

### The First Questions to Ask On the Job

You've outgrown new-kid jitters; the first days in a senior position are no time to clam up.

By Debra Donston-Miller

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You've been out of work for months.

You got the interview.

You nailed the interview.

You got the job.

You can't screw up.

You have to hit the ground running.

Now what?



Now, ask the questions you didn't, or couldn't, ask during the interview. The ones that will help you do everything from effectively managing your budget to knowing what to wear on Fridays. It's also your chance to find out about the culture and personality of the company at a level of detail that would have appeared presumptuous to ask during the interview phase. But job seekers still need to respect protocol and mind their manners in approaching their future co-workers and managers, experts said.

#### In this Package

- Who's Asking the Questions Here?
- Interview Questions Candidates Should Ask

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"The first thing I would tell people is keep it positive," said Cheryl Palmer, a certified executive career coach and the founder of Call to Career. "For example, ask a co-worker, 'What do you like most about the boss?' Don't ask, 'What do you hate about the boss?' When you're first starting out, you want to be on good terms with everybody."

Veterans of the organization are also likely to be suspicious of newcomers digging for dirt, she said. "Those who know the ropes don't want to be seen as being negative about the company or the boss or anything else," Palmer said. "The best thing is to keep it positive, and people are more likely to want to answer your questions."



One particularly thorny issue for new hires is how to deal with internal candidates you beat for the job, some of who you will need to work alongside or manage in the future. Kelley Rexroad, founder of KREX Consulting, a human-resources consulting firm, recommends new hires identify any internal candidates whom were overlooked in the hiring process and reach out to smooth feathers you wouldn't otherwise know were ruffled.

"You want to be sensitive to their feelings and hear their ideas," she said. "The person could feel passed over, think you are making more money than they are. Without that knowledge, you may feel a cold shoulder and wonder why. You can win over the person with something like this: 'I understand that you applied for this role. What about it interested you?' Then engage him or her: What do they think will be tough to do? What do they think the priorities are, and what do they want to work on now? It may be possible to turn that person into a successor in the future."

Lisa Quast, president and founder of Career Woman Inc. and a certified executive coach and author, recommends new hires reach out both to their new boss and new co-workers.

Ask your new boss about goals and objectives but also about what keeps her up at night. "I like to find out what worries my boss the most so I can determine creative ways to help alleviate her worries, such as through new projects, improving processes, etc.," said Quast in an e-mail to TheLadders. "Companies look for employees who add value, so try to find creative and inspiring ways to show how much value you can add."

Quast suggests asking co-workers what they are working on and how you can help. "This will give you a good picture of the projects being worked on by individuals, as well as projects that are larger in scope and being worked on by many within or even outside the department," she said.

### What not to wear

Of course, in addition to goals and objectives, you also want to know what to wear on Fridays. Many of the experts interviewed by TheLadders said it's important early on to engage your co-workers in a discussion about the corporate culture.

Linda Matias, author of "201 Knock-out Answers to Tough Interview Questions: The Ultimate Guide to Handling the New Competency-Based Interview Style," suggests digging to find out what type of personality succeeds with the company.

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"Every organization has its own culture," she said. "Team members with certain personalities may get noticed more often and receive promotions. Armed with this information, you can assess whether or not you will naturally excel in the company or if you have to flex your personality style."

Angie Maizlish, president of First Impressions and a certified professional resume writer and certified employment interview professional, said success in a new position requires a plan of action. This, she said, requires a list of good questions and a notebook and pen (or a BlackBerry or iPhone) to record the answers.

Some of the questions Maizlish suggests are:

- What do you want me to accomplish the first week? Second? Third?
- Where do you see me one month from now?
- What tools do I need to be familiar with to be successful?
- Do you have a mentor program?
- To whom do I address questions? What is the best way to communicate those questions?
- What method of communication do you prefer? Do you have an open-door policy, or is there a set time during which I can direct any questions?
- What are the top three goals for me this quarter?
- Can I eat at my desk?
- Where is the bathroom?

Finding the right answers to all of these questions (especially the last), will go a long way toward ensuring a smooth start in your new job.

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*Debra Donston-Miller covers work-life issues and difficult job-search situations for TheLadders.*

