

A Perfect '10'

Better Questions Yield Better Résumés

By Bridget (Weide) Brooks, CPRW

When collecting information from clients, asking the right questions can make a huge difference in the final product. Sometimes, the difference is asking as few as 3-4 more probing questions.

Imagine yourself a little bit like Larry King, peering over his spectacles, leaning in close to his interview subject. He opens his mouth and his guest lights up and shares details and stories you would never expect.

What are these “magic” questions that will get at the essence of your client’s appeal as a job candidate? While obviously you want to ask profession-specific questions, a recent *Résumé Writers’ Digest* survey reveals some outstanding general probing questions designed to help you gather information in a few key areas.

These questions can be incorporated into your questionnaires or asked in phone consultations or in-person interviews with clients.

Collecting Information About the Client’s Job Target/Desired Job

These are questions recommended to clarify the client’s job objective:

- What specific job titles are you targeting? (Please be specific regarding level, functional role, industry, and any environmental factors that are important to you.)



- How realistic is that goal, do you think?
- Can you identify 1-3 job postings for the type of position you’re interested in?
- If you had all the money you needed and you didn’t need to work, what would you do?
- In your performance reviews, in what areas did you receive the highest scores or the most positive feedback?
- What do you want to be “when you grow up”?
- If the “ideal” position were to become available, how would you describe it?
- What type of job are you looking for — and with what type of employer?
- If you could customize your career and create your own job, what skills would you use and how would you apply them?
- If you want to make a transition (new industry or job function), how can you make that shift?

Questions to Capture the Essence of the Client’s Current Job

If your client’s current job is relevant to his or her target position, spend some time identifying the key areas of expertise in the job he or she holds now.

- When a stranger asks you, “So, what do you do?” what is your answer? If an interviewer asks you the same thing, how would your answer be different?
- What is the most important part of your current job?
- Can you tell me about a typical day in your own words; what is predictable, what is difficult?
- What was the company’s purpose in hiring you ... what were you brought in to do? (And were you hired, recruited, or promoted into this position?)
- Can you name three critical functions of your job that would impact the company/department if you were not at work one day?
- What do you enjoy most about your current position? The least?
- What percentage of time do you spend on the “A,” “B,” and “C” aspects of your job?
- How does your current job fit within the context of the organization? Who do you work with? What other areas do you support? What interactions do you have with customers?
- What are you accountable for?
- At the end of the day, what makes you feel good about what you’ve done?

10 Questions to Ask Clients

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Questions to Elicit Information About Accomplishments

Accomplishments are the most important part of the résumé. Gathering relevant, quantifiable accomplishments can be a challenge.

- What have you achieved in your job — have you saved your employer any money or achieved any other quantifiable measure (helped the company make money, become more efficient, improve safety, improve customer service, etc.)?
- What do you do for the company that someone else did not, or would not, do?
- How was your performance measured in reviews — and what was the outcome (awards, recognition)?
- What key problems did you identify — and how did you help solve them? (Please describe in the Challenge-Action-Result format.)
- Were you chosen for any additional assignments? (What were they?)
- What would you rate as your top

three skills?

- What have you done that has broadened your responsibilities?
- Why are you good at what you do?
- What do others say about you and your work?
- What have you introduced at your firm that has never existed before ... or what did you improve upon?

Other General Questions

Sometimes there are questions that don't fit neatly into any other category, but that can help improve the overall résumé:

- Do you have a copy of your job description or any performance evaluations?
- What are your top 3-5 strengths and personality traits?
- What are you best known for at work?
- How did you find your most recent job?
- What sets you apart from other candidates for this job?
- Why are you a good employee? Why are you better than average?

- If you were asked to select your replacement, what qualities would you be looking for?
- What will be different about your next job?
- Is there anything that you don't want to do in your next job? (Especially something that you might be good at, but that you just don't enjoy doing?)
- Anything else you'd like to add?

Using Your Answers

Getting good information from the client is just the start — how you incorporate the answers into the résumé will help determine how effective the résumé is.

As Phil Graves, owner of 1-Day Résumé in Knoxville, Ky. notes, "Remember, they came in with a '2'; give 'em a '9' or a '10.'"

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