



What to Look for in Choosing Your Next Employer

By Joyce Gioia

If you have skill sets that are in demand, today you probably have lots of choices in where, when, and how you will work. However, in spite of the widespread availability of jobs, you should take the time to choose your next employer carefully. Taking the wrong job may mean wasting your valuable career time or worse, being miserable. To help you through this choice process, we have created lists of questions that will help you determine what's important to you.



What sort of company are you looking for?

As the technology boom continues unabated, the largest concentrations of jobs are found in computer- and technology-based fields (including biotech), as well the service and healthcare sectors. Of course, there are good jobs available in all fields, but if

you are looking to maximize your potential value, it makes sense to follow the road to where the most jobs are. After you have thought about your industry preferences, consider what sort of company you'd like to work for. Think about these questions:

- Do you want to work for a market leader or a start-up?
- Do you want to work in a large organization or a small one?
- Is it important to you to work for a company with a long history?
- Is stability—in market position and/or employee turnover—important to you?
- Do you want a potential employer to be well-known in the community?
- Is the quality of a company's goods and services a deciding factor?
- Is the inherent value—socially or otherwise—of a company's product a deciding factor?

What kind of company culture are you looking for?

Now that you know what kind of company you're looking for, consider what you'd like that company to be like on the inside. You can learn a lot about a company from its literature. Ask for brochures about the company's products and services, and look for additional information on the company's website. Look for newspaper and magazine articles about the company. Be prepared to ask questions in an interview, and look for

opportunities to ask questions of the people who work there. Here are some starter questions when considering the makeup of a company's culture:

- Are you looking for a corporate culture that values honesty and ethics? Experience and tenure?
- Does the company prize and implement new technologies? Is their availability important to you?
- How formal is the workplace? Are you looking for a "first name basis" company? Is dress code, formal or informal, important to you?
- Is it important to you that the company reward innovation? Support research and development? Be open to new ideas?
- How clear are internal communications? How would you rank the importance of clear and open communication between upper management and employees in the workplace?
- Look around: are people having fun? Do they seem to enjoy their work?

What style of leadership do you need to succeed?

The folks who work above you and with you can be immensely important in determining how happy you will be. If you like and respect the people you work with, and if you respect and enjoy working for your boss, you are likely to be much more successful and satisfied with your job. Leadership needs and styles tend to vary with job requirements and with industry trends, but there are certain consistent qualities you can look for across the workplace. Here are some things to look for:

- What sort of boss are you looking for? A friend, a coach, or a taskmaster?
- How visible and accessible do you want your leaders to be? Do you more want your boss to be in an office, or out on the floor with employees?
- Are the company leaders open to allowing you to take charge of problems and find your own solutions? If, for



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instance, you discover new, better, easier, or more efficient ways of doing things, will your ideas be considered or implemented?

- How does the company get work done? Will you have the opportunity to work on your own? In collaborative team environments?
- Will you have the opportunity, should you desire it, to seek promotions or transfers within the company?

What kind of working environment are you seeking?

What do you want the actual workplace to be like in your new job? Flexibility in office arrangement, job design, working hours, working conditions, facilities, and work/life balance is greater than ever before.

- Where do you want to work? Downtown? In the suburbs? In a small town or in a big-city corporate campus?
- How important are commuting options in your decision?
- Must you actually work in the office for a given company? Are there telecommuting or virtual office options?
- Is flextime an option and/or important to you?
- What does the workplace itself look like? How about the decor?
- How are working teams set up?
- Are there ample break areas? Is there enough parking? Are there exercise facilities?
- Is there a commitment to workplace safety?
- Is the social environment comfortable and friendly?

What benefits are important to you?

It's important to consider what kinds of benefits you want or need *before* you sit down to discuss a potential job with a prospective employer. Types of benefits available range from traditional health insurance and company cars to the more non-traditional types of benefits such as on-site pet care, concierge services, laundry services, and clothing allotments. There is a certain tendency in today's marketplace away from traditional compensation packages and toward cafeteria plans and creative benefit offerings. In fact, the former "Compensation and Benefits" field today is called "Total Rewards."

- What kinds of health insurance do you want/need? Do you need coverage beyond the traditional offerings? Are you looking for dental, maternal, vision, or other specialized care? Are additional coverages offered at discounts to employees? Can part-time employees piggyback on policies? What portion of premiums is employer-paid?

- What sorts of retirement or savings plans interest you? Are options beyond the traditional 401K available?
- How long must you work before vacation benefits kick in? How much paid vacation is available?
- Do you need on-site childcare? Eldercare? Petcare? Or a pet-friendly workplace?
- Are you seeking learning opportunities, either on-site or in local colleges or universities?
- Does the company encourage community service by allowing use of some "company time" for volunteer activities?
- Are you looking for other experimental benefits, such as on-site petcare

What kind of compensation package do you want?

While all the other categories and criteria are certainly important, money and compensation are certainly crucial. Compensation options and opportunities are as varied as the kinds of jobs out there. Some questions you should ask when thinking about compensation are:

- How soon will it be reasonable for me to receive a raise?
- Does pay increase in step with promotions and increased responsibility?
- How competitive is the salary range at this company when compared to the industry average? The local community?
- What sorts of overtime payment options are available? How about compensatory time off?
- What kind of bonus packages does the company offer? Can these bonuses be influenced by employee performance and achievement?
- Are there signing bonuses?
- Does the company offer profit-sharing opportunities?
- Are there compensation options available other than salary or hourly pay?
- Can you work as a contractor? On commission?
- Is compensation based in part on how well the company does?
- Are there equity options?

What sort of intangibles might make the difference in your choice?

All of the above factors aside, it's sometimes the small things that can make the difference. All the money and benefits in the world might not mean anything if that little voice in your head keeps nagging you, telling you that there's something missing, and that you're just "not happy". Here are some



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questions you might consider when deciding just what intangibles might be most important to you:

- Is your work meaningful?
- Would you be making a difference on a daily basis? To whom?
- Would you be able to see the results of your work at the end of the day, at the end of the week, or at the end of a project?
- Do you want responsibility and ownership of your own work?
- Are there opportunities for you to become involved in community outreach through a potential job?

What should you do with all these questions and answers?

Rank your individual answers in each section in order of importance, then rank each larger section in order of importance. You can then use the book ***How to Choose Your Next Employer*** to help you determine the kinds of questions you should be asking of potential employers. Enjoy your current job search . . . and those that inevitably will come in the future, as you continue to refine your criteria and make other choices.

Adapted from the book *How to Choose Your Next Employer* by Roger Herman and Joyce Gioia, available at www.hermangroup.com. Joyce may be contacted through www.hermangroup.com.

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