

# How to Spot an Unhealthy Workplace Before You Take the Job



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You may have heard the word “toxic” applied to a lot of things in the past few years — friendships, relationships, individuals — but have you thought of it being applied to a workplace?

Toxic workplaces are real, and they can have devastating effects on those who work in them. Arguing, undermining, and general animosity can wear on worker productivity and result in unfair (and sometimes even unsafe) power dynamics. Unsurprisingly, the 2017 Tech Leavers Study found that leaving unfair environments is one of the top reasons why women voluntarily quit their jobs.

But it doesn't have to come to that.

The next time you are interviewing with a potential new employer, use these five strategies to determine if the company is the right one for *you*, instead of just the other way around.

## **1. Do Your Homework**

Search sites like Indeed.com and Glassdoor are great job-hunting tools that list thousands of available positions plus details about salaries, benefits, and the interview process.

Most useful are the truly candid details shared by current and former employees about the good, the bad, and the ugly of working for companies from every industry. A word of caution: when looking at the cons, look for patterns as opposed to random personal complaints.

Management at less-scrupulous businesses may attempt to offset an abundance of negative comments with fake positive reviews, too, so look for overall consistency across all postings.

## **2. Read the Room**

Ask for a tour, not just to see if the setup is all open cubicles or private

offices but to get a feel for the energy in the office. It's possible to glean a lot of information from what you see — and what you don't.

It's no secret that tech has long been a male-dominated industry, but a workplace can choose to either encourage or discourage the culture that keeps the field feeling exclusive. Walking the floor to see the makeup and attitudes of the team you'd be working on can provide a lot of insight and help you direct your questions about team and company diversity.

Keep your eyes peeled for signs of stress or overworked employees as well. Empty break rooms and workers eating at their desks can be a big sign that something's off. Piyush Patel, author of *Lead Your Tribe, Love Your Work: An Entrepreneur's Guide to Creating a Culture That Matters*, notes that “if you have a culture where you need to eat meals at your desk, that's a leadership problem.”

### **3. Don't Confuse Perks with Culture**

Watch out for companies that can't meaningfully speak to their culture. And similarly, don't assume a company is a great place to work simply because it gives its employees free lunches or has ping-pong tables and bean bag chairs in the break room.

Good workplaces use perks to supplement and support their mission and culture — not to replace it. If you ask about employee assistance programs and are met with a list of seemingly unrelated benefits, that could be a big red flag that there may not be much substance behind the perks.

### **4. Listen to Body Language — Yours and Theirs**

Studies have proven that 93% of communication comes not from the words



being spoken. Fifty-five percent comes from body language and 38% comes from tone of voice, so watch what people are doing in addition to what they are saying.

If someone can't be courteous enough to engage in a conversation or avoid looking at their computer while you're talking, what does that say about how much they are concerned about what you have to offer?

Take note of your body language as well, including what your gut is telling you.

“If your survival instincts are saying ‘this isn't good, I shouldn't be here,’ I'd listen to that,” says Patel. “Your second brain is in your gut. If you walk in and you don't have a good feeling, it's probably not going to get better.”

## **5. Keep Work and Life in Balance**

The definition of work no longer fits so readily into the Monday-to-Friday, nine-to-five model. And unfortunately, some companies have started taking advantage of that, advertising flexible hours while simultaneously pressuring workers to give far more than 40 hours a week.

As you evaluate whether you want to work someplace, make sure the company culture will support your need to keep a healthy balance.

“Even in the busiest of schedules, the most practical and effective way we can live is by aligning our personal priorities of work, family, health, and well-being,” says Christine Riordan of the *Harvard Business Review*. “Such realignment can bring huge gains in emotional and physical energy, not to mention greater clarity and focus at work.”

## Now, Go Nail That interview

Now that you know it's possible to ferret out the truth about how well a company fits *your* needs before accepting an offer, it's time to get that offer.

Need tips on how to seal the deal? Women 2.0 can help you find the most critical question to ask your interviewer, as well as figure out how to navigate other challenges in the workplace.