

Using the interview to tell if the opportunity is toxic or a bad fit

See it

Assess it

Deal with it

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How does a candidate choose a bad-fit work environment?

They say: *“Remember, you’re interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you,”* but candidates often:

1. **Don't look for it:** Candidates are often more preoccupied about making a good impression than they were about assessing if an environment is toxic/bad fit.

See

2. **Don't recognize it:** Unable to define what factors would be considered red flags.

Assess

3. **Deny/Dismiss it:** So impressed by the pedigree of an institution and what doors they thought the opportunity would open, that they minimized or dismissed red flags during an interview.

Deal



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How does a candidate choose a toxic work environment?

A toxic work environment exists when

1. the organizational culture,
2. the people,
3. or something about executing the actual work

causes you such distress that it negatively impacts your morale, productivity, or other aspects of your life.



Toxic for everybody



Toxic for you = Bad Fit

Source: <https://lifehacker.com/how-to-handle-a-toxic-work-environment-1627385030>

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YOUR VALUES aren't shared	For example: family friendly, work life balance, non-academic careers, etc. You want a collaborative environment, they are competitive
YOUR STRENGTHS aren't recognized	For example: mentoring, problem solving, willingness to go the extra mile, etc.
YOUR APPROACH isn't appreciated	For example: you have been taught that transparency (or evidenced based approach, etc.) is a cornerstone of work – they don't. You think that yelling is inappropriate. They yell.
YOUR WORK STYLE isn't rewarded	For example: the way you make decisions, communicate, handle change, handle conflict/
YOUR GOALS aren't aligned or supported	For example: you want to publish in mid-tier journals, they only recognize Cell. You want time off to teach, they want you in the lab. Your definition of scholarship is X, your PhD advisor's is Y, and she's requiring you to add two chapters to your dissertation that you think – and have been told by your mentors - are unnecessary



Toxic for you = Bad Fit

with/by your PI or members of the lab

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Toxic for everybody

Interview here: people are faking job satisfaction throughout your interview

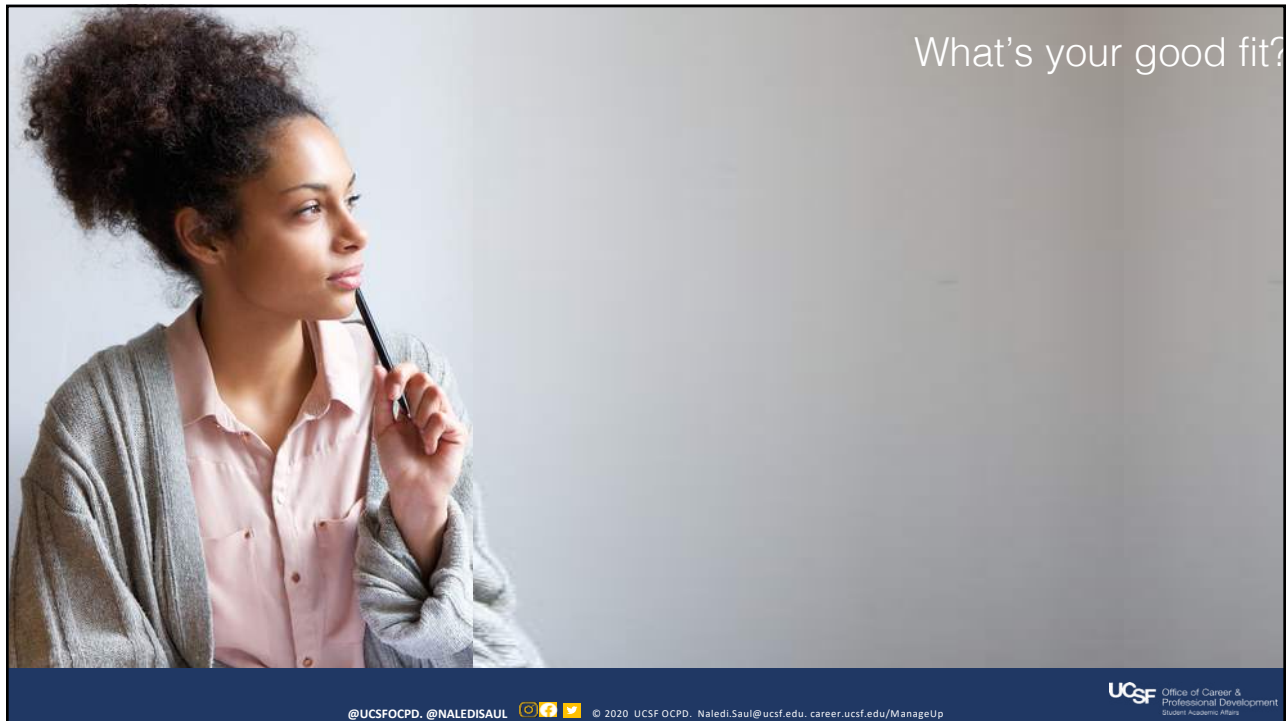
...but interview here: people really do have job satisfaction. But it's still toxic to you!

