



## Accounting for Corporate Culture

Why should job seekers in the accounting industry research a potential employer's corporate culture? Aren't there more important factors to consider, such as salary, bonuses and benefits? In this competitive accounting industry, job seekers are finding near equivalent salaries between the "Big Four" firms and mid-sized accounting firms, and "job-hopping" for the highest salary is not as practical today as it was five years ago. Many firms competing for top talent are using corporate culture as a means to distinguish themselves from the rest.

Job seekers are talking about the importance of corporate culture, because they are looking for a long-term relationship with their firm of choice. How comfortable a potential employee feels about a firm's workplace environment can be the deciding factor when accepting a job offer. It's important to figure out whether or not the values of your potential employer match your own.

What is corporate culture? At its most basic, it's the personality & character of an organization. It guides how employees think, behave, act or react, and feel. It's a broad term used to define the unique character and personality of a particular company or organization.

At Freed Maxick & Battaglia, CPAs, PC, the #1 ranked accounting firm in Western New York, emphasis is placed on creating a unique, sociable corporate culture for employees. "We're headquartered in downtown because of what the city has to offer to our employees in terms of it's accessibility, restaurants, theatre and culture," said Robert Glaser, Managing Director of Freed Maxick & Battaglia. "Additionally, it provides for greater access to the bankers and other professionals who are also located downtown." A strong recruiting point for the firm is the belief that employees must enjoy well-rounded lives, professionally and personally. Julie Becht, Human Resources Director of Freed Maxick explains, "We encourage a healthy work/life balance through organizing activities outside of the workplace, with many geared toward spending time with family. The Firm's unique sociable culture is evident at annual events like the picnic, holiday party, Corporate Challenge run in Delaware Park and end of tax season celebrations." In addition, the Firm purchases employee tickets for Bills games and Sabres games. There are Firm softball and bowling teams, too.

Talented and ambitious individuals want to work at a firm where they can use their skills to advance. Many want flexibility and lives outside of work. How can you find out in advance if the environment at a particular firm allows you to balance work with your personal life? The truth is that you will never *really* know until you have worked at the firm for a number of months, but you *can* learn as much as possible through research and observation.

With a bit of effort before and during the interview, you can get a good sense of corporate culture through a two-step process, starting with research and ending with the interview. Research the firm by visiting their website or using Google to find news articles, awards they've received or events they sponsor. Ask family or friends who know of, or work for the firm, about its reputation. You can learn a lot by doing your own investigating.

For the interview, ask one or more of these questions:

- Are work teams part of the structure?
- What is the director-to-staff ratio?
- Are there formal advancement programs like networking and mentoring?
- What are the requirements for billable hours, and are they different at various levels?
- Will I work on a variety of engagements across different industries?
- How much travel is expected?
- What are the firm's priorities and goals for the next few years?
- Are there established career paths for employees in this position?
- What skills and characteristics does the company value?
- How do people from different departments interact?
- Are there opportunities for further training and education?
- How do people get promoted? How many have been promoted in the past five years?
- What is the orientation process like?
- What behaviors get rewarded?
- How does the firm communicate to its employees?

You are going to spend a lot of time in the work environment -- and to be happy, successful, and productive, you'll want to be in a place where you fit the culture. You'll want a voice, to be respected, and have opportunities for growth. When looking for the firm that's right for you, remember you can chart your own course to success. Do your research, get the facts, and choose carefully. When you pick the right firm, you will be on your way to a challenging, rewarding career.