



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS TO ASK A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER



A guide to help associate ODs take the next step in their careers.

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As an optometry student or associate OD embarking on a journey to find your dream job, this pivotal moment in your career is not merely about securing a position. It's also about finding a professional "home" that aligns with your values, aspirations, and vision for patient care. Joining a practice that will help you accomplish your personal, professional, and financial goals is vital to achieving satisfaction in your career.

As you traverse the landscape of employment opportunities armed with your qualifications and enthusiasm, the questions you ask during interviews serve as beacons guiding you toward the right destination. I suggest every

associate optometrist pose the following essential questions to hiring parties when navigating the job market to ensure a path of fulfillment, growth, and professional success.

6 QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING THE HIRING PROCESS

Question No 1: What Is the Practice's Mission and Values?

Understanding the mission and values of a practice provides you with insights into its priorities and approach to patient care and is crucial for aligning your own goals with those of the organization. Have employees memorized the mission statement and taken it to heart, or is it something plastered on the wall purely

for the sake of appearances? Look for a practice that has a vision that resonates with your own beliefs and principles (see *Set Your Standards*).

Be sure to experience the office culture before committing to work at a practice. A great work environment can be witnessed and felt, and nowadays, many people value company culture and work-life balance over compensation and benefits.¹

Question No 2: Can You Describe the Patient Population Served by the Practice?

Every practice offers a different combination of services, which can vary based on patient demographics. For example, most successful users of



intense pulsed light therapy practice in more affluent areas, where patients are more likely to be able to afford out-of-pocket expenses. Likewise, an office in an area where most patients have state insurance may have difficulty generating revenue from \$1,000 frames. It is important for associates to understand patient demographics to ensure that they're joining a practice that resonates with the type of care they hope to provide.

Additionally, associate production will depend, in part, upon patients' insurance plans (or lack thereof). A practice that only accepts cash-pay patients will certainly have a higher revenue per patient than an office focused on patients with vision care plans. Given that most associates have a bonus incentive, having a grasp of a practice's revenue potential is vital to income expectations.

Question No. 3: How Does the Practice Support Work-Life Balance for Its Employees?

Achieving a healthy work-life balance is essential for overall well-being and job satisfaction. In fact, this topic is one of the most important considerations for younger generations navigating the job market.¹ Seasoned employers can malign work-life balance all they want, but it would behoove them to take notice

SET YOUR STANDARDS

Just as it is important to get to know your potential employer before making a commitment, you must know what's important to you as an individual to be able to evaluate the information they provide. Certain aspects of a practice's work culture, benefits and compensation packages, patient base, etc., may align with the goals of another person, but leave something out that's vital to you.

Take the time to consider factors such as: patient volume, paid time off (and any restrictions), call coverage, travel requirements in between offices, technician support, and noncompete restrictions in your contract.

and create career opportunities for associate ODs that maximizes their well-being. Inquire about the practice's policies regarding work hours, vacation time, and flexibility. Seek out offices that prioritize employee wellness and offer supportive policies that promote a balanced lifestyle.

Question No. 4: What Technology Does the Practice Use?

Optometry as a profession is evolving. During the interview process, ask about a practice's technology

to assess whether it is equipped to provide high-quality care and stay at the forefront of innovation. Most associates would rather not simply spin dialers every day and are excited about the opportunity to offer state-of-the-art services to patients. The expectation for ODs to practice standard of care with suboptimal equipment is a common cause of strife between practice owners and associates. Look to join an office that implements advanced technologies to ensure optimal patient outcomes.

Question No. 5: What is the Full Compensation Being Offered?

Let's not kid ourselves: Money is important, and it should no longer be a taboo topic, especially when today's ODs are graduating with a quarter of a million dollars (or more) in student loan debt.² Young optometrists understandably want to know exactly how much income they're going to earn and whether that will be sufficient to allow them to service their debt (and, preferably, eat more than ramen noodles).

The topic of compensation warrants its own article, but for the purpose of navigating a job interview, suffice it to

AT A GLANCE

- Ensure your own goals align well with those of the organization by clearly understanding the practice's mission and values.
- When interviewing for a job, learn what the take-home pay will be, whether the bonus structure is reasonable, and how your progress will be tracked.
- A common mistake made during the job search is turning the interview process into a conversation about yourself.



