

# Career Development Best Practice Guide

A head for business. A heart for the world.™



# Table of Contents



What is Career Connections?.....	1
Available Resources.....	1
Career Fairs.....	1
Putting SIFE on Your Resume.....	1
What Your Career Center Can Do for You.....	2
Doing Your Research.....	2
Don't Forget the Cover Letter.....	3
Writing a Killer Resume.....	3
The Interview.....	5
Corporate Culture.....	7
Accepting a Job.....	7

## SIFE Career Connections

SIFE is committed to being the premier source of effective, responsible business talent by giving you an opportunity to apply smart business practices to make a difference in the world while also developing your leadership, teamwork, communication and project management skills. Many top companies recruit SIFE students because you are emerging leaders who have exhibited the ability to blend competitive spirit and desire to succeed with a sense of integrity.

SIFE USA Career Connections exists to help bridge the gap between students and SIFE partner companies. A team of SIFE staff work to help you prepare for your careers and make the connections you need to land an internship or full time job. As a member of the SIFE network, you have access to several great resources to help in your career search which are outlined in the following sections.

## Available Resources

### Online Career Marketplace

Looking for a full-time job or internship? Want to know more about SIFE partner companies that see SIFE as the leading source of effective, responsible business talent? Check out the Online Career Marketplace which is available exclusively to SIFE USA students. Learn about the history, culture and career paths a company offers through this new online platform built specifically for you.

To access the Online Career Marketplace follow the instructions below.

1. Go to [www.sife.org](http://www.sife.org) and login to your student account
2. Select "Career Connections" on the left hand menu
3. Then select "Online Career Marketplace"
4. Scroll down to see the list of SIFE partner companies listed in alphabetical order

To submit your resume directly to a company you can click on "Send Email Request" then attach your cover letter and resume. Be sure to also write a short email stating the position you are interested in and how they can contact you. In the subject line, please be sure to put the company name and send one email per company you are interested in.

## Career Connections Magazine

The *Career Connections* magazine is a SIFE publication that gives SIFE students exclusive access, through SIFE partner companies, to the people, culture, trends and information that will enable you to effectively navigate the transition from college to your chosen careers. It is mailed to each active student via your faculty advisor twice a year: once in the fall and again in the spring.

You can also access the *Career Connections* magazine online by following the below instructions.

1. Go to [www.sife.org](http://www.sife.org) and login to your student account
2. Select "Career Connections" on the left hand menu
3. Then select "Career Resources"
4. A list of all previous magazines will appear from most recent to least recent

## Career Fairs

In addition to the competition process at the SIFE USA Regional Competitions and the SIFE USA National Exposition, there is also a Career & Internship Fair for students to learn more about SIFE partner companies and the available positions within their company.

Before each competition, the logos of the companies who will be represented appear on the SIFE website so you will know who will be attending each location. This is your chance to do your research before you arrive. Check out the company's website to learn more about who they are, what they do and what entry level positions they have available. You can also go to the Online Career Marketplace to see what positions each company has posted. Doing your research ahead of time will help you when you are on-site and walk up to introduce yourself to a recruiter. Knowing a little bit about their company will help set a good impression.

In addition to doing your research before the career fair, remember to update your resume and bring lots of copies with you. For more specific resume tips, please refer to the "Resume Writing" section below. Another item to bring with you is business cards. Business cards are a great way to leave your information with people you meet throughout the day such as a judge or recruiter during the roundtable lunch or with another SIFE team you want to collaborate with on a project. Also, several companies due to legal reasons cannot accept resumes but they can take your business card. It is

a great idea to exchange business cards with a recruiter so they have your contact information and you have theirs, and then you can follow up with them after you return home.

