

10 ridiculously smart questions you should ask in a job interview

[By Rachel Weingarten](#)

August 1, 2017

Posted on Ladders

In a crowded job market, the last thing you want to be is forgettable.

Yet people do it every day with this one mistake: not asking any questions in a job interview.

The mistake is understandable. You've been so busy preparing to *answer* questions, that you're forgetting to show the curiosity that lets interviewers see what *you* really want to know. After all, even if every single one of your responses are flawless and on point, by not asking a question or two of your interviewer you run the risk of coming across as generic.

On the other hand, you don't want to ask *terrible* questions. That's even worse.

Here's how to show the person interviewing you how you're different and why you stand apart from the rest.

Why did you join the company?

Mark Phillips, who runs a top office for [Sanford Rose Associates](#), one of the largest recruiting networks in the U.S. had a simple question that could be quite complicated. If the interviewer tells you it was because of vacation days or benefits, chances are good that there isn't all that much below the surface. If, however, they tell you about the creativity or integrity of the brand, you know you're potentially going to work for a winner.

How does this role further your company's mission?

Kelly Lavin, chief talent officer for newly launched [Canvas](#), the first text-based interviewing platform suggests you ask this because "While job duties and company culture are important to understand, determining why a company and role exists is just as, if not more, important." It will also allow you to better understand if you "align with the company's mission and will feel a sense of purpose in your new role."

Tell me about your most successful employees. What do they do differently?

Believe it or not, this one is almost a trick question for potential employers Lavin says. "The answer to this question will help a candidate understand how a company defines success and what specific behaviors can lead to that success." In one fell swoop you'll find out what success means to this company and how you can better achieve it.

What do you expect someone in this position to accomplish in the first 60-90 days?

[University of Richmond Career Advisor](#) Anna Young says, "Great candidates hit the ground running, find out how you will be expected to jump in and start contributing to the organization from day one." And in case you're wondering, it's fine to modify the question for an internship and ask about expectations for the first few weeks.

What, if anything, in my background gives you pause?

Roberta Matuson, President of [Matuson Consulting](#), says this is pretty much the one must ask question job seekers should ask in an interview. She says "By asking this question, you'll be able to overcome any objections the interviewer might have *before* you leave the room." And if you're smart, you can find a way to combat any preconceived notions by addressing them in a follow up note.

What is the turnover in your company, in the executive suite and in the department, I am interviewing for?

Dave Arnold President at [Arnold Partners](#) says as a leading independent CFO search consultant for technology companies, he's had 100's of people go out to interview with clients, and he thinks that's a question worth asking. While people no longer expect to stay at any given job for decades or more, it's nice to know how long you can expect to stick around if given the opportunity. If the interviewer grows uncomfortable or shares the fact that turnaround at their company is higher than *Dancing with the Stars*, you might want to think twice before accepting the position.

What are the opportunities for growth and advancement?

Young says, "This can help you to understand the structure of the organization and if there are opportunities to move up and advance your career." It's also a great way of finding out about different ways to progress or move into different roles "Also, it could help you to learn if they offered continued training or professional development for employees."

If you had a chance to interview for your company again (knowing what you know now), what questions would you ask next time?

Ashley White, executive director for Human Resources for [APQC](#), a member-based non-profit that produces benchmarking and best practice research suggested this toughie.

This one is slightly sneaky because it also allows you to surreptitiously monitor the interviewer's hidden signals. Do they suddenly look uncomfortable before spouting the company line? Do they greet this with a giant grin? You might have more answers to this question by what they don't say, than even by what they do share.

What haven't I asked that most candidates ask?

Phillips also suggested asking this question, which sets you apart immediately. On the one hand, you're lumping all the other applicants together and showing a level of confidence; on the other hand, you're gaining insight into your potential competitors: *they asked this, but it never even occurred to me.*

One last thing: so that you don't spend the coming days or weeks on pins and needles, it's always a good idea to ask this next question.

What are the next steps in this process?

Young says, "If they haven't already shared this information, it's important to ask about their timeline so you're aware of when you could be notified of a second interview, or a potential offer."

What to ask yourself

Shannon Breuer, President at [Wiley Group](#) was once one of 800 laid off at her former job, Shannon now draws on her own personal experience to provide clients with career coaching and transition services. She offers a list of questions you should ask yourself before an interview, and if needed – you can flip them and ask the interviewer.

- What level of work-life balance do you wish to enjoy?
- How casual do you like to dress?
- Is your ideal employer an up-and-coming small business, or a century-old corporation with time-tested values and a clear path for future promotions?
- Do you like the management style of the leadership team?
- What are the company initiatives you can stand behind?