

CRACKING *the* TECH CAREER

INSIDER ADVICE ON LANDING A JOB AT
GOOGLE, MICROSOFT, APPLE, OR
ANY TOP TECH COMPANY



GAYLE LAAKMANN MCDOWELL

AUTHOR OF *CRACKING THE CODING INTERVIEW*

WILEY

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1

Life at the World's Greatest Tech Companies

Everything you've heard is true. Almost.

Tech companies are known for brightly colored walls, ball pits in the office, free food (organic and gluten-free, of course), and shuttles transporting you to and from work. They're engaged in a constant game of one-upmanship, the latest and greatest company taking what its predecessor does and morphing it into something even better.

With an obvious focus on technology, their engineering divisions are presumed to be filled with nerds who eat, sleep, and breathe code. Some started coding early in life and some not until much later—but nearly all are passionate about technology. It's not just a job to them; it's something they love.

Outside of engineering—and in fact most employees at tech companies are not coders—intelligence is still prized. The focus on academics is hotly debated; some companies value elite institutions, while others recognize that many of the most brilliant people never finished college. After all, the founders of many of these companies dropped out of college.

Landing a spot at these companies can be challenging for some people, but it's absolutely doable.

Job seekers who attended strong universities are fairly technical (even if they don't want to be programmers), have strong and demonstrable skills

in their chosen profession, communicate well, have solid work experience, have a strong network, and can pull this all into a nice resume—they'll probably find it not terribly difficult to land a job at a prestigious firm. They might still get rejected by their top choice, but there will be other options.

That's the ideal candidate, but most successful candidates aren't ideal. You're likely missing several of those attributes. Don't count yourself out—there's still a path in to these hot companies.

Life at Infinite Loop and Microsoft Way

Even their addresses are suggestive of company stereotypes. Microsoft, at One Microsoft Way, screams big and mammoth. Google's 1600 Amphitheatre Parkway address is understated, like its user interfaces. Apple, of course, takes the bold "think different" step with One Infinite Loop—a play on words that could come back to bite a less beloved company.

Youthful

Despite the little eccentricities of each company, these companies are much more alike than they are different. Software companies are youthful—at heart, if not in actuality. They scorn the stuffy suit-and-tie atmosphere of their predecessors and elect to wear just jeans and a T-shirt. In fact, this casual attitude is so potent that it's pervaded even the social scenes of tech hubs; only a handful of restaurants in Seattle and San Francisco would request anything beyond jeans.

Perks

Desperate to attract and retain the best and the brightest, tech firms shower their employees with perks. Microsoft offers free drinks, a heavily discounted membership to a deluxe gym, and a multitude of extracurricular sports teams. Google matched and then one-upped Microsoft on almost all of these. Free sodas? Try free breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Free gym membership? Use the on-site gym and pool. Facebook cloned many of Google's perks and added a few of their own, such as an on-site bank.

Cynics argue that there's another side to this. They argue that the perks are just there to ensure that you'll stay at the office longer, and to infantilize employees to the point where they no longer feel self-sufficient and able to quit.

That might be a nasty spin on things, but there's some truth to it. When you get your dining and daily errands done on campus, you spend less time off campus and more time working.

Work/Life Balance

Despite rumors to the contrary, the biggest tech companies generally offer a pretty reasonable work/life balance. It's not a 9-to-5 job—in fact, the office is relatively quiet at 9 a.m.—but few people work more than 45 to 50 hours per week on a regular basis. Many people work around 40 and are considered strong employees.

Hours are flexible, too. Come in early or come in late—it doesn't matter, so long as you get your work done and are there for meetings.

To a large extent, the flexibility and the work/life balance is a reaction to the difficulties these companies have in finding talented engineers. There's a shortage of great engineers in the United States. If a tech company overworked them, the company would have even more trouble hiring engineers.

The exception, as in most jobs, is during crunch times. Software releases will be stressful on any team.

Moving Up: Individual Contributors

Although other industries push high-performing employees into management roles, technology companies tend to be more open to the individual contributor role. Many companies have promotion tracks that offer a great salary and more individual responsibility without becoming a manager. After all, great engineers do not necessarily make the best managers.

An employee, particularly in engineering, can continue to get promotions and increased technical responsibilities, without becoming a people manager. Eventually, this employee can grow into an architect or a distinguished engineer, earning one of the most respected positions within the company. It's perhaps not as glamorous as being a VP, but for some people, this is just right.