

Choose the right employer

How important is workplace culture to your success and satisfaction at work? People need to be just as discerning about an organisation they choose to work for as companies are selective about whom they employ, says Sue Simons, National Manager of Jobseek.

Let's say you've been offered jobs by two different organisations. Both jobs offer appealing future prospects and great working conditions. While the salary packages are similar, the first job provides health insurance as part of the salary package, while the other only promises health insurance after the first six months.

Which do you take? The tendency by new entrants into the workforce would be to snap up the job that offered the largest benefits, but beware. Decisions based purely on financial considerations are not necessarily the wisest. Many a candidate has discovered this to their detriment.

In fact, the key reason for employees leaving organisations has little to do with salary dissatisfaction and is more about an incompatibility of goals, indicating a huge shift in the reasons behind people changing jobs. Money is no longer the key determinant. Issues such as a motivational work environment, a compatible work culture and an appropriate work/life balance are more important than money.

If the 90s was the decade of the customer, the next 10 years will see a growing focus on employees. Leading companies, both in Australia and overseas, are recognising that their business goals and the personal needs of their employees need to coincide and that jobs must deliver value to employees beyond pay and benefits.

In today's talent-strapped work environment, being an employer of choice has become a key imperative for organisations!

Choosing the right employer

Before making your final choice, consider the "Employer of Choice" checklist. Research the answers to the following questions, and you will be able to form an idea about the compatibility of an organisation to your own preferences and needs in a workplace. Don't be daunted, the checklist is just that - a checklist - not a detailed and exhaustive examination!

Does the organisation know where it's going?

It's essential that you find out where the organisation is heading. What are its goals and aspirations? What sets it apart from its competitors?

Joining an organisation that has no viable growth strategy is a "death sentence". Unfortunately, these organisations are awful places to work for - morale is low, direction changes by the minute, and meanness and tightness replace prudent cost management.

What is the quality of leadership?

Quality leaders not only have the strength of character to make the tough decisions but they also inspire their staff. They are prepared to "walk the talk" and win the hearts of employees. At the end of the day, they make others want to follow them.

Are employees genuinely committed to the organisation and its goals?

Employee commitment is often the yardstick to a healthy organisation. Happy and committed staff usually means a strong and viable organisation.

Does the organisation have the capability to satisfy customer requirements?

There is a direct link between customer satisfaction and employee commitment.

Does the organisation in question understand and implement the things important to their employees?

As we spend most of our waking hours in the office, our work environment needs to be physically and motivationally attractive. It needs to reflect the fact that organisations value their employees.

Does the organisation have the work culture you're comfortable with?

While this may seem an odd prerequisite, it is amazing how often people leave organisations because of incompatible cultures.

For example, in a company that has a sales culture, people with a research and development focus can expect to be frustrated in that sales culture's focus on short-term efforts, rather than longer-term solutions.

Is talent genuinely identified, utilised and developed and are employees provided with some sort of career-path?

One of the most frustrating experiences any employee can have is feeling under-utilised and directionless. This can be the major cause of resignations and of staff being snapped up by the competition.

Is there a direct link between business success and personal success?

All employees like to feel they financially have a share in the success of the organisation - usually through incentive schemes such as "bonus" payments and share plans.

Is the need to balance work, life and family recognised by the employer and are these policies implemented and practiced?

Busy demanding jobs need to be compensated by flexibility to ensure healthy recreation and personal growth, including family and relationship commitments.

However, the nature of what is important in the work/life balance varies in the stages of employment. For example, for younger employees getting some leave to travel overseas may be important; for people with family responsibilities, having flexibility to attend to family needs may be paramount. For older employees, a flexible working week to fit in a golf game may be important!

Ultimately, is your resume going to be significantly enhanced by working for the organisation in question?

Studies have shown that employees now recognise that "cradle to grave" employment with one employer is very unlikely. Therefore, the modern resume is a more complex document than its predecessor. Most employers like to be able to see some kind of career path or pattern, however lateral, in the diverse roles that you may have undertaken in the duration of your career.

Finding the answers

In finding the answers to the employer of choice checklist, you should make a list of people who are either directly or indirectly connected with the company in question. When making enquiries, remember to be discreet and not to jeopardise any confidentiality associated with the appointment and selection process.

It would also be worth your while to tap into your potential employer's website or access company information via the Internet. Services such as Reuters could also be handy in obtaining useful company data.

Seek out literature and publications and read these and assess the messages they are sending.

Utilise the interview process effectively. Remember that an interview is a two way process and prepare thoughtful questions that expand on your research to date and fill in any gaps. Remember also, that the person interviewing you is also an employee, someone who must function in the organisation on a day-to-day basis. This is your chance to gain their insight into the workplace culture.

Finally, don't hurry your decision and do your homework properly before making that all-important choice.

By [Sue Simons](#), National Manager, Jobseek.