

What is the Company Culture and How to Find the Right Place for You

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By Michael R. Neece, CEO Interview Mastery

Landing a great job is not just about getting an offer and earning a paycheck. Loving your job is about finding the right company culture for you. It's about working in an environment aligned with your values and beliefs. Working at a company with values inconsistent with yours is stressful and unrewarding. The quality of your work life is also directly correlated to your supervisor's attitudes, values, and beliefs. A person's values significantly affect their behavior and hence how you are treated. No matter how great the position, if you're working in a caustic, understaffed, and unethical culture, you'll feel unfulfilled.

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

Organizational culture is composed of the values, behaviors, beliefs, and norms that permeate the group. Culture is expressed through words and behaviors of each employee. Culture is like a recipe where each person is an ingredient. Company or department leadership set the overall tone.

Interviewers say "the candidate fits" or "doesn't fit" to describe a candidate's qualifications. What interviewers are really saying is the candidate fits or doesn't fit the company culture.

To perpetuate corporate culture, companies hire people they feel "fit" and reject qualified candidates whom they believe "don't fit" their culture. During each interview, you have an opportunity to assess how the culture aligns with your values. Rarely will you find an environment totally aligned with your values. You can however, find organizations where the culture and your values can coexist.

Clues to company culture are found in interviewer behavior and their words. Below is a list of organizational cultural indicators.

- How you are treated?
- What phrases are frequently used by the interviewers?
- Is there a theme or unspoken tone to the questions you're 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 their questions treated with suspicion or professional curiosity?
- How considerate is the company recruiter?

Questions you can ask about organizational culture are listed below.

- Please describe the company or department culture in three words or three phrases.
- 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 towards professional and educational advancement?

Job interviews are business events where your talents are evaluated. Interviews are also your opportunity to evaluate how the company's culture compliments your values.