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7 Questions to Ask When Weighing a Job Offer

by [Rebecca Knight](#)

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Illustration by Ana Moreno

Summary.

You got the job offer! Now you have to decide whether or not to take it. It's impossible to predict exactly how a job will turn out, but asking the right questions of yourself and others can give you a clearer picture of what to expect. In this article, the author shares advice from two experts and offers seven questions to ask to help you make an informed decision and to help prevent future regrets: 1) What am I overlooking? 2) What's the company culture *really* like? 3) What's my prospective boss *really* like — and will we click both personally and professionally? 4) What's my potential for growth at the organization? 5) What relationships am I going to build? 6) Beyond salary, what else can I negotiate that would benefit me in this role? 7) What's my exit strategy?

You've been waiting for it, hoping for it, dreaming about it, and at last, it's here: the job is yours. Congrats!

With an offer in hand, the real decision-making starts, says Dawn Graham, the author of *Switchers: How Smart Professionals Change Careers — and Seize Success*. You now must

weigh not only the salary and benefits but also the role's potential to challenge and stretch you, the work-life balance it offers, and whether the company's vibe and values match your own. "When you're interviewing, the employer holds the power," says Graham. "But when you get an offer, the tables turn. Now, they want you and envision you in the role, which presents you with a rare moment of leverage."

Making the most of this leverage might seem intimidating, but it's an opportunity you shouldn't pass up, according to Chelsea Jay, a career development and leadership coach. "Taking stock of what the offer means for you and your career requires self-reflection," she says. "This is a big commitment and it needs to align with your lifestyle and your personal and professional goals."

Graham and Jay recommend giving yourself ample time and space to think about the offer. As you consider your options, here are seven questions they suggest asking yourself:

1. What am I overlooking?

During the interview process, you were laser-focused on landing the job. However, this single-mindedness might have led you to make assumptions or overlook important details about the position or company, says Graham. "People tend to focus on certain aspects of the job and end up ignoring red flags," she adds. For instance, you might be so caught up in the company's prestige or the prospect of a bigger paycheck that you disregard your hiring manager's distracted personality or that the company's rigid attendance requirements could strain your family life. But don't assume challenges will resolve themselves once you start, says Graham. It's unlikely your boss will change their behavior and negotiating a hybrid schedule might not be feasible.

Jay recommends talking through the offer with trusted sources, including your spouse, friends, or career coach. Address your hesitations, uncover blind spots, and go over any parts of the job or the organization that feel a little off. "Consider all your priorities," she advises. "If you have to sacrifice one, maybe it will be okay. Just make sure they don't all fall by the wayside."

2. What's the company culture *really* like?

Gaining a realistic understanding of a company's culture as an outsider can be difficult, so be alert for subtle signals.

Start by reflecting on your interview experience, says Graham. Note any signs of an unhealthy work-life balance, such as the company scheduling interviews late at night or frequently

sending emails over the weekend. Then reach out to potential colleagues and ask open-ended questions. Her go-to is, “What surprised you when you took this role?” Happy employees usually share positive experiences about their team or benefits. “But unhappy employees focus on the negatives,” she says. “You ask for one thing and they tell you six.”

Jay also recommends learning more about the company’s onboarding process. “You want to hear that you’ll be shadowing colleagues and attending trainings,” she says. “That shows the company is proactive, intentional, and invested in your success. What you don’t want is to be alone trying to figure everything out by yourself.”

3. What’s my prospective boss *really* like — and will we click both personally and professionally?

Jay recommends having an open conversation with your prospective boss about their management approach and how it aligns with your work style and preferences.

“You should feel comfortable having this conversation because you’ll need to discuss these things anyway if you decide to take the job,” she says. “If you’re uncomfortable expressing yourself and your needs, it might not be the best place to work.”

Talk to your potential boss about how they see success in the team and what they expect from the people working under them. Ask how they support their employees in growing their skills and moving up in the company.

Knowing what they look for in an ideal employee is also helpful. “They might say they like employees who work independently and take ownership, or they might say they like people who understand the chain of command,” she says. “It tells you a lot about their management style and how they operate.”

4. What’s my potential for growth at the organization?

Whether the job will “help you get to where you want to go next” is another important consideration, says Jay. She advises first thinking about your long-term career goals, including where you see yourself in five to 10 years. Then, figure out whether this role can provide the necessary skills, education, or mentorship to support your growth.

Ask the hiring manager about concrete examples of employees who have progressed in their careers. Inquire about a professional development budget and the extent of opportunities for

employees to take courses, attend conferences, or gain certifications. “You’re looking for signs that the company is committed to your growth and development,” she says.

Keep in mind that growth opportunities can sometimes be sugarcoated when the company is trying to woo you, so it’s essential to do your own homework and LinkedIn sleuthing. Look at the career paths of current employees to get a sense of internal promotions, average tenure, and turnover rates. If most people have stayed with the company for less than two years, that should give you pause, says Graham.

5. What relationships am I going to build?

“With remote and hybrid work becoming more common, it’s harder to build connections with colleagues and finding sponsors can be more challenging,” says Graham. That’s why it’s critical to understand both what your day-to-day interactions will be like, as well as how you’ll build a network at the company.

Reach out to potential direct reports, peers, and colleagues in other departments. Ask how they forge relationships and find mentors, and find out whether the company’s setup supports those efforts. Take note of the people you interact with: Are they smart, supportive, and collaborative, or do they seem standoffish, uncooperative, and overly competitive?

Remember: “Your coworkers are going to make or break your experience,” says Graham.

6. Beyond salary, what else can I negotiate that would benefit me in this role?

While some may feel uneasy about negotiating and fear it could damage their rapport with their prospective boss, the process can not only strengthen the relationship, but also be illuminating, says Graham. Watch how your potential boss responds: Are they rational and open-minded, or dismissive and inflexible? This could reveal how they’ll handle future situations when you need support.

As for what to ask, Graham recommends getting creative. It could be a cell phone allowance, tuition benefits, or membership dues to a professional association. Choose one or two items that would be most advantageous and highlight how they’ll also benefit both you and the company. “There’s always something to be negotiated,” she says.

7. What's my exit strategy?

It might seem overly negative to think about leaving a job before you've even accepted it, but Graham urges practicality. "This is a business relationship, and the company certainly has an exit strategy for you if you underperform" or if business is bad.

Research the job market for your industry and consider your options. Assess the company's financial health and stability by looking at publicly available information on its financial performance, credit rating, and market standing. This will give you an idea of its long-term prospects.

Bear in mind that you also might decide to leave the job sooner than anticipated for any number of reasons. "Hopefully you're going to be okay being there for the next 2–5 years," says Jay. "But it's wise to have a backup plan."

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It's impossible to predict exactly how a job will turn out, but asking the right questions of yourself and others can give you a clearer picture of what to expect. Your goal, plain and simple, is to make an informed decision and help prevent future regrets, says Graham. After all, "Life is too short to get into a situation where you think: 'Wow, I wish I'd known that before.'"

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Rebecca Knight is a journalist who writes about all things related to the changing nature of careers and the workplace. Her essays and reported stories have been featured in The Boston Globe, Business Insider, The New York Times, BBC, and The Christian Science Monitor. She was shortlisted as a Reuters Institute Fellow at Oxford University in 2023. Earlier in her career, she spent a decade as an editor and reporter at the Financial Times in New York, London, and Boston.