

How to Be Information Literate When Choosing Your Work Environment

By
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Work environments in the information industry, be they libraries or other information centers, come with just as many pluses and minuses that jobs in other industries offer. If you thought you were in the only industry that didn't enjoy toxic workplaces, back-stabbing co-workers, quirky policies, political gamesmanship, and micro-managing bosses, then you have been disillusioned. The longer you've been in the field, the more you are likely to experience many of these joys, and in my short three years of working in the information industry, I feel like I've already seen most of it to some degree.

Despite the fact that working in a library may really not be too far off from experiences you'll encounter in the corporate world, there is no reason to have a change of heart if you're new to the field. Those of us who have been around the block a little (or a lot) can certainly vouch for the fact that just as in any industry, there are good organizations and bad organizations to become a part of. In addition to knowing whether a work environment has a positive or negative vibe to it, there is also substantial importance in knowing if a potential work environment will be challenging and suited toward the skills you have or the skills you wish to acquire.

We all know friends and family members who have that sick-to-your stomach feeling when they get up to go to work in the morning. We also know some who get pigeon-holed into a certain skill set and push paper around all day. If we're lucky, or wise about choosing a work environment, we can avoid becoming members of these unhappy societies and look forward to our work each and every day. After all, if you don't enjoy doing the work that you are getting up for every day or the environment in which you do it, why get up at all? So before plunging feet-first into any old job in the information world, you would be well served to do your due-diligence and research what you're getting into.

It's hard to pick the first criterion that is most important to you, but you'll want to prioritize what it is that you're looking for in a job before looking at ads. Some people may think location is king. Others may be looking for their potential employer to 'show them the money'. The size and focus of an organization can also play an important role in your decision making. Then there is always the all-important job description, which lays out exactly what you will be doing at your job. There are a number of factors that should be considered when narrowing down your options, so let's look at a few in more detail.

The Job

Priority number one should be decoding exactly what that job description is saying. Don't just look at the requirements and the first few duties. When an employer lists a scrolling litany of items under the 'Preferred' section of the job ad, you better pay attention. Same goes for the duties. For instance, you may not be cut-out for supervising two staff members, creating online tutorials, or cataloging half the books in the building. Don't let these duties and requirements deter you from applying for a job, after all, most

candidates will not be proficient in everything being asked for. At the very least however, make sure that you have a good grasp on everything that will be asked of you, as well as the things that won't.

The Organization

Definitely take a peek at the hierarchical organizational chart. You'll want to know how many bosses you'll have and have many underlings as well. It doesn't hurt to take a trip over to the ole' work site before the interview, if you have the means. This can often shed some insight into how things are run, in addition to what you'll be looking at everyday. Have a look at the offices if they are in public view to see what your personal quarters will provide you with. It will also give you an idea of what kind of budget the organization has to play with. For example, if you're into high-price tag tech items and you see 70's furniture in the study areas, it's probably a good time to run for the doors. And of course, scoping out the organization's website for any clues as to what you can expect as an employee goes without saying. Benefits can be crucial.

The People

It would be great to know the personalities of every single relevant person that you will be working with before applying for a job, but it isn't quite that easy. There's nothing wrong with Googling the director or your potential co-workers to see where they've been, what they've published, or what they are interested in. I would have to advise against showing up on their doorsteps to ask them questions like "Hey, how do you like working at City-State College"?, but there are things you can do within reason to get a better feel for the staff. Remember, you don't have to be best friends but you will be spending A LOT of time with your co-workers so keep that in mind.

The Location

Location may be important to some and not so to others. If location is a priority for you, you will definitely be keeping a map on hand while sifting through job ads. Make a note that just because you're applying to a college or university doesn't necessarily mean there will be a whole lot going on off-campus in terms of cultural enrichment, mental stimulation, entertainment, recreation, or good schooling/day care. Geographical considerations should also be taken into account. Say you are trying your hand at a large governmental agency or corporate library, for example. Consider the traffic and time that it will take you to get to work, as well as the cost and availability of housing. These things may seem trivial when you find yourself in desperation mode, just trying to get your hands on any job, but with some of the salaries I've seen being doled out in the information world, you may be finding yourself with an unexpected roommate in those metro areas.

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