

# BUSINESS



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# HOW TO VET YOUR NEXT EMPLOYER

Look for clues the culture is right for you.

No doubt you've read or heard about the recent New York Times profile of Amazon's "bruising" white-collar work environment.

The exposé included cringeworthy accounts of employees crying at their desks and returning to work after a serious illness or personal crisis only to be put on notice they had to perform better or they'd be gone for good.

Amazon Chief Executive Jeff Bezos publicly disputed the report, writing in a widely-released memo that he didn't



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recognize the company portrayed in the article. A mid-level Amazon manager took to LinkedIn to share his account of what it's like to work at the company, countering a story he claimed was "blatantly incorrect."

The modern white-collar work environment that Amazon reportedly exemplifies takes a page from Silicon Valley startup culture, which values long hours, blunt critiques and obsessive attention to detail.

At the same time, other companies are remaking themselves to keep employees happy by promoting better work/life balance. In the past few months, companies including Netflix, Accenture and IBM have announced expanded benefits and perks for at least some of their employees, including extending parental leave.

If you're job hunting, how do you make sure you end up at a company with a workplace culture that's right for you?

According to career coaches, recruiters and other experts, it takes a fair amount of sleuthing - researching finan-

cial, reputation and hiring practices, as well as talking to current and former employees - to get the scoop on what a company is really like.

"Watch, look, and listen to the people already there," advises career coach Paula Gregorowicz, of the Paula G. Co. "Is there a vibe of adrenaline and intense pressure? What do they expect of you in terms of availability?" she suggests asking.

"Few people on their deathbeds wish they spent more time at work," Gregorowicz said. "Choose wisely according

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to your personal values, and when an employer shows you what they are like, believe them.”

Here are other suggestions for uncovering a prospective employer’s true colors, from career experts and coaches, recruiters, and company owners:

- Do your due diligence. In addition to checking a company’s financials, look at its client and employee turnover, suggests **Kim Shepherd**, chief executive of Irvine recruiter Decision Toolbox. “For many companies, a simple Google search on the company name and ‘company culture’ can result in a lot of information,” **Shepherd** said.

Discover the beliefs, interests and soft skills of a potential boss by looking up recommendations and endorsements on their LinkedIn profile. “If they are involved with charitable causes, you can deduce that they probably care about giving back to the commu-

ity,” **Shepherd** said. “It also allows you to find out where they went to school and their career advancement history.”

- Pay attention to how the company treats job applicants. Your experience submitting an application is a window into an organization’s culture. How well or poorly you’re treated could mirror how well or poorly you’re treated as an employee, according to San Diego recruiting industry consultant Elaine Orlor.

Once you’ve applied for a job, Orlor suggests asking yourself: Was I responded to? Communicated with in detail? Provided a way to ask questions and get answers? Treated “like a human?” She added: “Your recruiting experience should weigh into your understanding of the true culture in an organization.”

- Hang out in public spaces. If you have an on-site interview, get there early to people-watch.

“Listen to conversations while sitting in the lobby,” said Jennifer Pietrzak Carlson, an Anaheim executive coach and human resource

consultant.

“Ride the elevator. Check out the parking lot. Visit the break room,” she suggests. “Talk to maintenance and cleaning crew members. Take in the real moments of the work day” to get a better idea if a company is a comfortable fit.

- Talk to current and former employees. At an interview, ask to talk to people from multiple departments. “Arrange for 10- to 15-minute meet-and-greet informational interviews,” said Leticia Kelch, vice president of Irvine-based Kimco Staffing Services and Medi-Quest Staffing.

Use LinkedIn to connect with ex-employees, preferably decision makers, said Florin Tiru, a facilitator with the business networking group Laguna Niguel Connectors. Former managers may be able to share how healthy a company’s culture is and if they treat employees “as team members who are empowered in the business actions or replaceable assets.”

- Read online reviews. Use websites such as Glassdoor, the Great Place to Work In-

stitute, Yelp, Reddit and ConsumerAffairs to read anonymous reviews of what it’s like to work or interview with a company.

“Some will (be) great, some not so great,” said Gary Spencer, marketing director with Costa Mesa recruiter Mattson Resources. “Some reviews are real and some fabricated. Take out the high and low reviews and you get a better, ‘true’ feel what a company is about.”

- Look for comments. Dom Bokich, a Los Angeles area nurse recruiter for Providence Health & Services, recommends searching status updates on Facebook, Twitter and other social media and scanning comments left in online articles. “The truth about culture will reveal itself quickly,” Bokich said.

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