



April 2017

Look Before You Leap: 4 Questions Every Woman Should Ask While Job Searching

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Recommended Citation

Olvera, Hannah Y. (2017) "Look Before You Leap: 4 Questions Every Woman Should Ask While Job Searching," *Marriott Student Review*. Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/marriottstudentreview/vol1/iss1/7>

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LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

4 Questions Every Woman Should Ask While Job Searching

By Hannah Olvera

Every woman wants to find her ideal career. However, an ideal career isn't just a great position with competitive pay; people leave jobs like that all the time. An ideal career is both a perfect fit for the position and within the organization, which might seem like a lofty goal for those who are job searching. The solution? Research. Research a lot. Unfortunately for women, however, they disproportionately report dissatisfaction due to a lack of fit with the company, despite extensive preparation and research. According to 1,565 surveys conducted by Crain's Chicago Business, 42 percent of women voluntarily left their jobs due to lack of opportunities, 43.6 percent believe their compensation is less compared to their male peers, and only 50.4 percent believe their companies have a fair family leave policy².

While it is difficult to completely predict fit within a company, women should ask a couple of key questions to better evaluate gender equality in a company's

culture. This process will increase likelihood of personal career success. It will also create a concerted effort to kick start more companies to create equality in the workplace, enabling more women to have more potential in the work place.

1. What does the company look like right now?

Look at the stats, they don't show everything, but they do measure many women are currently working for the company and how many women are in leadership positions. It's no surprise that Texas Health Resources, which made the top of Fortune's 100 Best Workplaces for Women in 2016, 77 percent of employees and 66 percent of executives and managers are women⁴.

2. What kind of growth opportunities exist for me?

According to a Crain's Report from 2016, pay predictability is the largest determining factor for staying or leaving². In fact, Crain found that 42 percent of the 1,000 women surveyed left positions because they "didn't feel recognized and didn't see opportunities for advancement"². Women can avoid disappointment and frequent job changing by looking for companies that have the mentality to grow their employees and, more importantly, have structured leadership and mentoring programs.

Take Goodyear for example: Goodyear is known for their value "buy in early and build," a clear evidence of a growth mentality⁶. Coca Cola developed a mentoring program to empower their new minority hires. They found that 80 percent of mentored employees "climbed at least one rung in management" within five years⁵.

In the past 5 years, 42 percent of women voluntarily left their jobs due to lack of advancement opportunities

Another important indicator of a company's investment in you is the extent to which they assist its employees in pursuing higher education. Many companies, including Google and Boeing, are dedicated to reimbursing their employees' academic pursuits and give them time off.

3. What degree of flexibility does the company offer?

Flexibility is great for everyone, and that's why employers are striving to create more flexible work schedules for the new workforce— especially women. Whether maternity/ paternity leave is a priority or not, it is a good indicator of how progressive a company's culture is. For example, researchers from the University of Connecticut found that 33 percent of women leave their jobs within 12 months of having a baby (a rate that has remained constant for over two decades). Those who stayed reported feeling that management passed them by for advancement opportunities. Following management's lead, their coworkers thought them less competent and dedicated¹.

Fortunately, flexible schedules are on the rise, and some companies are putting extra emphasis on extended maternity leave with the opportunity to work from home once the maternity leave finishes, like Stratosphere Networks⁷.

4. Does the company foster open communication?

"There's a strong correlation between being able to talk openly with company executives and feeling like a workplace is fair," said Michael C. Bush, CEO of Great Place to Work. "Traditionally, communication channels with leaders have been less available to women than to men"³. Not only are communication channels less available to women, but studies show that white male executives are hesitant to take young females as their mentees⁵.

Although open communication is harder to measure looking from the outside in, some companies are working hard to create more transparent workplaces. Emilio Castilla, an MIT researcher, discovered that a certain firm maintained pay gaps between white and black employees. To overcome the bias-ridden compensation program, Castilla recommended posting each employee's name, race, and pay raise where all upper-level management could access the information. Social accountability kicked in and managers were more careful in the future to make all pay raises fair; the present pay discrimination quickly disappeared⁵.

Your research should not be limited to these four questions, rather they serve as a starting point. Job searching may be a long process, but the reward of finding your ideal career will be enough to keep you looking for the right company. Not only will you jumpstart your career and personal fulfillment, but you will join a movement that is actively fighting for gender equality in the workplace. You will pressure companies to be aware of women and their potential in the workplace. You will help them realize that they need to be more proactive in recruiting, and more importantly retaining, top talent for their companies. Your search for your ideal career isn't only about you; it's about creating change.

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 2. Cassie Walker Burke, Sabrina Gasulla. 2016. *2016 Best Places to Work for Women: Why do so many successful Chicago women leave their jobs? And what can companies do to encourage female talent to stick around?* Chicago: Crain's Chicago Business, April 4.
 3. Edward Jones. 2016. *Edward Jones Named One of the 2016 Best Workplaces for Women By Great Place to Work and Fortune*. St. Louis.
 4. Fortune. 2016. *100 Best Workplaces for Women*. New York City: Fortune.

5. Frank Dobbin, Alexandra Kalev. 2016. Why Diversity Programs Fail. Boston.
6. Gary VanderLind, Amy Alexy. 2013. All for Tomorrow's Leaders. Alexandria: Society of Human Resources, August.
7. West, Cassandra. 2016. Best Places to Work for Women Under 35. Chicago, April 4.

Stratosphere Networks is an IT service company. One employee, Amanda Westwood, operations coordinator, took 11 weeks of maternity leave and then started working from home to continue breastfeeding. She commented, "It's definitely a friendly place for women to work."