer.

"No", you reply, "I think you have covered everything pretty well."

You have made a mistake. Not only have you passed up your opportunity to ask some critical questions but you have possibly given the impression that you are not interested in the position. Other opinions could be developed by the interviewer that you had no motivation nor were you properly prepared for the interview. So what should you ask and when is the appropriate time to ask your questions?

### **Timing**

The first round of interviews is about discovery, learning about the job and the company, not the benefits or raises. Good questions to ask in the first round are about the job content, the kinds of challenges that you might encounter and the company's culture and future.

David had prepared ahead of time and was ready when the manager asked if he had any questions. David asked, "What types of projects would be forthcoming over the next six months?" The manager was eager to tell David about prospects for future business and the plans for future growth. This discussion prompted more questions from David. The interview ended after a lively exchange and on a very upbeat note. David's questions were appropriate and timely.

The interview should be an exchange of information: What does the company want, and what do you have to offer? But it is also important to discuss what the company has to offer, and what you want. It is essential to express an interest in the company and the work being done. By asking questions, you will demonstrate investigative skills, illustrate you are particular about the company you work for and that you are not going to take just any offer.

It is also important to consider whom you are talking to. The human resources person is the one likely to know about job descriptions, qualities being sought and the morale or company culture. The hiring manager, your future boss, is the person to ask about the department, the team you will be working with and the job's challenges. It is particularly important to know what kind of working relationship that your potential new boss is looking to have with his/her new employee. Can you see yourself enjoying this working relationship based upon their responses?

### **Career Talk is Fine but Show Me the Money!**

But what about the money? When do I get to ask about my salary and the benefit plan? What about car allowances and 401K plans? How much vacation time do I get? These are all questions on our mind and may be on the mind of your spouse when you walk through the door following the interview. However, there is an appropriate time for covering these important issues.

Generally the Search Consultant will have much of this information for you in the very beginning of the respective discussion. This is an obvious benefit of working with a Search Consultant. The Search Consultant acts as a liaison for you and can interface appropriately without giving the wrong impression. This should be enough information to satisfy you until you advance to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> round of interview. Often the human resources department will provide you with a brochure or information packet during the first interview, but if they don't provide it that day, then you are to wait until the next interview. Ultimately, when the potential employer has identified a strong candidate that they will most likely pursue, the benefit package is usually offered by the Human Resources department. It is foolish to think that any company will offer that information until you have been properly screened and determined to be qualified for the position/employment. Obviously, you will need this information to assess an offer, but all in good time. Your focus must be on the career opportunity, the proper career challenge, and your future employer relationship.

### **What You Should Not Ask in the First Rounds of Interviewing**

- Don't ask about salary, stock options, vacation, holiday schedule or benefits.
- Don't ask questions that have already been answered in the interview, just for the sake of asking something. However, ask again if you need to clarify a point.
- Don't grill the interviewer. It's OK to ask about the person's background, but only as an interested party, not an interrogator. Questions about the employer's background should never sound as if you are judgmental about their qualifications.

### **Questions You Should Ask in the First Rounds of Interviewing**

- May I see a copy of the job description or can you explain in some detail the main duties of this job?
- Why has the job become available? If termination, what do you see as the things that the incumbent can do to be more successful?
- What qualities are you seeking as the qualified person for this position?
- What things are you most proud of regarding your company that you like to tell people?
- What can a strong performer in this position expect as a natural career progression?
- What is your interview process?
- Have I answered your questions satisfactorily enough to advance to the next step? What can I clarify for you about any of my answers?
- In doing my research on your company, I found some interesting news articles on the web. Can you explain what is meant in this article...?
- I am very interested in what attracted you to this company?

Prepare ten or twelve questions before the interview based upon your research and your own natural curiosity. It is very wise to make your list visible as well as your research notes. You will want the interviewer to see that you have:

- initiative and drive
- interest and enthusiasm

- research capabilities and internet savvy
- preparedness skills
- career focused questions

Keep your list on your lap or close by. It is even appropriate to make notes on your list as the interview progresses through the interview. Check off questions that have been answered without you having to ask the question.

When the time comes for you to ask questions, take out your list. This will show good preparation on your part. You may have a lot of questions that you want to ask, but you also need to respect the time of the interviewer. Narrow your list down to the most important 3-4 remaining questions. Even if you have no real burning questions due to the thorough interview process, always have one good career focused question held back to close the interview. An example may be,

“So Mr. Jones, based upon what I have been hearing from you today, I am most enthused that your company is really growing and may have outstanding opportunity for someone with my background and experience”. Could you elaborate a couple minutes as to my possible career paths within your company?”

This time is a valuable opportunity for you to get the information you need to help you make an informed decision as well as leave the positive impression with the employer to motivate him/her to offer the position to you.