Toxic for you = Bad Fit

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What's your good fit?

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What's your good fit?

Right Skill Set

Research, advocacy, consulting, teaching, clinical care, administration, public education/outreach, project management, program implementation, policy, politics, diplomacy, grantsmanship, data analysis, managing teams, leading organizations, etc.)

Right Content (Interest Area)

- Research topic, health issue, population or system

Right Environment

- Your specific values, your approach, your strengths & your work style are recognized and rewarded
- You understand and respect the people with whom you work

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Your Turn:

What's your good fit?

Kamala Khan/Blue Heron

RIGHT CONTENT

- I want to work on X

RIGHT SKILLS

- I'd like to spend the majority of my time working on Y and Z, and less time working on A and B

RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

- I think I would thrive in a smaller, closer knit environment, where people are social, communicate well and support/help each other. No yelling, no microaggressions. **NO BACKSTABBING!**

♡ 0

bit.ly/OCPDGoodFit

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Candidates wish that the signs of a toxic environment would be obvious in an interview

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JOIN US

- There are many reasons why you'd miss seeing an organization is toxic or a bad fit, if you weren't expressly looking for signs.
- Remember: people won't be candid. So don't look for **candor** – look for **consistency**.

I'm embarrassed by my bad choice & struggling here. But if you don't realize how toxic this place is, that's on you

Look into my eyes: Run. Run, and never look back

I actually think this place is healthy, because I've consistently been in toxic work situations

My Boss/PI/Director is sponsoring my visa, so I'm saying nothing but good stuff today

I'm actually part of the problem

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Your Game Plan? Look for consistency, not candor from bosses, peers and subordinates



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Your Turn:

What's your good fit?

My career goal is: To find a position in X	
To get closer to my career goal, I am looking for an internship where I can...	
Right Content?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I want to work on Y, Z,
Right Skill Set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regardless of the organization, I would like the majority of my time to be spent doing A and B, with less time dedicated to A and B.
Right Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think I would thrive in a smaller, closer knit environment, where people are social, communicate well and support/help each other. No yelling, no microaggressions. NO BACKSTABBING!

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Your Game Plan? Look for consistency, not candor from bosses, peers and subordinates

Job Interview Schedule	Questions	What does the data tell you?
Boss: Your direct supervisor	1. What qualities and values do you look for in those you invite to join you team, lab, clinic, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think I would thrive in a smaller, closer knit environment, where people are social, communicate well and support/help of each other. No yelling, no microaggressions. NO BACKSTABBING! <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Does everybody give the right kinds of answers? Does everyone give a credible answer? Does everybody give a thorough/detailed answer? Does everyone give the same type of answer?
Peers: Panel of peers you'll work most closely with	1. How would you describe the values of this team, department, organization, etc.?	
Peers: Lunch with two colleagues	1. What direction do you think this organization is going in and what strategies do you think will be necessary to achieve those goals?	
Subordinates: Time with the person you will supervise	1. What do you need from the person selected as your supervisor in the first 6 months?	
Boss: Director of the organization	1. What direction do you think this organization is going in and what strategies do you think will be necessary to achieve those goals?	
Boss: Your direct supervisor	1. What direction do you think this organization is going in and what strategies do you think will be necessary to achieve those goals?	

