

6 THINGS YOU ABSOLUTELY MUST KNOW BEFORE ACCEPTING A JOB



In the ideal situation, the interviewer and the interviewee are equally interested in finding a perfect fit. Look out for yourself. Ask hard questions about work conditions, drawbacks, and low points. If asked tactfully and backed up with research, well-directed questions of this sort won't offend a responsible interviewer. After all, a happy employee is going to be more productive than someone who hates his job.

But if you choose unwisely the first time, don't worry – jobs are no longer forever. People change careers nowadays about as often as their hairstyles. Chances are, even the person who interviews you, if he or she hasn't been living in a cave with blind fish, will understand that you probably won't be with the company for life. Gone are the days of the 1950s "company man" who signed up after college and stayed on until he retired. Nevertheless, choosing a job and career right the first time saves a lot of time and angst.

The following are some questions you'll want to answer, either by yourself prior to the interview or during the interview, to avoid ending up in the wrong position:

6 Things You Absolutely Must Know Before Accepting a Job

The infographic features a woman in a black business suit looking thoughtful, with her hand on her chin. Six colorful thought bubbles surround her, each containing a numbered question. A large grey question mark is positioned above the bubbles. The 'granted' logo is in the bottom right corner.

- 1 What are the hours?
- 2 Pay?
- 3 What type of work will I be doing?
- 4 How long will I be here?
- 5 Are there walls?
- 6 Will I be a big fish in a small pond or cog in a machine?

1. What are the hours?

If your research hasn't revealed this already, you should ask if a job advertised as 40 hours a week really takes 50 or 60 hours a week, or more. You have a right to know how much you'll be working and should protect yourself by asking in the interview whether or not this is truly a 40-hour-a-week job. Interviewers should be honest with you about this; it's information you need to know in order to make a good decision. If you're going to be slammed with work from nine to nine every day, it might not be worth it for you.

2. Pay?

Be aware that over eagerness to ask about salary can make you look unprofessional. Asking about salary while calling up to schedule an interview is a bad idea. The best time to ask about salary is after you've gotten the job, but before you've accepted. Even if money is your prime motivation, wait till late in the interview to ask money questions.

Still, salary and other benefits are important. Before you go in for an interview, think about how much you need to make to live comfortably, and how much you think you deserve to make, given the responsibilities and your qualifications.

3. What type of work will I be doing?

Before you go in for an interview, think about which type of work environment suits you best. As we saw earlier, different corporations develop different attitudes. The atmosphere on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange is very different from a public library in a small town. Some jobs require you to work with a team in order to produce a final product, while you'll work in solitude in others. It's your responsibility to find the environment that best suits you.

4. How long will I be here?

Before the interview, you'll also wish to think about your commitment to the job. The interviewer will be concerned about how long you will be able to stay with them. Are you looking for summer employment between school terms, for a six-month experience, a three-month internship, or a lifelong career path? In establishing a career, consider that anything under a year does not constitute a valid work experience to some employers. In many jobs it takes six months just to get up to speed.

5. Are there walls?

When you go in for the interview, be alert to the work environment, both physical and human. Pay attention to the way the company gets its work done. Imagine yourself coming into that building every day.

- Do people in the office wear Armani or Levis, DKNY or Dickies?
- Do they crowd into cubicles or kick back in plush, well-ferned offices?
- Is there a backslapping, good-ol'-boy, "see the game last night, Joe?" feel to the place?
- Do the workers seem happy or do they wander around the office like zombies?
- Are there stains on the carpet, interesting art on the walls?

If you look at the interview experience as an opportunity to gather as much information as you can about the company, you'll have plenty of factors to sift through when it's time to make a decision.

6. Will I be a big fish in a small pond or cog in a machine?

How big a company do you want to work for? Will you be more comfortable as a prominent player in an office where everyone knows one another, or as a single, relatively unnoticed cog in a massive corporate machine? Smaller companies are more likely to offer flexible hours and vacation policies, and they may offer more opportunities for immediate, diverse, and substantive involvement. In addition, a smaller company may be a growing company. It can be exciting to ride a company as it grows, to watch and participate in the formation of its culture and lingo. Smaller companies also tend to suffer less from bothersome bureaucracies, so your ideas have a better chance of immediate implementation.

By the same token, it's difficult to hide in a small company. Everyone will soon realize if you're not producing. It may be more difficult for you to take vacation, or even a long lunch. Small companies also tend to pay less and can't offer the benefits of a larger firm. And especially in these consolidation-crazy times, they're somewhat more susceptible to buy-outs and bankruptcy than a big, established operation. Fortune 500 companies, on the other hand, can usually afford higher salaries than smaller places can. They also offer more comprehensive benefits, and may offer a wider variety of potential places to live.

In the interview process, employees at small companies understand that they don't have the name recognition of bigger places and won't expect you to know as much about them. This is why it's an especially good idea when interviewing with a smaller place to find out who they are and what they do. Make sure you thoroughly check their website, if they have one. At least research the industry in which the company's involved if you can't find anything more specific.

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