

Production Assistants—and Assessing Your Employer's Needs

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Ninety percent of the people I have ever interviewed as a prospective employer never tried to determine the wants, requirements, and needs of our company.

How can someone possibly obtain or do well in a job if he or she does not take the time to understand what the employer is looking for? It's hard to believe, but few interviewees ever take the extra step.

Instead, most people come into interviews concerned only about what they need. People are concerned about

- the hours they are going to be working,
- where they will be working,
- the benefits the company offers,
- stock options,
- the amount of vacation time they will be getting,
- what the company culture is like, and
- who they will be working with.

Most interviewees I have spoken with throughout the years seem focused on questions like these. There is absolutely nothing helpful about asking such questions during an interview. Although these are definitely things you should be considering when evaluating an employer, you should wait to ask these sorts of questions until after you have secured the job. Once you have an offer *in hand*, you are going to be in a far [better position](#) to get good information anyway.

Your line of questioning during an interview should focus primarily on what the company needs from you. The interview is the best time to ask as many questions as possible about

- what the employer is going to expect of you,
- why the opening exists,
- what the ideal employee in your position would be,
- how you would distinguish yourself in the job if you got the job,
- whether there are additional responsibilities in the job that you could undertake,
- what the people who have been most successful in the job have done right,
- when the employer need someone to start.

You can end up with a lot of job offers if you really take the time to probe employers for exactly what they are looking for. To induce someone to hire you over others, you generally have to offer some advantage that fulfills the hirer's needs more than others. Let's review some of the needs employers have:

- the need to look good to their superiors
- the need to feel calm and relaxed at work
- the need to make sure that sales goals and quotas are met
- the need to minimize expenses
- the need to feel like they have a *friend* at work
- the need to be more effective at their job
- the need to increase revenue
- the need to make the company seem reliable
- the need to represent the company as friendly, considerate, and professional

There are literally thousands of needs that any given employer might have, and you never know exactly what they may be. The better you probe to understand the needs of an employer, the more likely you are to secure (and maintain) the job.

For example, for a Malibu, California, fashion boutique, the most important thing for the employer may be to have extremely attractive girls working behind the counter, wearing the latest fashions. If a girl interviewing for one of these jobs comes into an interview knowing this, she could talk about how she is "obsessed" with the latest fashions and looking good--and get the job. If this girl later on were to become fat and to start wearing apparel from other stores to work, she would probably lose her job. She might not even be told why she was being fired, but she would quickly be replaced by somebody who was more in tune with the employer's needs.

Conversely, if a person were interviewing for a job in a watch store down the road that routinely sold \$25,000 watches to wealthy people, the most important thing might be to have a passion for timepieces along with an ability to explain complex movements to people, while keeping a strong, business-like appearance. If this person showed up to the interview wearing an expensive suit, looking the part and speaking with an educated accent, he or she might get the job. But if this person suddenly started showing up in cheap suits, talking very loudly, with bad grammar--that person would also lose his or her job and might not ever be told why. This would be another example of how an employee might fail to meet an employer's needs.

The more you understand your employer's needs in the interview (and at all times), the better opportunity you have to make sure that you succeed within the organization. You can know by asking an employer's needs in the interview if you are someone who can fill them or not. If you can fill your employer's needs, you need to be able to let them know this in no

uncertain terms.

Employers will not always be completely direct with you about what they want. It is up to you to discern this in the interview.

Over the years I have employed many young women who have had jobs during their careers as production assistants for various soap opera actors, television announcers, and others in Hollywood. Because each opening for a production assistant will draw hundreds of hungry applications, the studios do not need to offer much more than minimum wage for these jobs.

What the soap opera actors, announcers, and so forth really want, however, is not just someone to assist them on the set and whatever is in the formal job description. They may want a driver, a house cleaner, a babysitter, a personal shopper, a cook, maybe even someone to find them drugs when they are traveling... you name it. They also often want someone who is willing to work not just the 40 hours or less that the studio is willing to pay them for, but who is willing to work 80 or more hours per week for the price of 40 hours of minimum wage work. Now, in fairness, many of these stars pay their assistants in cash under the table for this extra work, but some do not.

If you wanted to be a production assistant for one of these Hollywood types, do you think the star would tell you directly that he or she wants you to work for less than minimum wage, or to bill time to a studio for walking their dog, or to pay you under the table in cash? They may allude to this by talking about how they have a very busy personal life and how they need help with all sorts of random things. The stars may drop a lot of hints about the things that they need. If the production assistant asks the right questions and shows a willingness and ability to do all this sort of work, she will probably get the job.

There is a lot of skill in getting these jobs, and they can lead to great things. For example:

Producer [Kathleen Kennedy](#) started out as a production assistant on the Steven Spielberg movie [1941](#), and was asked to help him organize a number of special effects notes that he had in various states of disarray--some were scribbled on cocktail napkins, half sheets of paper, etc. She took the notes home with her, organized and bound them up in separate notebooks. This so impressed Steven Spielberg that he took her under his wing and eventually helped her become one of the most powerful producers in Hollywood. http://filmtvcareers.about.com/od/basics/p/CP_ProdAsst.htm

However, most people will never get a production assistant job if they do not show a real willingness to do exactly what the hirer wants. One star is going to have needs that are different from another. Learning what is required in each job when you are interviewing is extremely important, and the more you understand this, the more likely you are to get hired.

When you are interviewing for a job, you are there to get hired, and you are only going to get hired if you are a *fit*. The only possible way to be a fit is to know exactly what the employer is seeking, and to find this out you must ask lots of questions.

A few months ago, I was seeking an assistant in Las Vegas and I received a response that went something like this:

I am a fastidious gay male who excels in the areas of punctuality, order, neatness, and cleanliness. I make sure at all possible costs that the man I am working for has a clean and organized desk, that he keeps his appointments and has a well ordered life.

This was not exactly what I was seeking; however, if this level of detail and neatness and so forth were important to me, this person would have been my first choice. In reality, what I prefer is someone who is mellow, quiet, understands what is going on, and is flexible. Someone who interviews with me and understands this is more likely to get the job than the guy above. Had this person shown up and asked a bunch of questions to determine my preferences, he would have had a far better chance of getting the job.

You can be perfect for any job if you find out what the employer is seeking. Let the employer tell you what they are seeking, and ask a lot of questions to get to the heart of their needs.

One of the greatest causes of people losing their jobs is the failure to take the time to consistently take into account their employers' needs. [Job seekers](#) and employees who do take the time to understand the needs of employers seem to be the ones who end up with the best jobs, and who have the most luck staying employed. If you truly understand what your employer needs, then you are rarely going to lose a job. Once you have this information, all you have to do is precisely what is expected of you--and you will succeed at your job.

THE LESSON

Assessing your employers' needs will lead you to success in both your job search and your career, so work to ascertain exactly what it is they are looking for. Once you know what your employer wants, do precisely what is expected of you and you will succeed. Determine exactly what your employer is seeking by asking lots of questions in the interview. Those who take the time to understand their employers' needs are those who wind up with the best jobs.

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