## Putting SIFE on Your Resume

As with any club or activity you are involved with during your collegiate career, putting SIFE on your resume is extremely important. It is a way for you to show you were involved in other activities outside the classroom plus it is a chance to highlight your leadership, project management and teamwork ability. Depending on your level of involvement you can list your experience under “Activities”, “Leadership” or even “Experience.” Please note, the below samples are only suggestions and are not the only way to include clubs on your resume. The most important item to keep in mind is to describe your involvement so a recruiter can see exactly what you did.

In addition, by listing SIFE on your resume you will be able to discuss in more detail the impact you were able to make through your projects during the interview process. You can describe all the skills you learned such as communication, multi-tasking, follow through and much more through your SIFE experience and how you can immediately contribute to their company.

Below are several examples of how you can list SIFE on your resume.

SIFE (Students In Free Enterprise)  
2008 -2010

- Co-led “Preparing for Your Future” project in which 4 women secured jobs
- Fundraising project leader – raised more than \$2,000 through grants, fundraising events and local business support
- Member of 2009 Presentation Team at Regional and National Competition

President  
SIFE (Students In Free Enterprise)  
8/2009 to Present

- Increased team membership from 5 to 25 active members
- Planned and led all team meetings
- Managed team’s financials and stayed within budget for the year
- Led entrepreneurship project

SIFE (Students In Free Enterprise)  
2010

- Team member of “Piggy Bank” project in which we taught 3<sup>rd</sup> graders about how to save money for their future
- Attended 2010 SIFE USA Regional Competition in Chicago, IL

## What Your Career Center Can Do for You

*Information below is provided by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) on [jobweb.com](http://www.jobweb.com)*  
<http://www.jobweb.com/studentarticles.aspx?id=908>

The career center at your college or university can be a valuable—and sometimes fun—place to visit. So what can a trip to a career center do for you? How can a career counselor or adviser help you? There’s more than you might think. Following are just some of the services college and university career services centers and offices offer.

### Assessment testing

Are you uncertain about what major to pursue or have you already chosen a major but aren’t sure where it can take you? Career counselors are trained to administer a variety of standardized tests that can help you pinpoint careers that suit your interests, values, and personality type.

### Career advice

Career counselors and advisers can meet with you one-on-one to discuss your plans and help you find a focus. They can also introduce you to a wealth of resources at the career services office.

### Career fair information

Are you hoping to meet lots of employers at once? Most career services offices sponsor at least one career fair a year. Staff members can also point you to fairs at nearby colleges and universities.

### Career libraries

Most career centers keep plenty of information about employers handy for students to peruse. This can include company brochures, annual reports, news articles, and listings in guides. Many also maintain collections of reference books, periodicals, newspapers, and employment newsletters that contain information on occupational exploration, emerging occupations, salaries, undergraduate and graduate schools, resume writing, interviewing, and more.

### **Computer access**

Are you having trouble accessing job-search sites on the Internet? Or do you need access to a computer and printer to prepare a professional-looking resume? Most career centers offer at least a few computers for students to use, and staff members can offer advice on how to use them.

### **Employer information sessions**

Career centers often sponsor sessions in which students can meet representatives of one or more companies and learn what they have to offer. Sometimes these representatives are alumni, and can relate how their experiences at a college or university translate into their current career.

### **Job, co-op, and internship listings**

You don't have to confine your job search to newspaper classified ads and online search engines. Most career centers keep updated lists of entry-level jobs, co-ops, and internships, either on paper or online.

### **Recruiting**

Recruiters from a variety of companies, agencies, and even the federal government often spend a day or several days on campus interviewing students.

### **Resume and cover letter advice and critiques**

Are you wondering whether you've prepared your resume correctly, or have you put off preparing one at all? A meeting with a career counselor or adviser can help you learn the basics, from what information to include to what typeface to use.

NACE is a proud SIFE Trade Association Partner. We encourage you to explore their website and visit your on-campus Career Center for additional information which can be helpful in your career search.

## **Doing Your Research**

As you begin your internship or career search it is important that you find time to do your research. This includes researching potential companies you want to work for and also understanding different industries.

Below is some information on three of the most common industries to help get you started with your research.

