

Five Steps to Evaluate a Job Offer before Accepting

Employers shouldn't be the only ones asking for references during the job hunting process.

Job candidates should carefully evaluate the "credentials" of prospective employers as well.

Too many employment disasters occur because individuals do not do their homework before accepting a new position. When a company makes a job offer, there's risk on both sides, but it's far greater for the candidate than for the company, especially if the position involves relocation.

To avoid taking the wrong career step, job candidates should research five key areas before saying "yes":

1. **Talk with Current Employees.** Try to meet employees at all levels: your peers, prospective boss, and subordinates. Make a special effort to spend ample time with the boss, in a social environment as well as in the office. The higher the job level, the more important the "chemistry" and the more subjective the hiring process!
2. **Check Customer References.** Don't be shy quizzing customers about their satisfaction with the company's product or service; why they selected the firm as a vendor; strengths and weakness from a customer's perspective; as well as projections about their business relationship in the future.
3. **Financial Stability of the Company.** If the firm is publicly held, the company should be willing to provide certain information at your request. Depending on the seniority of the position, it may be advisable to get a professional financial opinion, especially in the case of a privately owned operation. Other good sources of financial information include investors, whether venture capital or banks, and vendors. If they don't pay on time, there's a good chance your paychecks may not be predictable!
4. **The Work Environment.** Make sure you see where you'll be working and get a clear picture of the available resources, including the professional/clerical support necessary to do the job.
5. **Organizational Expectations.** Understanding and adapting to the "corporate culture" is critical, especially at executive levels. The new boss management style, level of expectations and communications approach will be important factors in determining your success on the job.

Don't overlook these points, but remember to sell yourself first, get the offer, and then ask the tough questions.

For individuals who find themselves in a new situation that looks like a mismatch, start looking immediately. The longer you stay in the "wrong" job, the more you damage your employment credentials. A brief stay with a company is easier to explain in your next interview than a series of one or two year stints.