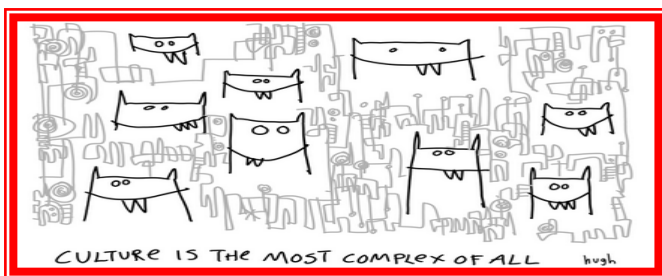


BRING YOUR BEST SELF TO WORK EVERY DAY  
ASSESSING AN ORGANIZATION'S CULTURE



MORE THAN A RESUMÉ  
JANUARY 2014



One of the hardest things for first-time job-seekers is determining if they are a good fit for an organization. Fit means that you have the skills to perform a job, and the drive to use those skills effectively. It also means you are suited to the organization and its culture.

Culture is hard to pin down. CEOs think hard about it because, although it may not seem this way to job-seekers, they are in a war for talent—not just to attract employees, but also to hold on to them.

In his latest book, *Quick and Nimble*, Adam Bryant, author and writer of the "Corner Office" feature in the New York Times, distills the biggest drivers of corporate culture from his more than 200 interviews with CEOs. *Quick and Nimble* is a terrific read, filled with useful information for first-time job-seekers.

While in school, there's little time to read anything other than what is assigned. So when I read business-oriented books, I read with a filter: **Will this information help my clients—graduating college seniors and recent graduates—in their job searches, and in their success in their first professional job starting on Day One?** This book does.

This guide uses the findings from Bryant's book to provide college and recent college grad job-seekers with tools to help assess an organization's culture and your fit within that culture. The material is organized in four categories:

- The culture principle according the CEOs interviewed.
- What to look for to see the principle in action.
- Questions to ask when interviewing.
- Actions you can take to ensure your success.

#### WHY CULTURE MATTERS

The cover drawing from @gapingvoid says it all. Culture is about people, and creating an

environment where they can grow, contribute and be rewarded. Organizations that have created this kind of work environment are able to quickly and nimbly innovate and thrive in a challenging global economy. Easy to say. Not so easy to create.

In my career, I've had the benefit of working for companies where I was able to grow and contribute. I was rewarded for my successes, and for risks I took. I also benefited from working in a nasty, harsh workplace where I learned I did not fit—thank goodness. This tool can help you avoid the latter negative experience, and identify the places where you can be your best.

#### CULTURE PRINCIPLES

As I talk with college students and recent grads across the country, I always try to understand what is important to them in a job. The principles that stand out include:

- Respect, as individuals and for what they are able to contribute.
- Transparency, for understanding the big picture and how they and their work fit into it.
- Opportunities to work independently and in teams, but not in silos.
- Collegiality, although it doesn't have to be fun all the time.
- Purpose, feeling their work matters.
- Leadership, which matters more than hierarchy.

According to the CEOs interviewed in Bryant's book, a culture of innovation aligns with what Millennials are saying they want from their jobs and workplace. You get it. Not every CEO does. Find the companies that do, and then target your job search.

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*Jane Horowitz has championed college students in their job searches from colleges and universities across the country, and with majors from engineering to fine arts, from computer design to banking. Jane has made a measurable and lasting difference in college students' lives.*



CEOs talk about the importance of a culture of respect so that people can do their best work. This includes:

- Being a good person and treating people well.
- People feeling their opinions are valued as much as the next person's.
- A feeling of safety inside the organization.
- Allowing for and rewarding risk-taking.

Respect is coupled with making sure that there is no confusion between hierarchy that you need for managing complexity with the respect that people deserve. The days of command-and-control leadership are dying.

- Low hierarchy should not mean low respect, nor should high hierarchy automatically mean high respect.

Feedback and candor are important aspects of respect. "When people are awesome, tell them they're awesome. When they mess up, they should hear that as well," says 3Cinteractive CEO John Duffy.

- Set clear expectations.
- Constructive feedback enables people to focus on achieving, learning and bonding.
- Destructive feedback creates defensiveness.
- Be consistent.
- Do it constantly.

#### CULTURE OF RESPECT IN ACTION

An early indicator that respect is a core value is your treatment during your interviews.

- An agenda is sent in advance with the names and titles of the people you will be meeting with.

- Interviewers are on time.
- Your resumé has been shared and read prior to meeting with you.
- If meeting in the interviewer's office, email and phone are turned off—you have their full attention.
- Look and listen for signs of a respectful workplace as you walk around.

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Is everyone in the organization given a set of goals and expectations? Annually? Quarterly? How are these used?
- How are employees evaluated? By whom? What does success look like?
- Describe how feedback is provided?
- If I bring an idea to my boss, what typically would happen? How are decisions made?
- What happens if you make a fairly significant mistake?
- Describe the company's management style.
- How does this position fit within the organization?