### **Retail**

Retail is the sale of goods or commodities directly to consumers. Several SIFE partner companies in this industry include Walmart/Sam's Club, Walgreens, Lowe's, SUPERVALU, JC Penney, CVS, Rite Aid, Macy's, Home Depot and Finish Line.

Common entry level positions include but are not limited to: store manager trainee, customer service representative, sales manager trainee, human resource generalist, and marketing associate.

### **Consumer Packaged Goods**

Consumer Packaged Goods which is often referred to as CPG, are consumable goods such as food and beverages, footwear and apparel, tobacco, and cleaning products. In general, CPGs are things that get used up and have to be replaced frequently, in contrast to items that people usually keep for a long time, such as cars and furniture. Several partner companies in this industry include Campbell's, PepsiCo, Clorox, Unilever, Sealed Air, American Greetings, Dannon, Nestle Purina, Kraft Foods, Sara Lee, Bimbo Bakeries, Del Monte, Hershey's, ShurTech and Henkel.

Common entry level positions include but are not limited to: retail business manager, category analyst, territory manager sales representatives and/or sales management programs.

### **Business Services**

Business Services is the industry in which companies that provide services rather than goods. Service industries include everything else: banking / financial / insurance / accounting, communications, wholesale and retail trade, all professional services such as engineering and medicine, all consumer services, and all government services. SIFE partner companies in this industry include KPMG, Wells Fargo, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Cintas, College Pro, Advantage Sales & Marketing, Robert Half International, Penn Mutual, Liberty Mutual, Waste Management, MARS Advertising, Edward Jones, and Aflac.

Common entry level positions include but are not limited to: accountants, retail merchandiser, management training programs, sales representatives, customer service representatives and financial representatives/advisors.

## Don't Forget the Cover Letter

*The information below is provided by Robert Half International, a proud SIFE partner company. For more information about Robert Half International, please visit [www.roberthalf.com](http://www.roberthalf.com)*

Many job seekers today are tempted to skip the cover letter. Think twice before doing so. This document can be invaluable for entry-level professionals. A thoughtfully written letter can distinguish these individuals from the crowd by allowing them to go into greater detail about the unique skills and qualifications that make them the best fit for the role.

Following are some tips for creating an eye-catching cover letter:

1. **Avoid a generic salutation.** If possible, don't start your note with "To whom it may concern" or "Dear sir or madam." Instead, call the company to ask the hiring manager's name (as well as the correct spelling) and title if it's not apparent in the job posting. Addressing the letter to a specific individual will demonstrate both motivation and resourcefulness.
2. **Keep it focused.** Hiring managers don't want to read a novel, so limit your note to two or three short paragraphs. Explain why the job interests you and what qualities you can bring to the position. Your interest in rock climbing isn't applicable unless you are applying to a firm that caters to sports enthusiasts, for example.
3. **Customize the content.** It's important to target each letter to the actual job opening. You can determine which professional accomplishments to focus on by looking at the job posting. For example, if you are applying for a position that involves managing a small team, play up your interpersonal skills and previous experience overseeing small groups. Expand upon one or two key points from your resume — perhaps how you oversaw a successful product launch — to better key into the potential employer's needs.
4. **Showcase your top assets.** There's a fine line between confidence and cockiness. Saying you are the best "web designer west of the Rockies" is less effective than explaining how your redesign of a client's website increased sales for the company by 10 percent or noting that you won a prestigious award for your work.
5. **Address any concerns.** The cover letter also is a place to address any issues that may give a hiring manager pause, such as gaps in employment. Briefly explain why you were out of work and, more important, what you have been doing since then to keep your skills up-to-date.
6. **Don't make demands.** Avoid asking for a specific salary or making other work-related demands ("I prefer working from home every Friday.") The purpose of your letter is to explain what you can do for the company, not vice versa.
7. **Be honest.** Don't stretch the truth about your accomplishments. Even seemingly minor misrepresentations — saying you managed the daily operations of a firm's help desk when you actually co-managed it, for example — can come back to haunt you during the reference or background check process.
8. **Check for errors.** A sure way to take yourself out of the running for a job is to have a typo or grammatical mistake in your cover letter. Ask a trusted friend or family member to review the document before you send it out. Seventy-six percent of executives we interviewed said just one or two typos in a resume would remove applicants from consideration for a job; 40 percent said it takes only one typo to rule candidates out.
9. **Find a place.** When applying for a position electronically, paste your cover letter into the body of the e-mail message you send to the hiring manager or into the appropriate space on an online application, if possible. Keep in mind that not all online job services will allow you to take this step.