If you get divergent answers or don't get answers at all: that is a flag and there is probably an issue



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Look for consistency, not candor: Bosses, Peers and Subordinates

	Productivity/Performance	Feedback	Training	Professional Dev.
Boss(s)	1.What are your performance expectations/benchmarks for success for the selected candidate in the first 6 months?	1.If I'm the selected candidate, I want to be sure I'm achieving your goals. How do you let your team know when they aren't meeting your expectations?	1.How do you onboard and ramp us new staff?	1. What types of professional development opportunities do you encourage your staff to partake in?
Peers/ Colleagues	1.What do you need to see from the selected candidate within the first 6 months? 2.How does this position interact with yours? How do you think this position should optimally interact with yours?	1.If I'm the selected candidate, I want to be sure I'm achieving your goals. How does Boss X you let your team know when you aren't meeting their expectations?	1.What was your onboarding/ramping up like?	1. What have you appreciated most about the types and level of support regarding your own professional development?
Subordinates	1.What type of support do you need from the selected candidate in the first 6 months?	1.If I'm the selected candidate, one of my responsibilities will be acknowledging and celebrating your achievements and giving you corrective feedback to improve. What approach do you appreciate when someone is acknowledging your work? What about giving you corrective feedback?	1.What was your onboarding/ramping up like?	1. What types of professional development opportunities have you engaged in previously and what would you like to do next?

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But...Is there any way
to get people to be candid in an interview?



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But...Is there any way
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Person A: Picture in your mind the best advisor (or teacher, mentor, preceptor, attending, boss, etc.) you've ever known.

Person B: Ask the following questions:

- What is it about person X that makes them a great _____?

Person C: Observe Person A: How did they respond?

Person A: Person with birthday closest to January
Person B: Person with birthday closest to December
Person C: Other Person!

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But...Is there any way to get people to be candid in an interview?



Person A: Picture in your mind the **best** advisor (or teacher, mentor, preceptor, attending, boss, etc.) you've ever known.

Person B: Ask the following questions: • What is it about person X that makes them a great _____?

Person C: Observe Person A: How did they respond?

Person A: Picture in your mind the **worst** advisor (or teacher, mentor, boss, etc.) you've ever known.






Person B: Ask the following question: • What is it about person Y that makes them a great _____?

Person C: Observe Person A: What is their response?

Person C: What was different about how **Person A** answered the two questions?

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Stop trying to impress people, and give people space to talk... and pay attention to what they fill that space with

Verbal <small>What the person says</small>	Para-verbal <small>How the person says it</small>	Non-Verbal <small>How the person behaves</small>		
				

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Stop trying to impress people, and give people space to talk... and pay attention to what they fill that space with

Verbal What the person says	Para-verbal How the person says it	Non-Verbal How the person behaves		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non detailed, generalized responses that anyone could say about anyone 2. Vague answers 3. Repeating use of particular adjectives 4. Answers your question with a question: "What do you mean by 'best?' " etc. 5. Evasive responses: "That's a good question" 6. Rambling 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Silence 2. Halting, hesitating responses 3. Short responses 4. Clipped ending, as if not inviting further inquiry 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sighing 2. Uhhhhh 3. Eye rolling, grimacing 4. Deer in headlights look 5. or a look of slight confusion as if they, 'don't understand the question' 6. Annoyance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Fidgeting, tapping, hair twirling 8. Blinking rapidly 9. Mocking your question 10. Despairing, derisive or maniacal laughter 11. Head shaking 12. Stretching 13. Other nervous tics 	
				
<p><i>Do they exude satisfaction or joy?</i></p> <p style="font-size: small; text-align: center;"> @UCSFOCPD, @NALEDISAUL 📧 📷 📺 © 2020 UCSF OCPD, Naledi.Saul@ucsf.edu, career.ucsf.edu/ManageUp Office of Career & Professional Development Student Academic Affairs </p>				

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But...Is there any way to get people to be candid in an interview?

1. Look for both verbal and non-verbal cues
2. Listen both for what they are saying and what's missing
3. Give people space to talk
4. Self disclosure helps



Between looking at:

- each individual data point (each person you meet)
- and the overall consistency in responses...

