

Look Before You Leap: How and Why to Do Pre-Interview Research to Snag a Job of Your Dreams

By Cheryl Ferguson

I got a call from a friend the other day who had been approached by a recruiter with a lead about a position at a hot company rumored to be going public shortly in a sexy business space. Later that day she called me and asked, “What, if anything did I know about XYZ company?”

While it is always flattering to be singled out for a lead on a great new opportunity, you can avoid a lot of surprise, heartache and frustration by doing your homework before making a move.

Here are three suggestions to help you decide whether to pursue a new opportunity or stay where you are.

1. Learn all you can about the company. Visit the company website. Does the business interest you? Why? Has the management team been successful in the past? Has the company raised money, won an award, or signed an exclusive agreement with a key business partner? And finally, the company website is a great place to find out what industries and universities they’ve tended to hire from. Are you an alumnus of the CEO’s alma mater?

2. Get a sense of the company culture. Find out if somebody in your circle of friends or a business colleague knows of someone who works at the company, or has worked with any of these individuals at one of their previous companies. What’s the company’s reputation like? Is this the kind of environment you can thrive in?

3. Contact the local chapter of the industry association. This is especially important if you are new in town, new to the industry, or don’t know anyone connected to the company. Find out when the local chapter of the industry association is having their next meeting and go. Introduce yourself to someone during the pre-meeting reception or at your table, explain that you’re considering a new position in the industry, and ask for their advice. If you’ve already got a particular company in mind, see if someone from that company is attending the event or is on the program. Introduce yourself to that person and ask them why they enjoy working at the company. Get the person’s business card and send a note, thanking them for their time immediately after the meeting.

If you decide after doing this preliminary research that this is the company and the industry for you, then by all means go on the interview if invited. Prepare yourself for

the day by asking the person setting up the interview what the interview process is like: how many people are on the interview team, what are their titles, and how long will each individual interview will be.

Remember an interview is a two-way street: this is your chance to get to know the people you will work with as well as a chance for them to get to know you, so come prepared with questions.

Below are some sample questions to get you started. Feel free to include these or add some of your own.

From the prospective boss you want to know:

- What their managerial style is like
- How long they have been with the company
- What are the expectations for the role
- Are there a staff, budget and timeline in place to meet those expectations

From the people on your team you want to know:

- What they like about their job and their manager
- How long they have worked with the company
- What other industries, if any, they've worked in and how this company's culture compares to their previous employer

You will want to send a thank-you note to the members of the interview team, so make sure to get a business card or email address of everyone you met with so that you can send the notes later that same day or the very next day at the latest.

While it is helpful to discuss the interview with close friends and family members, only you can decide whether or not this is the right job for you. Has your current company grown so large that the entrepreneurial spirit you originally went there for disappeared? Is there better opportunity for advancement at this new company? Are you making the move because of a change of lifestyle (recently married, new baby on the way) and if so, how will one more big change affect the already delicate balance of work and home life you've set up for yourself? Armed with the answers to these questions, you will be better prepared to decide whether or not this is really the dream job you want in a company you can call home.

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