



HOW TO INTERVIEW A POTENTIAL EMPLOYER AVOID A TOXIC WORK ENVIRONMENT

1. Why is the previous person in the role leaving?

An employer doesn't have to tell you all the person's business that is leaving. In fact if they do, that is another clue to pay attention to. What you want to look for is if they refuse to give a reason or if they speak negatively about the person leaving. Those are red flags for lack of respect and a potential issue with leadership.

2. Will I be able to meet with the person in the role prior to their departure for training?

If it is a no, ask why. If the person is still there and not willing to help train the new person, this can be a sign of lack of team collaboration and workplace cohesiveness.

3. Ask the hiring manager, how do you ensure your direct reports experience professional development?

If they refer you to a list of annual workshops that calls for an additional question. What will you do personally to help me develop my skills and advance my career? A leader should be able to provide an example of others they have helped or give you at least a few ideas about promotion or their mentoring style.

4. How are mistakes addressed?

If you are then asked, do you make a lot of mistakes?, this could be a deflection. Simply say: "No, but mistakes within a team happen. I ask this question to understand your team dynamic. So, what happens when a mistake occurs?"

If it is taken as a learning lesson, great. Otherwise, listen closely to decide if you want to deal with their philosophy of how to respond to mistakes.

5. How are new ideas or the challenging the ideas of others in their team handled?

Challenges and new ideas foster growth. Beware if this is not encouraged. There may be a stagnant and monotonous environment. When people dislike change that can cause tension and stress.

6. How many people have been promoted from within in the last 3-5 years? Be specific about your demographic – women, people of color, etc.

Leaders should be able to identify the number promoted within their departments or division. If it is zero, ask why? If they don't know, well that is a cause for concern. It shows a lack of interest in you or anyone being promote under their leadership.

7. Ask to meet with your potential team members.

If that is not possible, be concerned. If you do meet with them, be direct. Start by saying: "I really want to be happy in your next role and want an organization you can grow with." Then start your questions and take notes.

- How long have you worked for the organization?
- Do you plan to leave the company within the next 12 months?
- Is the work environment collaborative and supportive?
- Is gossip encouraged?
- How does leadership react if you make a mistake?
- How does leadership, specifically the person that will be your direct manager, handle being challenged?
- Does the company promote from within?
- If given the opportunity to go back in time, would you take this job again?

8. Look for these RED FLAG phrases.

- We work and play hard together, or We are family – Doubtful you will have time for yourself or your family.
- Meaningful work – Low salary
- Understaffed – You will do more than one person's work
- We love our company and want you to as well – Blind loyalty is expected

Don't be afraid to ask these questions. Be sure to take notes. If an organization or person does not like being asked about their work environment, then they may have something to hide, and it likely is not the place for you. Note their answers and the body language. Sometimes body language tells us more than words. Listen to your gut! Remember, this could mean the difference between finding your dream job and being in a toxic environment that will force you back into the job search process again. And don't forget about your personal well-being!