

By Suzanne Thornberry

At the end of an interview, most interviewers like to throw out the question, "Do you have any questions for me?" Almost all interviewers will ask if you have any questions, so be prepared to ask something. If you've done your research, you should be able to ask an intelligent question or two about the business. But there are some questions you should avoid, because you may give your prospective employer an unfavorable impression. The root of the problem is jumping the gun on questions that really should be saved and used only if you get the job offer.

Of course, not all of these questions will be deal-killers for every hiring manager. But if you're in the first round of competitive interviews, it's worth knowing the kinds of questions that can leave bad impressions.

1 How much vacation time do you provide?

These and related topics about opportunities to get away from the office may make you look like a slacker in the eyes of some. If you get an offer, that's the time to ask about benefits.

2 Can I bring my dog to the office?

Avoid asking about any quirky perks, such as keeping a hot plate in your cubicle or taking a long lunch for a tai chi class. Even asking about common perks—such as free parking—is petty at this point.

3 Will I get an office?

First, don't phrase questions with the assumption that you'll get the job (at least preface them with, "If I'm hired..."). But the office question, in particular, will raise doubts in the interviewer's mind about how well you concentrate, how chatty you are during the work day, and how much time you'll spend on personal business.

4 Can I work from home?

Again, it's not cool to ask about ways of getting out of the office before you're even offered the job.

5 Will I have to carry a pager?

Many jobs require IT employees to be available 24/7 or on a rotating schedule, so your curiosity is understandable. But don't risk placing any doubt in the interviewer's mind about your willingness to be available.

6 Does this company monitor Internet usage?

This question also casts doubt on your commitment to working on company business. Besides, most of us can live with some restrictions on Internet use.

7 What's the stress level here?

If the hiring manager has seen other employees wash out because of the stress, he or she should have already asked about how you handle stress. It's a pointless question, really, because the "level of stress" is a subjective measure. You'd be much more likely to get a useful answer from a prospective coworker.

8 I noticed that your stock is down 10 percent this year. Do you expect people to be laid off?

It's terrific to research a company before the interview, but don't base your questions on its negative aspects. The hiring manager must not be expecting layoffs in your position, or he or she would not be going through all the effort of interviewing people.

9 What's your management style?

The problem with this frequently recommended question is not the risk of alienating the interviewer. After all, most people like to talk about themselves, so you might think it's a subtle way to stroke your prospective employer's ego. The problem is that the hiring manager can spin the answer in a way to make negative traits seem like virtues. A self-described "hands-on manager" might drive you crazy with micromanagement. Conversely, someone who encourages employees "to work independently" may not understand the technical aspects of the work or may not be able to communicate what's expected. So if you choose to keep this question on your list, be aware that the manager's perceptions of his or her style may differ drastically from your perception of it.

10 Do you have a tuition reimbursement program?

While it's good to let your employer know that you want to increase your knowledge about technologies or business in general, the hiring manager may wonder if you'll be more devoted to finishing your degree than putting out fires at work.

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