

7 Questions Great Candidates Ask

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(This was written for the interviewer; as you review this material interpret the information provided from your perspective, i.e. you – the interviewee.)

At the end of the interview when you, the interviewer, ask the candidate, "Do you have any questions for us?" it's often hard to know what to expect. Will the candidate ask a couple of superficial questions just to be polite, or will he or she ask deep, probing questions?

If a candidate appears to be simply going through the motions at this point, this is often a sign of a candidate who is not fully engaged with your brand and the hiring process. On the other hand, a candidate who probes and asks questions of substance is a more engaged candidate. The person is trying to form a picture of your business to see if it is the right cultural fit, job fit, technical fit and career fit for him or her. This more discerning approach is likely to be taken by the best candidates. But, what questions are these more engaged candidates likely to ask and how should you respond?

Below, I have set out seven interview questions that great candidates might ask and given some suggested responses.

1. Why did the previous job holder leave?

The candidate wants to know the fate of the former job holder, that is, was he or she fired, promoted, or did the person resign-and your answer will have a great bearing on the viability of the role for the candidate. Of course, if the former job holder was promoted, shout it from the rooftops, as it shows career progression potential in your firm. If the worker resigned amicably to broaden his or her horizon, explain this too.

If it was an aggravated resignation or dismissal you might want to prepare an answer along the lines of:

The candidate and the role did not prove to be a good match and despite us both working together diligently to rectify the situation, it did not work out and we unfortunately parted ways, which is not something we relish as we want all our employees to succeed. We followed all the correct procedures and best practices and wish them well in their career.

This shows that you can handle the ups and inevitable downs professionally and should reflect well on your business. Fudging or fogging this response will make top candidates suspicious.

2. What are the training and development opportunities?

A PwC study tells us that one of the main reasons that people leave businesses is due to a lack of career progression. Candidates know that training and development improves their skills and increases their chances of career progression; so, top candidates will want to know about training and development opportunities. Make sure to respond in detail, explaining your formal and informal training and development opportunities. Also explain how candidates can access this training. If training budgets are small, focus on how your business uses coaching, mentoring, experiential learning, stretch assignments and job rotation to train staff.

3. What is the career progression potential at your business?

Top candidates want to progress, so explain where internal roles are advertised and how they can apply, and describe one or two employees who have started low and progressed through the business to really demonstrate career potential in your firm. If you are a smaller business lacking formal role-based, career progression, explain how candidates can grow and increase their responsibilities and salary in your firm.

4. What is the company culture at the business?

Culture fit is a key today, not just from the employer side. Top candidates want to work in a positive culture that they respect and is in line with their values. So explain the values by which employees and managers operate in as positive and as honest a light as possible. Make sure it's not too glossy (unless it truly is perfect!) as it won't sound credible; so, you might want to outline one or two areas for improvement too.

5. What is your personal management style?

Studies show that one of the main reasons that employees leave and fail to meet their performance goals is a lack of rapport with their direct line manager. Good candidates know that it is important to gel with their line manager. So be open and honest about your management style, e.g. hands on/ hands off, or democratic/authoritarian etc., so the candidate can make an informed decision about his or her potential fit.

6. How do you plan to deal with changes in the market?

The best candidates will be commercially minded and will have SWOTTED up on your business model. They will know the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in your business area and will want to know how your business is planning to address them. You need to show that you are a strategically led company that can adapt to the environment by outlining how you plan to address any known weaknesses or risks to your business and/or how you plan to exploit emerging opportunities.

7. How do your employees wind down?

All employees who work hard and smart know that they need time to wind down to sustain performance and health over the long term. You don't want to give the impression of supporting a workaholic environment, so, of course, explain how you value employee health and talk about your wellness programs and commitment to work-life balance.