When well crafted and targeted to the opportunity and employer, a cover letter can give you a significant edge over the competition. If you're searching for your first job or looking to take your career in a new direction, don't miss this chance to make a strong first impression and set yourself apart from other contenders.

## Writing a Killer Resume

*The information below is provided by Robert Half International, a proud SIFE partner company. For more information about Robert Half International, please visit [www.roberthalf.com](http://www.roberthalf.com)*

Landing a new position can be a challenge. The last thing you want to do is sabotage your employment search, and, since your resume is typically the first impression that hiring managers have of you, it's also the first place where you can potentially ruin your chances.

According to a survey conducted by Robert Half International, executives don't spend more than six minutes, on average, screening each resume they receive — which means every word counts in this critical document.

Of course, no job seeker is going to shoot him or herself in the foot on purpose. But you might be harming yourself without realizing it. Here are four common mistakes that put you at risk of losing the job opportunity:

**You don't proofread.** Three out of four executives we interviewed said just one or two typos in a resume would remove applicants from consideration for a job. Since your word processing program has a spell-check function, you may think there's no need to review your resume for typos and grammatical errors. Unfortunately, spell-checkers don't catch words that may be spelled correctly but used incorrectly: For example, if your most recent position was as a corporate blogger, your software may not raise the red flag if you mistakenly list yourself as a "logger." In addition to reading through the resume yourself, you should also have someone else review it to catch any errors that you may have overlooked.

**You exaggerate your qualifications.** Some people will do whatever they can to stand out, which includes fudging the details about a job title, the amount of time spent with an employer or a professional accomplishment. But if you think that a hiring manager won't try to confirm your qualifications, think again. If you are caught making up information, you not only will lose out on the opportunity at that company but also may permanently harm your reputation. Even a small fib can prove harmful. So, for instance, if you're working toward a degree that you plan to complete by the summer, don't say you already have the credential.

**You don't explain yourself.** The best resumes use specific language so hiring managers can clearly understand your qualifications and

accomplishments. If you say you are "knowledgeable" about HTML, an employer will not know if you use it every day to code web pages or if you simply know that the acronym stands for Hyper Text Markup Language. Instead of using a vague term, you should explain how you've leveraged your knowledge of HTML for certain projects or to aid your employer, how long you've been using it, and if you possess any relevant certifications. Along the same lines, be specific when listing periods of employment, including the month and year for start and end dates instead of just the year.

**You're too wordy.** Sometimes it's difficult to determine what information belongs in your resume and what can be safely left out. After all, the temptation is to describe any qualification that might remotely tip the scales in your favor. But you might not want to list every accomplishment, skill or project you've worked on. Hiring managers appreciate brevity, so focus on the aspects of your work history that are most relevant to the job for which you're applying. If you've had a long career, for instance, you may include fewer details about jobs you held early on that don't relate to your current career path. Hobbies, personal facts and other fluff also can be left off.

## Interviewing

*The information below is provided by Robert Half International, a proud SIFE partner company. For more information about Robert Half International, please visit [www.roberthalf.com](http://www.roberthalf.com)*

The interview might arguably be the most important step in the job search process and is your chance to show a company that you are the best person for the job.

