

7

QUESTIONS A FINANCIAL
SERVICES PROFESSIONAL
SHOULD ASK A
POTENTIAL EMPLOYER
BEFORE ACCEPTING A
ROLE

EMAIL

enquiries@paulharpersearch.co.uk

WEBSITE

www.paulharpersearch.co.uk

PHONE

01761 252 536



INTRODUCTION

If you are a Financial Services professional you will know your skills are in demand and that nowadays, particularly Financial Advisers can almost name their price. Yet many appointments still fail. In many cases, this could have been easily avoided, if only the chosen candidate had asked the right questions before accepting the job.

There is a great deal of information available to help you prepare for job interviews and questions that you might be asked to enable you to prepare responses that demonstrate your excellence as a Financial Services professional. However, there is much less information available on questions you should be asking a potential employer.

I have put together 7 questions with additional insight on what you should be looking for in a response from a potential Financial Services employer to enable you to make the best and most informed career decisions.

Why is the job open or why did the previous person leave?

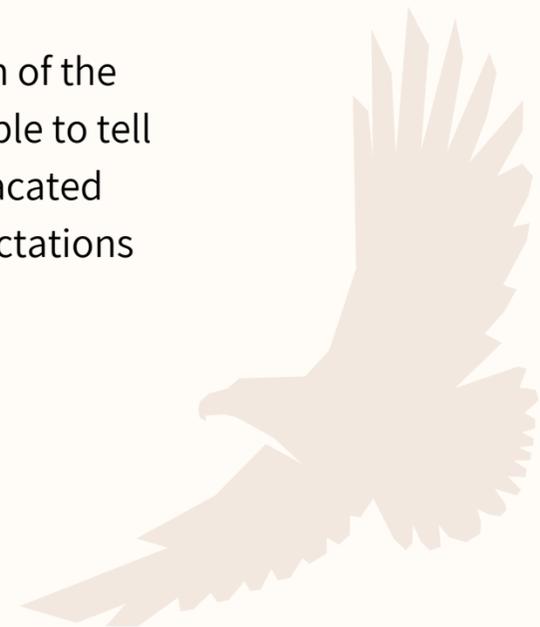
Question 1

You can learn a lot about an organisation, not just Financial Services companies, by asking this question. If the role has been newly created due to business growth, this can be a positive indicator of business health, investment and therefore job security.

If this is the case, you may want to probe further to understand more about what would be expected of you in the role, as newly created roles can sometimes be unclear and take a while to develop.

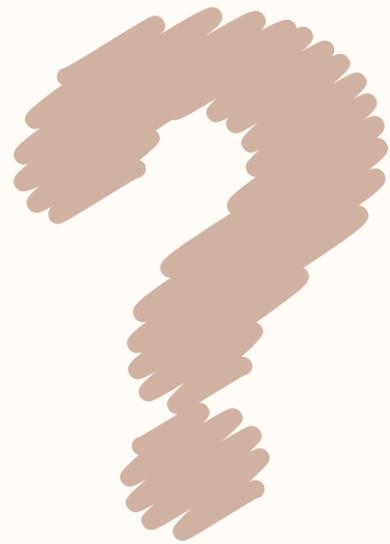
If the role has been newly created due to structural changes, it can again be a positive indicator of a business that is responsive to change. However, it could also be due to a business experiencing challenges, so make sure you receive a satisfactory answer to your question.

When you ask this question, you can often determine, from both the body language reaction of the interviewer and the actual explanation, if there are any red flags. The interviewer should be able to tell you clearly and concisely why the previous incumbent left. If the role has been filled and vacated several times in the last few months or years, this may be an indicator of problems with expectations for the role itself, or perhaps a toxic manager or colleague(s) within the department.



How do you reward and evaluate performance?

