





Here's what not to do: Dress up like the FedEx dude and eavesdrop on a prospective employer's meetings. Or spike your potential coworkers' coffee to get them dishing on the boss.

We understand the temptation. We've all said yes to what we thought would be our dream job, only to discover that by the time we have our security-card photo taken that it looks very different on the inside. But unless you'd like the cops involved, such covert tactics are hardly the way to complete the picture.

Sure, any smart job hunter does the standard detective work: Dissect a company's annual reports, track down former employees, and Google the new boss to make sure there aren't hate sites devoted to his name. But there are other stealth (and very legal) ways to get beyond the glossy surface and make sure any potential employer's sales pitch matches up with reality. "When you're interviewing for a job, you're typically thinking about your new title, the big-name company, and the money it will bring you," says Billie G. Blair, a Los Angeles-based organizational psychologist and management consultant. "What you really should be doing is stepping back from that and paying attention to all the small things." So rev up those five senses. You'll need them to weed out the nightmare jobs and find the one that's the perfect fit for you.

### **1. The office is your fishbowl**

In 2001, Mary Dondiego walked into Connect Public Relations, a firm in Provo, Utah, for an interview, and was immediately startled by the office's overwhelming silence. "There was basically one large room where I couldn't see anyone's head over the cubicles," she recalls. "I thought that was weird initially, but I shrugged it off." Her hunch proved right. Coworkers who sat right next to her emailed instead of talking, and she found the culture stifling and compartmentalized. (Connect's founder and president, Neil Myers, says the firm has a "hard-working, heads-down" culture that's not right for everyone.)

Dondiego, now a PR manager at a consulting company, should have paid heed to the cultural cues she spotted during that first visit. "You're looking for the tone of the people, how they're dressed, how they interact with one another," says Liz Ryan, founder of WorldWIT, a networking community for women. "The lobby is a wonderful fishbowl into the culture." In fact, Ryan recommends intentionally arriving for an interview 20 minutes early to eavesdrop on everything from what employees say to the receptionist to the gossip in the restrooms.

While you're there, be sure to get the grand tour, taking a few mental snapshots of your new boss's office, says Don Townsend, a recruiter whose clients include Cisco and AT&T. "If you don't give a hoot about politics and you've gone through three interviews and everyone has pictures of politicians in their office, you might question whether it's a good fit for you."

### **2. Give the cab-driver test**

No matter how closely you scrutinize your boss's office walls, scrutinizing her is another game entirely. She'll be on her best behavior, making it all the more important to get her