#### YOUR ACTIONS TO FIT IN

Do	Don't
Ask for, and get in writing, a clear set of what you are expected to do.	Don't be defensive if/when you receive less than positive feedback.
Keep your boss informed on what you are working on.	No yelling—ever.
Ask for feedback—frequently.	Criticize co-workers or your boss in public.
Take risks and be sure to let your boss know what you are doing.	
Learn from your mistakes.	
Listen—ask questions.	
Speak up in meetings.	
Have adult conversations.	

## ACCOUNTABILITY



Respect is just part of the equation, according to Bryant. Performance and accountability also matter. For any organization to operate at a high level, people have to play their position.

Companies are like teams, and for teams to succeed, all the players have to deliver. In high-performing organizations:

- It's not only about an individual's success. It is about what you are trying to accomplish as a team and company.
- Leadership is not a position; you lead by how well you influence other people's thinking.
- Trust is assumed until it is broken.
- The ability to quickly and nimbly move things forward is expected.

When everyone plays their position, the team can focus its energy on executing the strategy, rather than being distracted by concerns over whether teammates are doing what they're supposed to do.

### CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION

You spend at least a third of your life at your job. You should have a place you're happy to go to every day. In your job search, target employers with a record of innovation and accomplishments. Look for customer reviews. In interviews, listen for the following:

- Praising of all employees, not just the one rock star.
- Your questions are answered, not evaded.
- Change is embraced, not feared.
- The interviewer talks using "We" instead of "I."

Although you are part of generation that is more comfortable with unstructured systems, actual chaos is unproductive. So listen and look for signs of chaos: shifting priorities, unclear direction, unstable processes, unhappy customers and disengaged employees. These are red flags:

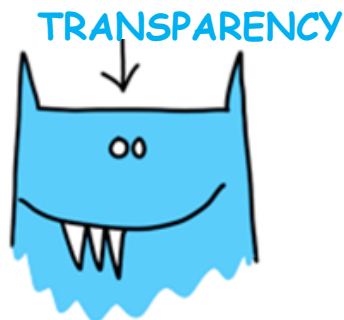
- A job description say that states, "tolerance for ambiguity."
- A job description that changes with each interviewer.
- A workplace that is congested, with obstacles to walk around and people who look like they are being interrupted in their work routines.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How is performance measured? Individual performance and team performance?
- Are there predictable and accepted rules and behaviors for getting work done?
- What is the preferred method of communication in the company?
- What are some of the things that drive success?

### YOUR ACTIONS TO FIT IT

Do	Don't
Check your ego at the door—play for the result, not for your role on the team.	Earn the reputation of team debater and jerk.
Once a decision is made, support the person and the decision.	Miss deadlines: if you know you will, let the team know.
Be dependable.	
Be reliable—take responsibility for your actions.	
Take initiative.	
Understand your role on the team.	
Demonstrate predictable behavior.	



Companies that are quick and nimble ensure that everybody in the company understands what the company is trying to do, and that means crystal clear communication. Transparency is how companies:

- Get people invested so that they care about what they're doing.
- Simplify complex strategies and ideas so everyone can understand them.
- Communicate the big picture and help employees see how their work and the work of their colleagues contributes to achieving goals.
- Clarify the goal of the organization and ensure that everyone shares in the same goal.
- Prevent work silos—no us vs. them.

#### CULTURE OF TRANSPARENCY IN ACTION

Mission and vision statements have many benefits. However, the usefulness of these statements in driving results only goes part of the way. What is also needed, and is perhaps even more important, is a simple plan that everybody understands, so they can see a clear link between the work they do and how it drives those goals.

In interviews, look and listen for:

- How people are communicating with each other.
- How the work of the teams and the company is displayed, if displayed at all.
- A disconnect between what the company states as its values and the way you are treated during the interview process.
- Answers to your questions: Are they clear or in double-talk.

- How and if the interviewers talk about the company mission, and goals.
- High employee turnover.
- Tolerance for risk.
- Answers to tough questions.

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How is information shared? How does the company deal with bad news?
- How are conflicts and problems handled?
- How is feedback given?
- How accessible is the leadership team?
- Are there weekly, monthly, quarterly and/or annual meetings for employees?
- Are people encouraged to speak their minds? Can people voice an opinion openly without a negative consequence?
- Does the leadership team communicate when they are wrong?
- How responsive is the leadership team to new ideas?

#### YOUR ACTIONS TO FIT IN

Do	Don't
Invite people in—to the work you are doing, into the process.	Have a hidden agenda.
Speak your mind in a respectful way.	Play politics.
Share information.	Gossip.
Solicit input.	
Tell the truth.	
Admit when you are wrong.	