Question 2

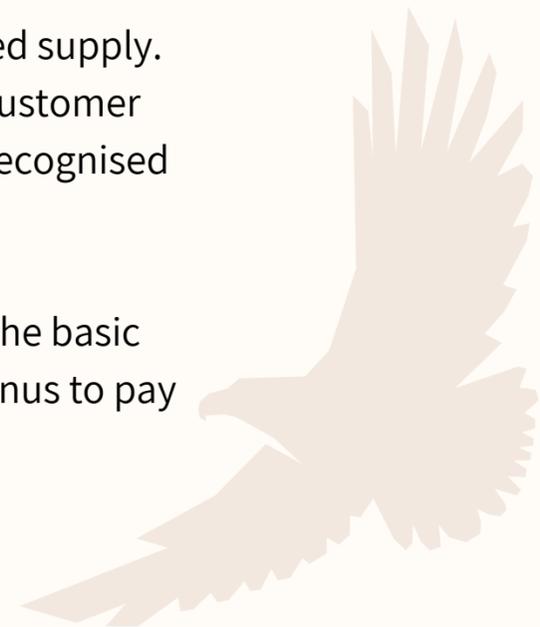


How a company evaluates performance can tell you a lot about what is important to a business. The Retail financial services industry used to be highly sales oriented, where basic salaries were low and sales success was rewarded.

Unless you have been living outside the UK, you will recognise how Financial services businesses have changed since RDR. The product & platform providers have seen squeezed margins and become very cost focused while DFMs and Asset Managers have merged and sought greater scale to survive and thrive. In many of these businesses, a siege mentality can exist where performance evaluation and bonuses are hard to come by.

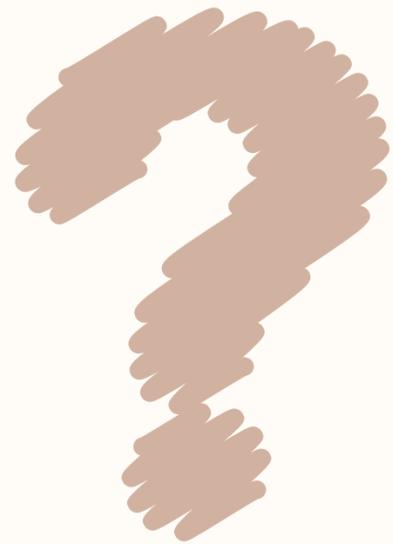
By contrast, Financial Advice businesses have started to thrive as demand for advice exceeded supply. The adviser sector has fragmented moving from sales focused businesses to technically & customer focused businesses. That can mean better basics and lower bonuses (or even performance) recognised through annual pay rises.

As the world has changed, many more companies pay discretionary bonuses. That's fine if the basic salaries are high - and bonus is just that - a bonus. But it's no good if you are relying on the bonus to pay your mortgage!



How do you reward and evaluate performance?

Question 2 *cont...*

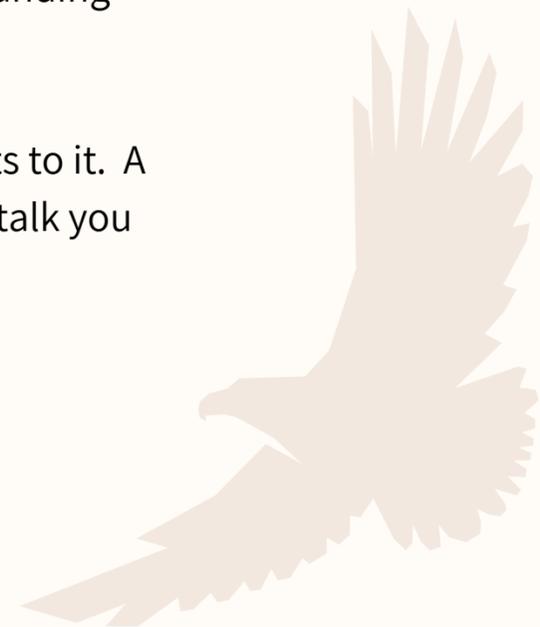


Also, don't fall for a high but unrealistic quoted OTE. Remember, it's not the OTE that counts, it's what actually get paid out. What are other members of the team earning? What bonuses were paid last year? Last quarter?

We know companies where the OTE is much lower than actual earnings and others where OTEs are attractive but rarely met. Some companies have a reputation for not paying bonuses. Other reward schemes can be very generous for high performers.

Do they have a formal and structured process, or is it an ad-hoc informal process? Understanding their approach can help you evaluate the company's priorities.