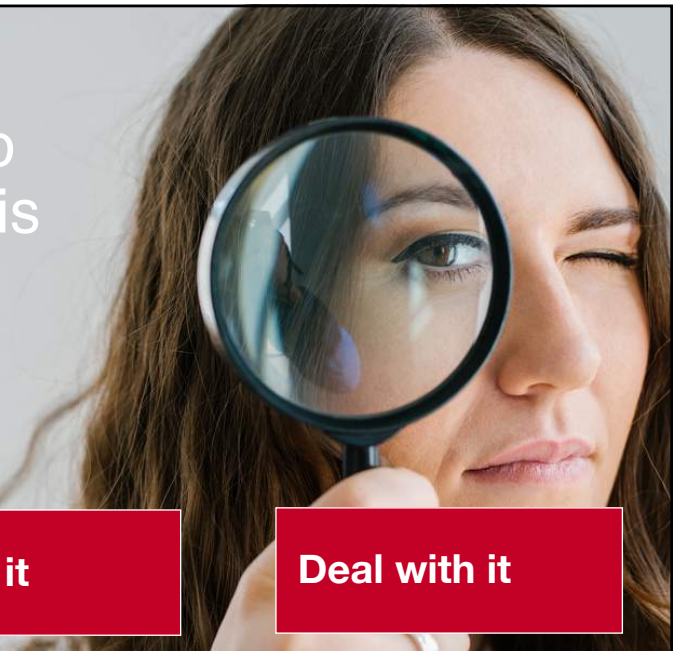
...a picture begins to emerge.

ASK A BASELINE QUESTION FIRST:
(something where people remember their original joy)

"One of my goals is just to learn about the team. So, what do you love most about science/ being an NP?"

Don't ask yourself "would I be happy here?"
Ask yourself, "What type of person would thrive here?"

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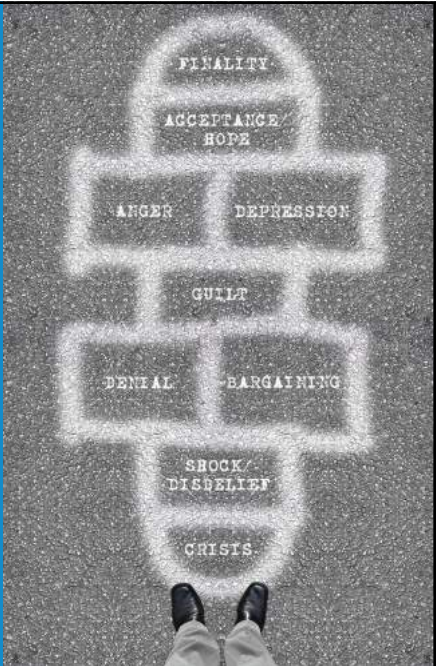
How to Deal

1. If the lab is toxic or a bad fit, it could be hard to accept what you see.

Depending on how much you wanted it to work out and how you feel about your options, your brain is going to try to minimize things.
2. To interview well, you will have already begun to identify with the institution (and the lab) and imagine yourself there
3. If you're right (and it is toxic or a bad fit for you), you'll never know

Do you hear yourself saying:

- ❖ *Maybe I didn't really see that.*
- ❖ *I saw that, but maybe I misinterpreted what I saw?*
- ❖ *Maybe this happened because (of this convoluted explanation you just made up because you don't want this opportunity to be a shark-infested pit)*
- ❖ *Maybe it's not so bad?*
- ❖ *Maybe they were having a bad day?*
- ❖ *Perhaps they forgot to mention it*
- ❖ *But its Dr. X's lab! The name recognition will open doors. Doesn't every place have their issues?*
- ❖ *I'm sure I can handle it.*
- ❖ *I can put up with anything for a few years*

