

# SAVVY JOB APPLICANTS ASK QUESTIONS

Interviews are conversations in which organizations and applicants determine whether there's a match between their values, goals, interests, and capabilities. Though organizations may direct most of the discussion, applicants should always prepare a few questions of their own to determine if the position is the best fit for them at this time.

The questions applicants ask highlight what they consider of greatest interest. Therefore, applicants should resist questions about salary, benefits, and topics that could raise concern about their willingness to do work when and how the organization wants it done. Similarly, applicants should move beyond information that's available online and in organization literature, as well as information that's been covered already in the interview. So, what's left?

Consider questions that...

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## CLARIFY

Asking for clarification can enhance understanding of the work and organization—providing applicants don't inadvertently suggest they have difficulty listening or comprehending. To distinguish the former type of question from the latter, situate questions in a larger context. For example:

*"You mentioned that RockinItCo is looking to... . If that were to occur, would this position would be reconfigured to accommodate... ?"*

*"One of your colleagues said the division is turning its energy toward... . Could you explain where you see the team making the greatest impact in such work?"*

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## EXTEND DISCUSSIONS

Building upon earlier conversations, as well as information about the position, organization, or industry can showcase applicants' knowledge of and interest in the larger profession. For example:

*"I read in the WSJ, that several companies in the industry are shifting to... . Does RockinItCo have an interest in moving in that direction, too?"*

*"RockinItCo's website notes that it's expanding its work in the area of... . Are there elements that you're particularly excited about or, perhaps, cautious of?"*

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## REVEAL COMPANY VALUES

Listening to how people describe the organization, divisions and teams, individual projects or the work in general, clients, and competitors can reveal what the culture privileges most. For example:

*"What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?"*

*"What are the greatest challenges facing RockinItCo's in the near future? The biggest opportunities?"*

*"Who are your strongest competitors and, presently, where do they surpass RockinItCo?"*

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You may not have time to ask all of your questions in one sitting, but identifying information you'd like to know can help you gather information throughout the process and ask questions in the most appropriate contexts, making interviews a conversation rather than Q&A.

Keeping a list of the questions you so ask, as well as the answers you receive, can also help you refine and streamline questions for later interviews and, as offers come in, evaluate your options.