### Preparing for the Interview

Preparation is the first step towards a successful interview. Hiring managers are continually amazed at the number of applicants that come to their offices without any knowledge of the company, position and what they are going to say.

Be sure you know:

- The exact place and time of the interview, and the interviewer's title, full name and correct pronunciation.
- Pertinent facts about the company, such as annual sales revenue, principal lines of business and locations.
- How the opportunity will impact your immediate and long-term career development.
- How to present yourself in the interview.
- What to ask during the interview. An interview is a two-way street, and probing questions are important for many reasons. Insightful questions helps determine if your relationship will be mutually rewarding. The more you understand the opportunity, the better you will be able to communicate your interest to the employer.

## The Interview

For the hiring company, finding the right match means identifying an individual capable of meeting the immediate needs of the position. More importantly, the candidate must have the potential to be the future resource and a long-term asset for the firm.

Similarly, you must determine whether you can be successful in the available position and whether the company will give you opportunity for growth and development.

During the interview, focus on positives and accentuate your strengths. Remember everyone has the same goal – to achieve the right match.

Below are some do's and don'ts to keep in mind to avoid committing costly errors:

- **Do** plan to arrive on time or a few minutes early.
- **Don't** forget to bring your resume. Keep several copies in your briefcase or handbag if you are concerned you might forget.
- **Don't** leave your cell phone on.
- **Do** smile and shake hands firmly.
- **Don't** chew gum.
- **Do** maintain eye contact as much as possible.
- **Do** follow the interviewer's lead, but try to get him or her to describe the position and the duties to you early in the interview so you can relate your background, skills and accomplishments to the position.
- **Don't** answer questions with a simple "yes" or "no." Provide details whenever possible and describe your successes related to the situation.
- **Do** answer all questions honestly.

- **Don't** over-answer questions. And if the interviewer steers the conversation into politics or controversial subjects, try to do more listening than speaking since this could be a sensitive situation.
- **Don't** make derogatory remarks about former or present employers. When explaining reasons for leaving, limit your comments to those necessary to adequately communicate your rationale.
- **Don't** inquire about salary, vacations, bonuses or retirement in the initial interview. If the interviewer asks what salary you are looking for, provide a range based on your knowledge of the skills and experience required of the positions, but explain that finding the right career opportunity is your motivating factor.
- **Do** conduct yourself as if you were determined to get the job even if the interview does not seem to be going well. Never close the door on an opportunity.
- **Do** thank the interviewer for his or her time.

The following are seven questions to consider asking at your next job interview:

1. **'What are the top three tasks you want the candidate to tackle once hired?'** You need to be clear about the initial expectations of the job and ensure you're on the same page as your new employer. The job ad may not include enough detail for you to fully understand all that is entailed. The last thing you want is to be misled about the duties of the position and end up overwhelmed — or underutilized — once you're onboard.
2. **'Is there room for growth and advancement?'** This shows a willingness to learn and adapt as changes in the position or industry occur. Adaptability is especially important in today's employment market and may make you an asset to the company should a reorganization occur. It also points to your drive and initiative, and underscores that you are looking for a career, not just a job.
3. **'What happened to the person who previously held this role?' (Or, if it's a new position: 'How has this job been performed in the past?')** You need to know any problems or past history associated with the position. For instance, was your predecessor promoted, or have several people cycled through this role in a short period of time? If the position is new, what's the likelihood it will be permanent?
4. **'Why did you choose to work here? What keeps you here?'** You may think you like a



certain company, but the fact is, you're an outsider — and you need to find out what an insider has to say about it. Who better to ask than the interviewer? With any luck, he or she will provide insight as an employee and potential coworker. Pay attention to the tone of the response, as well as the response itself. Does the hiring manager seem genuinely enthusiastic?

