

Take 5

Five questions to ask during an interview for your management-level job in finance

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Stepping into a managerial role in finance is a significant career move. Not only do you have a fiduciary responsibility to your employer, but you are also accountable to a group of people who look to you for leadership and support.

For that reason, the job interview for such a position is critical. No matter how much you want the job, it's important that you ask the right questions to get a clear picture of your potential employer's expectations and management style, as well as the company's working environment.

Here are five questions that will help you determine if the financial management job you're interviewing for is the right fit for you:

Question 1: What are the characteristics you're looking for in the ideal manager for this position? What interpersonal, technical and administrative skills and/or style are required for success in this role?

The answer to this question will provide important clues as to whether or not your personality and leadership style match up with your potential employer's expectations for the job. Is he or she looking for an aggressive manager who can mediate conflict or a hands-off leader who is more of a shepherd and overseer?

Question 2: What is your own management style? How do you go about making decisions, delegating, solving problems, running meetings and so forth?

Just as your personal style should be a match for the job, your potential boss' personality and leadership approach should be one that you can work with. How does she react to problems with deadlines? How does

she handle staff members who are late to meetings? Answers to this question will give you a snapshot of internal office relationships and the day-to-day business conduct.

Question 3: Tell me about the team I'd be working with. How long have they been working here? What are their educational and professional backgrounds? Professionally, what are their strengths and weaknesses?

As a manager, it's important to meet your staff with eyes wide open. If you understand up front who they are and where they're coming from, your transition into your managerial role will be much smoother and more pleasant, since you'll be aware of weak spots and can address them appropriately. For instance, maybe your team is not so good at getting reports in on time, so fixing that can be one of your first priorities. Also, answers to these questions give you an opportunity during the interview to stress areas of your education and experience that can fill gaps in the strengths of the company's finance team.

Question 4: What are your objectives for the person who takes this position over his or her first 100 days on the job? Will the new manager be given a detailed plan of action? How will you measure success in this role over those first three months on the job?

Along with giving you an idea of how structured your position will be, the answer to this question provides further information about your potential employer's leadership style. Are you going to be closely monitored and directed over those first 100 days, or will you be freer to develop your role and your team in the way that works best for you?

Listen to your potential employer's answers to this question very carefully, remembering that this is the person—and the leadership style—you'll be working with every day.

Question 5: What is currently the most pressing business issue or challenge for your finance department? Is a plan of action to resolve this challenge already in place?

Again, it's helpful to know what kind of environment you're coming in to. Every finance department has some challenges, so you shouldn't necessarily view the answer to this question as a negative. You'll have to weigh the challenges against your experience and expertise and your readiness to take on that particular problem.

Remember: A job interview isn't just an opportunity for you to sell your potential employer on your talents and experience. It is also a fact-finding mission that can help you determine whether or not the company you're interviewing with is a good fit for you. ▲



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