

Distinguish Yourself in the Interview

by Jan Cannon

Chances are that you consider an interview as the time for you to answer questions, and yes, you will be answering them. But what will distinguish you in the interview are the questions you ask. How do you ask great questions? Prepare well-researched, open-ended questions for the interviewer.

Use your research to provide content for your questions. Start a question by asking, "Since your company has sold its ABC division, what direction do you see the company moving in the next 1-2 years?" You know the division was sold because you did your homework researching the ABC company. Whatever you learn in the research phase of your job search you can put to good use in the interview. Good questions will set you apart from the other candidates.

Some ideas for effective, open-ended questions to ask include:

- ♦ Where do you see the industry moving in the near future?
- ♦ Where do you see your company headed in the next few years?
- ♦ What about this department/this job?
- ♦ What are the business' priorities?
- ♦ What is the critical responsibility of this position?
- ♦ How is this organization different from its competition?
- ♦ What are the challenges facing someone in this position? How would you like to see them managed?
- ♦ Define success in this organization?
- ♦ What are the most important things you look for in a member of your team?
- ♦ Why is this job available now?

If the interviewer seems annoyed with any of these questions, use your good sense to stop asking them.

Be prepared for the interviewer's questions, too. A good interviewer will ask situational questions. Situational questions tend to get an honest answer far more often than direct questions. For example, if you're asked whether you work well with other team members, the answer will always be OF COURSE. A much better question is: "Tell me a time about a difficult team situation and how did you handled it." Be careful with situational questions - answer honestly, but not with too much detail that might show you in a bad light.

The more you prepare ahead of time, the better your interview will be. Do this by thinking of questions that you want the answers to, of course. But also think (and even write down) your major accomplishments so that you'll be ready to tell some stories about your achievements when asked. As in many things, the more prepared you are the better you will perform. An interview is one of those times to shine because you're prepared.