

Four Questions to Ask a Potential Manager



By Caroline Levchuck

Happiness on the job sometimes comes down to one person: Your manager.

Your manager can matter more than money, title or benefits. People don't always quit jobs, they sometimes quit bosses. Many workers leave a position because they're unhappy with their bosses.

On the other hand, if you genuinely like and respect your boss, your job can be rewarding, fulfilling and even fun. But how can you ensure that you and your potential boss will get along?

While there are no guarantees, you can often recognize a boss who's right for you -- if you ask the right questions.

The Ideal Employee

Do you want to know what your potential manager will expect from you?

Ask her, "What's your ideal employee like?"

If her ideal employee works long hours on a regular basis, expect to do the same.

If her ideal employee is someone who never questions procedure, don't plan to arrive and immediately implement new ideas.

If her ideal employee works independently, rest assured that you won't be micro-managed.

You're likely to be happier on the job if you and your potential manager have similar working styles. After all, everyone deserves a manager who thinks that they're the ideal employee.

The Skinny on the Staff

You can tell a lot about your potential manager from his staff.

Ask him, "Can you tell me about the people I'd be working with? How long have you worked with them?"

Pay attention to how well your potential boss seems to know his staff. Can he list their individual accomplishments? Is he proud of them?

Note his tone and energy when he talks about his team. Does he sound upbeat and positive? Or is there a hint of frustration or disappointment in his voice?

Also note how long his staff has worked with him. High turnover can be a red flag, and happy employees are more likely to stay put.

Results and Rewards

Do you want to excel on the job? If so, then you need to know how a potential manager defines excellence.

Ask her, "How do you measure success on the job?"

You may be accountable to complete projects to deadline and under budget. Or perhaps you'll need to reach a certain benchmark in your performance, for example a dollar value in revenue or a percentage of satisfied customers.

You should also ask about the typical career path for an employee who successfully meets his goals. After all, you want to work for a manager who recognizes and rewards excellence.

A Problem Solved

Sooner or later, a problem will arise. And you need to know how a potential manager will handle it.

Ask him, "What's your approach to solving problems?"

Knowing how a potential manager solves problems can give you insight into his management style. Does he prefer to take charge and make a decision independently? Does he delegate the decision to a staff member? Or does he favor a more collaborative style of problem solving?

Finally, keep in mind that a potential boss' overall attitude toward answering questions can be very telling about his management style. If he's open to questions and answers thoughtfully, he's likely also open to exploring and improving his working relationships. And that's one quality that makes for a great manager.