5. **If the interviewer is not your prospective manager: 'What can you tell me about the person I will be reporting to?'** It doesn't matter how wonderful the company is; a rocky relationship with your boss will make you miserable. Try to find out what type of person and supervisor your potential boss is. If you're used to working independently to solve problems and complete tasks, for example, you're unlikely to thrive under a micromanager.
6. **'What is the company's long-term outlook?'** It helps to have a general picture about the future of the company you plan to work for, especially given the current economic climate. You might also ask questions about recent company developments that you uncovered in your research — such as expansion plans or a dip in revenues — to gain a better understanding of the company's challenges and growth potential.
7. **'What are the next steps in the hiring process?'** This is an important question to ask at the end of the meeting. You need to know when the company plans to make a decision and when you should follow up. The interviewer's response may also give you insight into his or her interest in hiring you. Keep the door open for further communication by asking the interviewer for a direct phone number and the best time to call before you leave.

### After the Interview

In a competitive job market, just one wrong move during the application process can take you out of contention for the position you seek. Not sending a thank-you note after an employment interview is one of those wrong moves. In fact, no thank-you note may translate into "no, thank you" from an employer that was considering hiring you.

A thank-you note is a chance for you to make a lasting, positive impression on a hiring manager who may have interviewed dozens of candidates. Nearly nine out of 10 executives polled by our firm said sending a brief letter following an interview can boost a job seeker's chances of landing the position.

Following are some tips for writing a winning thank-you note:

**Keep it formal.** After an interview, some job seekers use their cell phones or PDAs to send off a quick thank-you note to the hiring manager — in "text speak." But hiring managers won't be impressed by "thx 4 ur time." Just as you wouldn't wear shorts and flip-flops to an interview, avoid such informal language, which could come off as unprofessional. Also, saying thanks so quickly after the interview makes it seem like you haven't given the meeting proper thought — that you're sending the note as routine, not because you truly appreciate the opportunity. A better tactic is to send an e-mail message to thank the interviewer within 24 hours of the interview. Then, follow up with a letter sent through the regular mail.

**Be specific.** In your note, bring up points from the conversation you had with the hiring manager. For example, if a prospective employer stressed that the open position calls for knowledge of a particular software program, use the thank-you letter as an opportunity to remind the person that you've worked with the application on a range of projects.

**Repeat yourself.** While a lot of what you include in your thank-you note may feel repetitive, remember that a hiring manager who has interviewed a dozen candidates may not remember all the specifics about your skills and experience. Just like an advertising campaign for a consumer product, a certain amount of repetition is necessary to distinguish yourself from the competition.

**Make it personal.** If you discovered the hiring manager shares your passion for travel or mystery books, referencing this commonality could make your letter even more effective. Personalizing the note will remind him or her who you are and that you paid close attention during the interview.

**Allay concerns.** A thank-note is your chance to address any concerns the hiring manager expressed, especially if you were unable to do so in the interview. Perhaps the interviewer was worried about your lack of industry experience, and during the interview you forgot to mention a temporary position you had in the sector. You can bring it up in your note, along with a few points about how that experience contributed to your knowledge or interest in the field.

**Don't stop at one.** If you interviewed with more than one hiring manager, send a thank-you note to each person. Address every letter to a specific individual, even if you have to do some research to uncover the spelling of someone's name or locate his or her

contact information. Also make sure the content of each letter differs; hiring managers often compare notes — literally.

**Add an extra.** Perhaps during the interview you mentioned an article you recently read that's relevant to the firm's business. Send or attach it with your note, along with a brief explanation of why you thought your contact would be interested in the information. Indeed, whether it's a news article or a link to an interesting website, you'll make yourself more memorable by demonstrating that you've gone beyond the basics.

Finally, keep in mind that sending a well-written thank-you note at other points in your job search can be advantageous. This communication shouldn't be limited solely to the employment interview. It's also worth sending a short letter of thanks to a contact who clued you in to a job lead, a former colleague who served as a reference or a manager who accepted your request for an informational interview. On the job hunt, the little things count. Displaying good manners can help you forge stronger relationships and ensure people are happy to lend a hand when you need their help again.