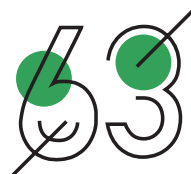
Percentage of survey respondents who say they consider a company's culture before applying for a job.¹



Percentage of survey respondents who say that work-life balance is an important factor when searching for a job.²



Percentage of the workforce that will be comprised of Millennial and Gen Z employees by 2025.³



Percentage of survey respondents who cited low pay as a reason for quitting a job in 2021.⁴

1. New survey: company mission & culture matter more than compensation. Glassdoor. July 10, 2019. Accessed April 4, 2024. www.glassdoor.com/employers/blog/mission-culture-survey/
2. Glassdoor launches advanced filters to find companies highly rated for work/life balance, diversity & inclusion and more [press release]. October 10, 2022. Accessed April 9, 2024. prn.to/3vMTyFA
3. Lazic M. 30 mind-blowing interview statistics to get you going in 2023. Legaljobs. May 20, 2023. Accessed April 9, 2024. legaljobs.io/blog/interview-statistics
4. Parker K, Horowitz JM. Majority of workers who quit a job in 2021 cite low pay, no opportunities for advancement, feeling disrespected. Pew Research Center. March 9, 2022. Accessed April 9, 2024. www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/

say there are a variety of ways to pay an OD. Most associates nowadays are compensated based on a structure that entails a base salary and some type of bonus incentive. When interviewing for any job, it is crucial to learn what your total take-home pay will be; whether the bonus structure is reasonable; and how production, revenue, collections, receipts, etc, will be tracked and monitored to evaluate your progress. After you're hired, you can request access to the practice's production metrics to help you stay in the loop and remain actively engaged in growing the business.

A great way to broach this topic with a potential employer would be to ask, "Can we create a structure in which I am best incentivized to work hard and produce more, so that we can all increase our income and grow the practice?"

One confusing aspect of our industry is the sheer volume of terms we use, many of which describe the same thing. For example, some refer to optometrist production as "revenue,"

while others call it collections, receipts, etc. Regardless of the verbiage, production simply refers to the amount of money that hits the bank account of the practice.

Two other items related to compensation include ensuring there is a well-constructed benefits package and discussing the potential for practice ownership in the future. Again, these must be discussed early in the process!

Question No. 6: What Can I Do to Further the Success of the Practice?

A big mistake many associates make during the job search is turning the interview process into a conversation about themselves. Interviewing for a new opportunity is not unlike a first date; if one person is entirely focused on themselves, it can be a turn off for the other individual.

Likewise, an employer may not be overly impressed if an interviewing OD focuses on their salary, benefits, and work hours without expressing any interest in the employer or the practice. Therefore, I highly encourage

all ODs to flip the script at some time during the interview process. Simply put, ask the employer what they are seeking from an OD in this position. What are their expectations? Are there areas in their practice that they would like to grow? Are there optometric specialties that they would like to incorporate into their clinic? You can even take the conversation a step further and ask the employer about their dreams and aspirations. Would they like to spend less time in the clinic? Where do they want to see the practice in 3, 5, or 10 years? What can you do as an associate to help them accomplish these goals? If ODs really want to stand out in the job search, they should make the process less about themselves and more about the employer.

IT'S TIME TO AIM HIGH

Seeking out the best optometry position for you can be daunting and stressful. Fortunately, the process can be made easier by taking to heart and implementing the interview topics discussed here. Finding the right practice is about aligning values, understanding patient demographics, prioritizing work-life balance, accessing advanced technology, negotiating fair compensation, and demonstrating a proactive approach, which can all be done during interviews. By asking these six essential questions shared here and focusing on alignment, growth, and contribution, associate ODs can confidently navigate the job market to ultimately land their dream job. ■

1. Jorgensen N. Beyond compensation and benefits: why company culture is key. *Forbes*. April 12, 2022. Accessed April 4, 2024. bit.ly/3UvXfck
2. Nuefeld A. 2024 Optometrist income report. *ODs on Finance*. February 5, 2024. Accessed April 25, 2024. bit.ly/3JESsPi

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