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

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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.

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

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.
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See it  Assess it  Deal with it

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.

Source: https://lifehacker.com/how-to-handle-a-toxic-work-environment-1527385030

Toxic for everybody  Toxic for you = Bad Fit
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causes you such distress that it negatively impacts your morale, productivity, or other aspects of your life.

### 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.

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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 everybody

Toxic for you = Bad Fit
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
Your Turn:

Kamala Khaz/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!

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

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The 4 Rules:

1. Pay attention to the questions they are asking you.

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

11/23/20

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

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

• 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.

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.

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.

Look into my eyes: Run, run, and never look back.
Your Game Plan? Look for **consistency**, not **candor** from bosses, peers and subordinates.

**Your Turn:**

**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?**

- I want to work on Y, Z,

**Right Skill Set**

- 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**

- 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!

**What’s your good fit?**
### Your Game Plan? Look for **consistency, not candor** from bosses, peers and subordinates

#### Job Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>What does the data tell you?</th>
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**Boss:**
- Your direct supervisor

**Peers:**
- Panel of peers you’ll work most closely with
- Lunch with two colleagues

**Subordinates:**
- Time with the person you will supervise

**Boss:**
- Director of the organization

**Boss:**
- Your direct supervisor

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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

<table>
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<th>Productivity/Performance</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Professional Dev.</th>
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#### Boss(s)

1. What are your performance expectations/benchmarks for success for the selected candidate in the first 6 months?
2. 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?
3. How do you onboard and ramp us new stuff?
4. 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 yourself?
3. If I’m the selected candidate, I want to be sure I’m achieving your goals. How do you let your team know when you aren’t meeting their expectations?
4. What was your onboarding/ramping up like?
5. 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?
2. 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?
3. What was your onboarding/ramping up like?
4. What types of professional development opportunities have you engaged in previously and what would you like to do next?
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: Person with birthday closest to January
Person B: Person with birthday closest to December
Person C: Other Person!
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

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<td>1. Non detailed, generalized responses that anyone could say about anyone</td>
<td>1. Silence</td>
<td>1. Sighing</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Answers your question with a question: “What do you mean by ‘best?’” etc.</td>
<td>4. Clipped ending, as if not inviting further inquiry</td>
<td>4. Deer in headlights look</td>
</tr>
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<td>5. Evasive responses: “That’s a good question”</td>
<td>5. or a look of slight confusion as if they, ‘don’t understand the question’</td>
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Do they exude satisfaction or joy?

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 it’s 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
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 internal 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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