## Corporate Culture

*The information below is provided by Robert Half International, a proud SIFE partner company. For more information about Robert Half International, please visit [www.roberthalf.com](http://www.roberthalf.com)*

When hunting for a new job, it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of a potential fresh start. But be careful that your enthusiasm doesn't blind you to one important factor: how well you'll fit into a potential employer's workplace culture. Many job candidates forget to consider this aspect of a job offer, yet it often plays the largest role in determining their satisfaction in a new position.

Every organization has a unique culture. This blend of values inform and reflect the firm's policies and actions, and often set the tone for the day-to-day office environment and how employees interact.

Think of corporate culture as a pair of glasses you'll wear every day. Even the best-looking glasses — the ones that impress your friends and draw compliments from coworkers — will quickly have you aching to remove them if they constantly pinch your nose.

So how can you tell whether you'll fit into a company's culture before you start working there?

It's not always easy, but the following advice can help:

### Know what you want

Many job candidates misjudge their ability to adapt to an unfamiliar work culture, so they don't take the time to clarify, even to themselves, what type of office environment fits them best. Do you thrive in a demanding or relaxed environment? Innovative or traditional?

Jot down a list of your work values so you can see how well they align with a potential employer's culture. If you value frequent communication with your superiors, for example, you may encounter problems if managers are rarely in the office.

### Conduct a little research

It's fairly easy to develop at least a fuzzy picture of a company's work environment based on what you've heard from friends or read in the media. Before you reach the interview stage, bring that picture into sharper focus.

Start with the corporate website. Just as important as what the company says about itself is how it says it. Also search news and business sites for recent articles or profiles. If your prospective employer is a public company, check out its annual report for more hints about life at the firm.

### Hear it through the grapevine

Past or present employees of the company can provide invaluable insight. Even if you don't know anyone who has worked at the firm, you're probably within a few degrees of separation of someone who has, so take advantage of your professional network.

Online networking sites such as LinkedIn or Facebook can help you expand your connections and learn more about the organization. The more people you ask, the better — if you hear a negative report from a disgruntled former employee, for example, try to balance it with the impressions of someone who works for the firm now.

### Learn from the interview

The interview process is your best chance to learn about a company's corporate culture. For example, take note of the workplace atmosphere. Do employees seem engaged with their work and each other, or under stress and isolated?

When meeting with the hiring manager, ask questions geared toward the workplace culture, such as “What do you like best about working here?” You might also ask about the characteristics the firm values most in its workers or about how often people get together outside of the office.

Again, the way the interviewer responds can be just as revealing as the response itself. Does he or she hesitate before responding? Do you get a sense of genuine excitement, or does the response seem contrived?

### **Build your mosaic**

Don't put too much stock in any single impression, whether it's from an interviewer, your research or a friend's experience. The more information you get, the better able you'll be to tell an aberration from a distinct pattern. A former employee's complaint about a caustic environment, for example, might say more about that person than the workplace culture.

But at the same time, don't hold your tongue if you are feeling at all uncomfortable about any aspect of the new job or the office climate. A follow-up interview or phone call gives you a chance to address any concerns you've developed. For example, if you've heard from several sources that management doesn't encourage creativity, ask the hiring manager about it directly.

As you conduct your research, keep in mind that you're not necessarily judging how well an organization works overall — you're determining how well it might work for you. A company may have a thriving, efficient workplace that just doesn't suit your personal work style. Remember, when it comes to corporate culture, there's no such thing as one-size-fits-all.

## **Factors to Consider Before Accepting a Job Offer**

*The information below is provided by Robert Half International, a proud SIFE partner company. For more information about Robert Half International, please visit [www.roberthalf.com](http://www.roberthalf.com)*

Searching for a job is hard work. Scanning help-wanted listings, researching companies, sending out customized cover letters and resumes, and attending interviews can be tiring and time-consuming. So, if you're like most job seekers, you're excited — or at least relieved — when your efforts result in an employment offer.

