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Small, Medium, Large - What Kind of Company Should I Work For?

Throughout the progress of a person's career, chances are there will come a time when a decision has to be made about whether or not to accept work with a company based on the size of the organization. If you are just starting out, there may not be a lot of information available to tell you both the pros and cons for choosing a company according to its size. Companies are always going to try to put their best foot forward in an interview, and will be generally reluctant to discuss what might turn out to be negative aspects about joining the organization from an employee standpoint. Sometimes, certain characteristics about a company might seem negative to one applicant, but exciting to a different applicant, so a look at some potential pitfalls is worth a glance. Regardless of what size organization you choose to work with, there is no such thing as a low risk job for employees. Though the risks are different for various size organizations, they just change their shape rather than being eliminated.

Micro to Small Businesses – Regardless of what a company sells, whether it is services or products, one thing is common to all very small business operations. Whoever runs the company expects to be literally running the company and everyone associated with the organization. There are variations in experience and personality in these “bosses,” but no matter how they treat people who work for them, employees will be expected to get acquainted with the intimate details of how the business owner wants the business to run. With small business, the work load will be flexible and heavy, tolerance for mistakes generally low, and employees will be expected to withstand the performance standards set by the business owner. Many small business owners see themselves as the absolute ruler of their domain, and do not tolerate being ignored when they have come to a decision about something. Because the business depends on making customers extra happy, the cardinal sin of working for a small business is doing something that causes a sale to be lost – any sale. Pay and benefits associated with these jobs will be generally lower than larger competitive companies, and all employees will be working with the risk that the business owner does not know what he is doing with his company. Many small business owners tend to micro manage their operations, and if they have a garish personality, will often seem dictatorial and brash in the way they treat employees working for them. As a small business grows, there are lots of opportunities to be exposed to all aspects of an operation for ambitious employees, and these jobs are an excellent proving ground for learning new skills that can be taken to the next level. If a person works well in a small business, they will have the potential of growing beyond their initial responsibilities, and gaining experience that will carry forward in their future career. If a person likes to solve problems and take direct orders from the owner of a company, they will benefit from working in a small organization.



Midsize Companies – Midsized companies may have several locations within a business territory, and the upper management has usually learned how to delegate responsibilities to lower level managers, though this is not always true. Some midsize owners occasionally try to micro manage their businesses as well, so it is important to find out the business practices of the leadership. In these companies, there is usually some insulation between the rank and file workers and upper level management, though most midsize organizations have a relatively short path to reaching the head honcho. There will usually be lots of memos coming down from the top, policy and mission statements that change according to the health of the business, and more bureaucracy to deal with in negotiating benefits and pay increases. These companies usually have benefits and health care coverage that are better than small business plans, and they have been around for a while. These businesses are acutely aware of their bottom line, and are likely to make hiring and firing decisions based on the financial goals set by management. Expectations for employees are usually oriented toward hiring people who are willing to do what it takes to get the job done, including long hours and changing levels of responsibility for work load. Though the work opportunities are varied, they are not as broad based as that seen in small companies. Unless an employee can move into management functions, the potential for advancement within these organizations will be limited by the value these companies place on the individual skill sets an employee has to offer. In negotiating salary, the best opportunity for getting raises is in the initial hiring process. After a person is hired, the raises will depend on how well the company does in meeting its profit expectations, and the interval established for pay reviews. Pay increases will be generally low, and some struggling companies will play games in granting increases to employees. In times of unexpected bad fortunes for these companies, there will usually be plenty of indications that a lay off or downsizing of staff is imminent, but little information about which employees are most at risk. These companies will try to get the most out of each person they hire before announcing who will be getting the boot. Risks associated with working for these companies is all about the bottom line profits, so keeping an eye on the pulse of profit statements will be an excellent indicator of whether this will be a good or bad year for the individual employees. The fortunes of midsize companies often turn on the decisions of the upper level leaders and their personalities. Checking the track record and history of company leadership can help to indicate their potential for success and the effect of their management style. These companies still have mechanisms for appreciating and rewarding individual contributions to the limit of their resources appropriated for this type of recognition. For general employees, this level of business is the first to develop a “glass ceiling” for advancement. Though they may promise unlimited potential, it will not take long to find out just how limited that advancement potential is. One must be adept at business politics and have acute business acumen to move into high positions of management for these companies.

Large Companies – Working for a large company has some benefits above any other type of organization, but the risks are higher and the potential for growth are also the most convoluted of any company type. In these organizations, an employee is most likely to encounter the demonstration of the old adage, “The left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.” Large profit motivated companies in private industry make business decisions based on pleasing the company shareholders, eliminating competition, and maintaining their hold on their respective business markets. Large government organizations are influenced by political shifts rather than profit motives. Whether these companies are government or private, one thing an employee can count on are lots of rules and regulations associated with every aspect of every job associated with the business. There are few large companies able to maintain a close relationship with their employees, and everything that changes must be pushed through a lumbering bureaucracy for approval. Though these companies often have the best benefit plans for employees, they are also the most convoluted and regulated. Advancement potential can be high for those who are able to discern the right path through the

organization, but the road to this end is long and arduous for most employees. These companies will tend to hire and utilize people with existing and specific skill sets for all functions, so variety and rapid change are generally the least prevalent in a large company. Both employees and customers are generally reduced to impersonal numbers within large companies, and there may often be sudden and unforeseen shifts in fortune for hundreds or even thousands of workers with very little notice. Large companies are more interested and focused on the organization, re-organization, consolidation, acquisition, and reassignment of resources. Upper level management can often decide to outsource entire operations, close facilities and open new locations with little available warning to those affected by the decisions. As an individual employee, it is easy to reside too long in a large business resulting in significant skills atrophy, and difficulty in finding alternative jobs when a large company closes its operations in a given location. Working in a significant function of a large company can help to create an impressive credential for choosing to work with a smaller organization on leaving employment with the large company. In recent years, unscrupulous management in large organizations has been noted for profit taking and building their own golden parachutes while ruining the fortunes of rank and file employees. As a large company begins to fail, it takes longer for the effect to spread throughout the entire organization, because so much of the operation runs on a predetermined plan. High profile projects do come and go quickly as various business units compete for management attention, and shift the focus of leadership to various different levels of control and responsibility over business functions. This can often result in being on top one minute, and out the door the next. Advancement planning should be done in finding out how to move within small groups rather than expecting to make large leaps within the scope of the organization. Impressing localized supervision is the key to moving forward.

This article is by no means a comprehensive assessment of all considerations one should make before choosing what kind of company is most beneficial to work with in making career choices. It does provide a start for anyone who is currently engaged in career planning, and a broad scope for approaching the next move one might wish to consider in reaching their individual goals.

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