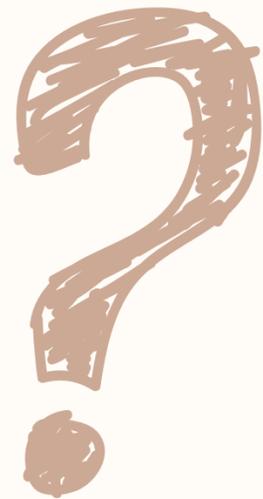
A good performance management process will in fact have both formal and informal elements to it. A good indicator of a company that is interested in their employees, is an interviewer that can talk you through the process both enthusiastically and informatively



How do you ensure employees develop and learn?

Question

3

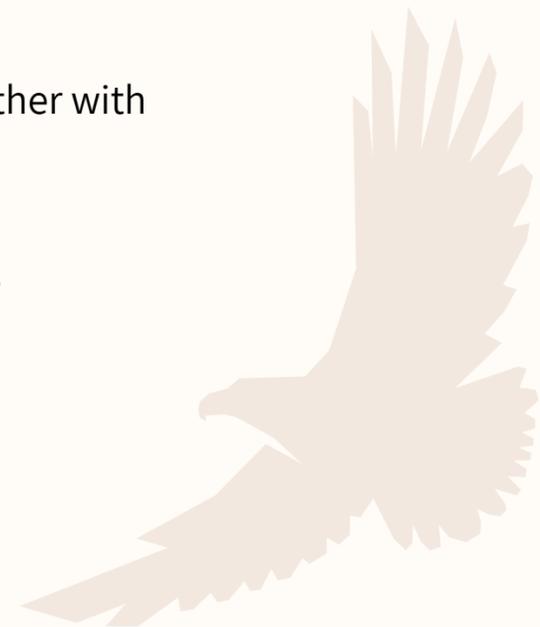


Our industry is keener than ever on training and professional qualifications. Whenever you consider accepting a new role, you want to be clear about what the role and company will do for you personally and professionally.

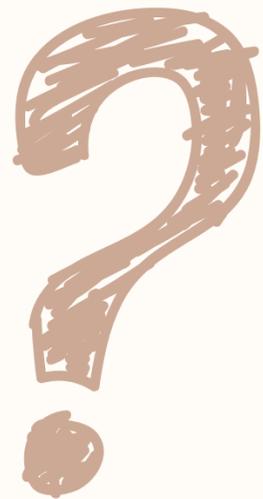
From a professional perspective, you want to be challenged, empowered, recognised for your success, exposed to opportunities to develop further and given opportunities to learn and develop new skill. You may want to study for further professional qualifications such as Chartered or Certified Financial planners or Wealth Management qualifications.

Remember, personal development is a form of remuneration as it increases your earning power, either with your current employer or the next one!

You might want to ask your interviewer what their experiences has been with the company.



Question 3 *cont...*



Areas to explore would be:



Is there an established Induction Process in place?



Do they have a performance management process?



What are their training opportunities like?



Will they consider sponsoring professional qualifications?



Do they encourage and support Continue Professional Development (CPD)?



Is there a mentoring scheme?



Question

4



Is there scope for promotion in the future?

There are pros and cons to any business that just either promotes from within or brings in senior people from outside the business. What you want to hear is that a company objectively applies both of these approaches.

The structure question below will give you further insight. It demonstrates a business's determination to grow and improves with and through people, not in spite of them. Again, you might want to ask your interviewer where they came from and how they arrived in their current role.



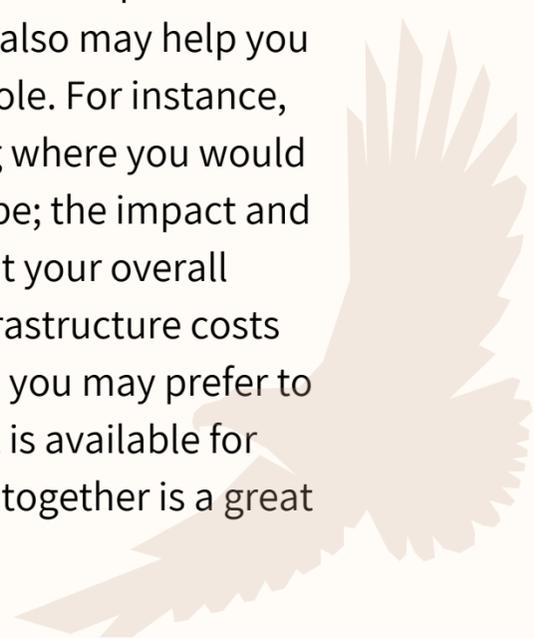
Question 5



Can you tell me how the role relates to the overall structure of the organisation?