In some cases, a pressing need for a paycheck may outweigh any potential drawbacks to a new role, especially given the uncertain economy and rising prices for gas and food. But if you are in a position to be selective, you must consider every angle before rushing to accept a prospective employer's offer. After all, a new full-time job usually isn't a short-term affair. Following are some guidelines to help you determine whether to accept a job offer or wait for a better opportunity:

### **Scrutinize the job description**

Carefully reviewing the job requirements, key tasks and responsibilities, as well as who you will report to, may be the single most important step in assessing an offer from a potential employer. Ask yourself these questions:

- Will you enjoy the day-to-day duties of the position?
- Will you be challenged?
- Is the level of responsibility appropriate considering your experience?
- Are you willing to make any required lifestyle changes (e.g., travel, longer commute, rigid work hours) that may affect your quality of life?

If the answer to any of these questions is no, accepting the position might not be in your best interest. While some negative factors can be overlooked — a slightly lower starting salary than you prefer, for instance — fundamental problems with the job itself are a definite deal-breaker.

### **Evaluate the company**

The work environment affects how you feel on a daily basis, so make sure it's one you feel comfortable in. If, for example, you strongly prefer a conservative corporate culture with set hours and established processes, you probably won't be happy in an informal atmosphere with a “fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants” business approach.

Also consider the work styles of your future boss and coworkers. If you sense that you and your potential colleagues have conflicting styles or personalities, tread carefully. While differences in character and opinion can result in better group dynamics, frequent disagreements often lead to unproductive and unhappy work teams.

### **Review the compensation package**

How does the salary compare to what you made in your last position or what others in your specialty and with the same skills earn? Take a look at the benefits package, too. How generous are the perks? Keep in mind that attractive benefits can sometimes outweigh sub-par compensation.

Or perhaps you're offered a job that requires you to work long hours but offers the option to telecommute. Being able to work from home several days a week may give you the time you need to attend to personal obligations and compensate for the rigid work schedule. Additionally, if an offer meets most of your requirements but doesn't include a benefit that's important to you — such as tuition reimbursement for a professional certification you seek — it doesn't hurt to ask if that perk can be included in your employment agreement.

### **Ask about opportunities for growth**

There's nothing worse for your career than getting stuck in a dead-end job. While a so-so role may be fine in the short term, holding a position that does not allow for advancement for an extended period of time can take a toll on your health and happiness.

Try to get a realistic idea of the growth opportunities available within the company. For example, have people who held the job before you moved up with the firm? Where did your prospective manager start out? If the answers to such questions don't seem to support a policy of promoting from within, you may want to continue your job search.

Careful consideration of the issues discussed above will help you decide whether to accept, reject or negotiate a better offer. If, after evaluating each of these points, you are still unsure which way to

swing, go with your gut. If your intuition tells you that something is a little off, conduct some additional research or ask more questions of the hiring manager before making your decision. Moving into a new role is a big step, and you want to enter the arrangement knowing all the facts. With a thoughtful analysis of the pros and cons, you'll be able to make the best decision for your career.

A resource available through Robert Half International is their Salary Center. The Salary Centers include more in-depth discussion of the current employment market, including data specific to certain areas of the country. Visitors also can find Salary Calculators – they can use this tool to find compensation for a target position adjusted for their local market, as well as customized job postings. Below are the links to the Salary Centers:

[www.roberthalf.com/SalaryCenter](http://www.roberthalf.com/SalaryCenter)  
[www.rht.com/SalaryCenter](http://www.rht.com/SalaryCenter)  
[www.officeteam.com/SalaryCenter](http://www.officeteam.com/SalaryCenter)  
[www.roberthalflegal.com/SalaryCenter](http://www.roberthalflegal.com/SalaryCenter)  
[www.creativegroup.com/SalaryCenter](http://www.creativegroup.com/SalaryCenter)

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