

QUESTION TIME

Laurence Lewis says it's not all about answers, you should have questions you want answered too

It's time for the Monaco Yacht Show and the beginning of another recruitment season; if you are on the job market, you need to prepare and rehearse. I have often written about interview techniques yet there is one topic I have never approached even though it seems to catch candidates unaware at the end of the interview. The moment when the principal asks "Do you have any questions for us?" Sitting there agape with a bewildered look is not an option so, how do you avoid stumbling at the last minute? It is your last chance to make an impression, so, let's make it a good one!

Most captains and crew are well prepared to answer technical questions but many have overlooked this important period during the interview process. They have simply not thought about any questions to ask or are unable to improvise and think on their feet. They ask questions that suggest they have not done their homework about the yacht or ask about the salary and benefits which is a real turn off for most employers. Not having any questions to ask sends the signal that you are not really interested in the position so, even if you feel a lot of ground has been covered during the meeting, you must think of at least one question to ask.

Of course, an interview is a two way street but when an employer asks "Do you have any questions for us?" he is not interested in how the job will impact your private life. Unless you have been head hunted which is a different scenario altogether, now is not the time to ask if the yacht can winter in Palma just because you live there with your family!

Through these final questions, an employer will try to assess your interest and curiosity in the position and the yacht, if you are interested in bringing added value to the yacht and if your personality is the right fit. So, let's look at some of the questions one should NOT be asking at this point; the ones best left for a second interview or conversation once an offer has been made:

How often will you actually come on board the yacht? This is really off putting for the yacht owner as it implies you want to see him as little as possible. You come across as lazy and self-centred.

I live 15 minutes' drive from the port where you winter, I'd like to go home every evening off season, would this be okay with you? This question is all about you; you bring zero added value to the yacht by asking this.

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What kind of salary are you offering? Wrong time to ask, this is best left for a second interview or once mutual interest has been expressed. Same for any benefit related questions and time off - now is not the time.

Do you have any plans to buy / build a new yacht? This makes you seem uninterested in the job on offer and invariably alarm bells will ring with the interviewer: will you quit the job he is offering you at the first opportunity?

Things you could easily find doing a google search or talking to the recruiter: i.e when was the yacht built? This shows complete lack of interest and preparation.

So, what kind of questions should you be asking?

Questions about you: "Do you have any concerns about my application?" This is a great question as it allows the interviewer the possibility to express his reservations about you and it gives you the opportunity to tackle his fears and really change his mind about you. It also shows that you are a confident person, not afraid of handling rejections. This really works, try it! You can also say "From what you said, I am very interested in the position. How many other captains am I competing with for the job?"

Questions about the job: "Why is the position vacant?", "Why is the current captain leaving?" Anything along those lines such as "How long was the last captain employed with you?"

Questions about the employer: "What did you like best about your last captain?" or "What is the most important quality you look for in a Captain?" If you want the job, go for it. The "Do you have any questions for us?" can really be a deal maker or indeed a breaker and certainly not a question to be underestimated. Happy interviewing.