This is one of the first things a skilled recruiter will ask about a potential role. Titles mean very little in financial services. Don't be fooled by courtesy titles.

One company's "consultant" might be the equivalent of someone with a much more impressive "director" courtesy title elsewhere. Look for the responsibilities and report lines. It also may help you get a greater understanding of the support available to help you succeed in your role. For instance, what ratios of paraplanners or customer service staff are available. Understanding where you would fit in helps you to determine if the role is right for you; where any challenges might be; the impact and influence you may have; where the opportunities for growth might be and what your overall contribution will be to your team, department and company. Be realistic, a good infrastructure costs money but may help you be effective in your role. Likewise, if you are self-sufficient, you may prefer to work in a less bureaucratic place with a smaller infrastructure where more profit is available for distribution to employees. Understanding how a company works together and fits together is a great indicator of whether you want to be a part of it.



Question

6

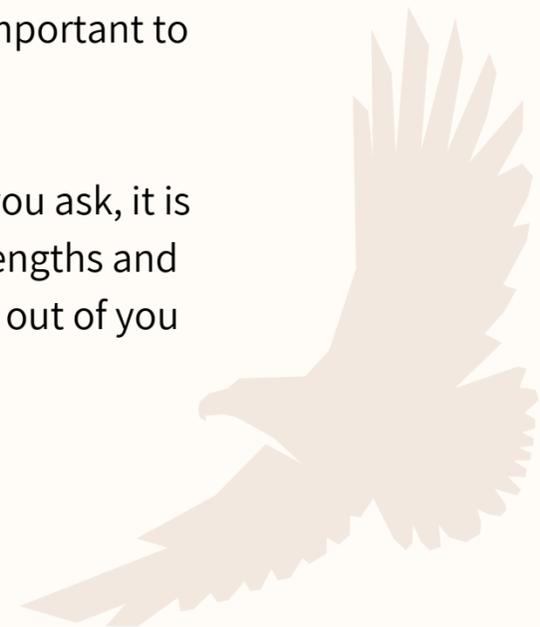


How would you describe the work culture here?

The importance of culture fit can be astonishingly underestimated. In order to be able to interpret any response to this question, you should be very clear on the types of culture that you will thrive in, as well as the cultural environments that you would struggle to work within.

Some people want to work for sales orientated financial services organisations with an “eat what you kill” mentality. Others feel the emphasis today should be on looking after existing clients in a more collegiate way. I work with all sorts of companies with all sorts of cultures. However, it’s important to recognise not all cultures suit you.

Although the answer to this question could be subjective and depend very much on who you ask, it is still a very worthwhile question. The result of which allows you to consider both your strengths and weaknesses to determine if the culture will permit you to work in a way that gets the best out of you to be successful in a role and company.



Do you have any doubts about whether I am suited to this position?

Question

7



This is a great question that demonstrates you are open to constructive criticism and willing to learn from the experience of others at any point in your career. It also gives you a real opportunity to address any weaknesses that the interviewer may perceive that you have.

It ensures that the interviewer is forced to reflect on the interview while you are still in the room and gives them the chance to ask you any final questions to clarify any nagging doubts they might have about your ability to do the role.

Finally, through the interview, you will have gained a good understanding of how you can contribute and be successful in the role. So re-state your strengths and how they translate in terms of you being the right person for the role.

As well as giving you crucial information that you need to be able to make the best possible career decision for you, asking questions of a potential employer enhances your appeal as a potential employee. You're demonstrating additional and important factors about your thinking, competencies, behaviour and character that the employer will inevitably benefit from should you ultimately join them. Interviews are a two-way process. As mentioned earlier, your Financial services skills and qualifications are in demand. Both sides have a lot to gain and lose so ask the questions and enhance the likelihood of making the decision which is best for both of you.