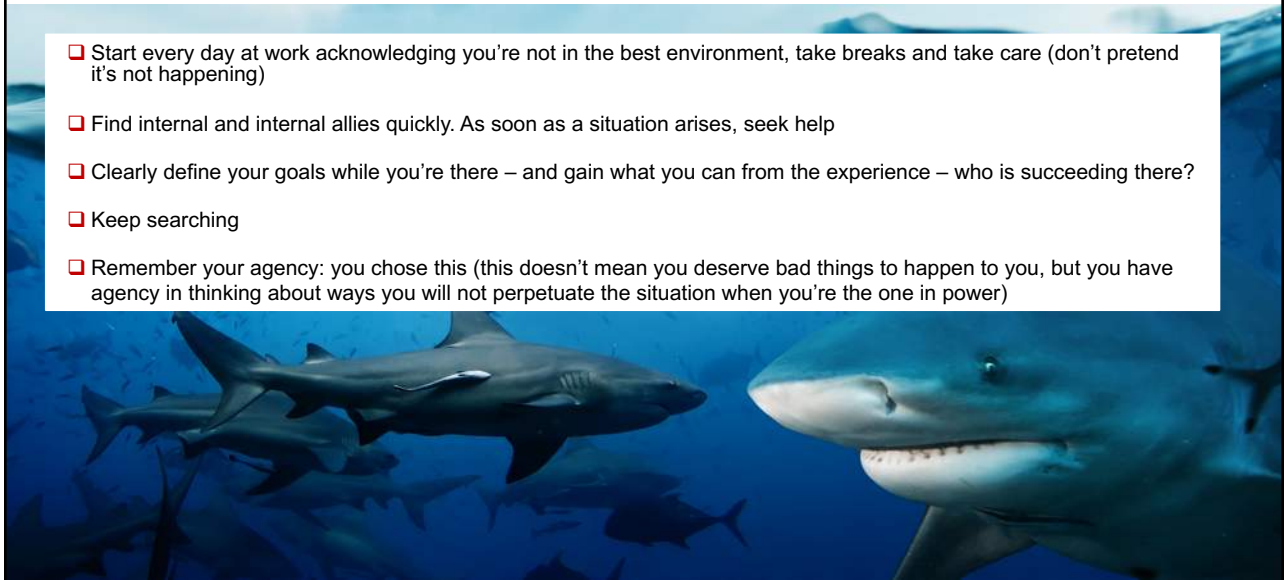


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And if you do select a toxic or bad fit position?

- ❑ Start every day at work acknowledging you're not in the best environment, take breaks and take care (don't pretend it's not happening)
- ❑ Find internal and external allies quickly. As soon as a situation arises, seek help
- ❑ Clearly define your goals while you're there – and gain what you can from the experience – who is succeeding there?
- ❑ Keep searching
- ❑ Remember your agency: you chose this (this doesn't mean you deserve bad things to happen to you, but you have agency in thinking about ways you will not perpetuate the situation when you're the one in power)



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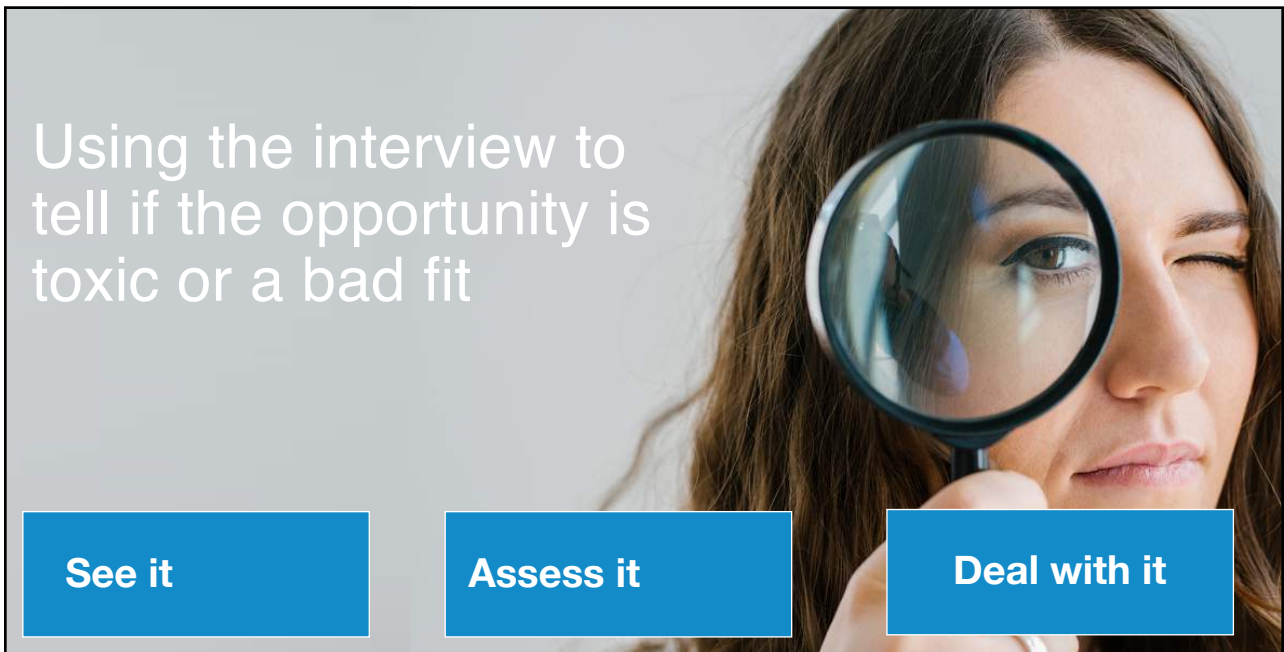
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