

EMPLOYMENT

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS JOB SEEKERS SHOULD COMMONLY ASK

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Disappointed in your last job or the company you joined? Was it different than what you expected based on the interview?

It happens all the time. People interview for jobs. They get offers they're excited about, and then find themselves disappointed with the new work situation within just weeks of starting.

Not asking enough — or the right — questions during a job interview is a common cause of an unhappy outcome, said Thomas Morris III, a past president of the Assn. of Career Professionals International (ACPI) and founder and president of the consulting firm Morris Associates Inc./Arbora Global Partners.

Echoing that sentiment, Susan Howington, CEO and founder of Power Connections in San Clemente, said, "Sometimes when we really want something to work out, we have 'selective hearing.' We miss key points made by the interviewer. We forget to do our due diligence and ask critical questions about the company, the management team and the job that come back later to haunt us."

"You don't want to sound like you're interrogating the employer," said Morris, "but there's a difference between being arrogant and 'in your face' and simply asking relevant

R.A.R.E.: A guide to accepting the right job

Thomas Morris, former president of the Assn. of Career Professionals International, suggests getting a clear sense of the following in every job interview:

Responsibilities

"What would my tasks and projects include on an average day?"

Authority

"Would I have support and direction in making decisions that help me complete tasks and projects?"

Resources

"Are the goals of my potential area of responsibility a priority for management?"

Evaluation of performance

"How, by whom and how often will I be evaluated?"

questions to help determine whether the situation is a good fit."

Before interviewing for a new job, "identify what surprised or disappointed you about your last job," urged Morris.

"Don't just review the company's website," she advised. "Search the Internet for articles about the company that appeared in other publications. Try to talk to people who work there or do business with the company. You can learn a lot that way," Howington said.

Howington also urges job seekers to make sure the job they accept comes with the resources needed to support the duties and mission outlined by the interviewer.

"This is commonly overlooked," she said. "People often assume that if they're being hired for a particular initiative or job, management

will definitely provide the necessary resources to do it. That's not always true. And sometimes, even if the human or financial resources needed are provided, support from key managers and executives is missing."

Morris stressed the importance of making sure the authority needed to perform your job comes with the position. "People often forget to ask about the authority and resources to execute the job they're hired for," he said. "Someone might be hired as a V.P., then realize after only weeks on the job that they have a nice title but not the resources or authority needed for the mission they've been given."

What if your boss was a problem at your last job?

"A key reason people leave companies voluntarily is because of bad management and

poor relationships with their superiors," said Morris.

"You can prevent problems by asking about a prospective boss' management style," said Howington.

"For example, you might ask: 'Do you give subordinates a lot of autonomy or do you prefer being more involved in the day-to-day activities of people who report to you?' Another relevant question could be, 'How do you define success for the person in this job?'" Howington explained.

It can also be useful to ask why the job you're interviewing for is vacant. If the answer is "The person previously in the job was promoted," you'll know the job has advancement potential, she said.

"On the other hand," said Morris, "if the interviewer responds, 'The previous employee just didn't work out,' consider following up with: 'If you don't mind my asking, what was the problem? If hired, I want to make sure I measure up to your expectations.' If the interviewer responds candidly, you may get additional insight into the boss' expectations for the job and your potential to meet them."

Don't forget to ask about the company culture, too.

"Does the company website describe the organization as 'family friendly'? If so, and if that's important to you, ask for an example of family-friendly policies or activities," suggested Morris.

He added, "If scheduling flexibility is a priority for you, ask if the company offers flextime or telecommuting. You can't assume the culture of another company is the same as the one you've been in."

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