

Assess Company Culture to Find the Best Fit

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Landing a great job involves more than interviewing well, getting an offer and earning a paycheck. While it's the interviewer's responsibility to assess your skills and experience, it's up to you to determine whether a particular employer is aligned with your core values and beliefs.

Working at a company with values inconsistent with yours is stressful, unrewarding, even depressing at times. No matter how great the position and salary, if you're working in a caustic, understaffed and unethical culture, you'll feel unfulfilled.

The job interview is your best opportunity to assess the work environment and organizational norms. But how can you assess the culture while you're being interviewed?

Organizational culture is dictated by the values, behaviors, beliefs and norms that permeate the group. Culture is expressed through the words and behaviors of each employee. Company or department leadership sets the overall tone.

Recruiters and managers often say that a candidate “fits” or “doesn't fit” to explain why a candidate should be offered a job offer or not offered one. What interviewers are really saying is the candidate fits or doesn't fit into the company culture. Many companies, in an effort to perpetuate their corporate cultures, hire people they feel fit and reject candidates whom they think do not fit their culture.

You should be sure the culture works from your standpoint as well. Rarely will you find a work environment totally aligned with your values, but you should be able to find organizations where the culture and your values can coexist.

Be a Keen Observer

Here are some of the things to be cognizant of during your interview experience:

- How are you treated while interviewing?
- What phrases do the interviewers use frequently?
- Is there a theme or unspoken tone to the questions asked?
- How does the environment feel to you?
- How prepared are the interviewers? Are they on time?
- Were you given an interview schedule?
- Were you treated like a prisoner or a guest?
- Are your responses to questions treated with suspicion or professional curiosity?
- How considerate is the company recruiter?

Ask for Details

Of course, digging up facts about company culture doesn't have to be an altogether clandestine effort. You can simply ask questions about organizational culture. Here are a few to consider:

- What three words or phrases would you use to describe the company or department culture?
- How does the company (team) handle conflict or differing opinions?
- How does the company recognize employee accomplishments?
- Does the company have a code of ethics?
- Please describe the leadership or managerial style at your company.
- What qualities do the most successful employees in your company possess?
- What is the company's attitude toward professional and educational advancement?

Job interviews are business events where your talents are evaluated — and they are also your opportunity to evaluate how the company's culture complements your values. Be sure to make the observations and ask the necessary questions to make a good assessment of whether the culture is the right fit for you.

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