
READING THE SIGNS BEFORE YOU SIGN ICA FLUOR

Reading comprehension: Look at the following titles and match them to paragraphs A – D. Two of them are extra and won't be used.

- Positive signs
- One star out of five
- Out of the frying pan into the fire
- Hire a lawyer
- Google it!
- Reach out

Avoiding a toxic workplace

A. _____ Job hunting is its own peculiar type of hell. There are the applications, the selling yourself, the highs of the interview offer, the lows of the waiting and the rejections. In the desperation to impress and to secure a job offer, it can be easy to stumble into another type of hell: the toxic workplace. In many ways, having a job in a horrendous work environment is worse than being unemployed. Stress levels are increased, sleep is reduced and the only resolution is to leave, meaning you now have to find a job in addition to working at the one you have. There's also the question of whether staying somewhere only briefly will negatively impact your CV. Many will choose to tough it out for a year or 18 months to avoid awkward questions at future interviews which can feel like a jail sentence. With this in mind, it's worth looking at which red flags to look for before you sign a contract with a new employer.

B. _____ It's certainly worth using your networks, or social media sites such as LinkedIn to contact current employees. You don't need to openly ask if it's a bad place to work, you can keep your questions more general. Something like 'I'm thinking of taking a position at your company and I'd really appreciate your thoughts on working for them.' Ask about the working hours, the senior management and the company culture and see what their replies are like. It's generally not too difficult to tell if someone is wholeheartedly supportive of their employer or if they have reservations, even if they're not being upfront about them. You may well find a lot of euphemisms, such as 'challenging work environment' meaning 'stressful', or 'strong leadership' which might mean the line manager doesn't like taking advice, or have any interest in the welfare of the team. If you find people are openly hostile about the company, then this is certainly a bad sign. That said, do try to get more than one opinion..

C. _____ These days, there are several sites where you can find information about companies, such as what it is like to work there, what the hiring process is like and what questions were asked at the interview. Websites like Glassdoor provide reviews for jobs much like Yelp provides them for restaurants and other businesses. So, it's worth checking on there to see what is said. Keep in mind that they are largely anonymous and people are generally more likely to take the time to write them when they are angry and upset than when they have had a good, or reasonable experience. Still, multiple reviews saying the same things is noteworthy and could well be an indication that it is true.

D. _____ It's also a good idea to see what you can find out about the company generally on the Internet. If there have been any lawsuits filed against them, or legal trouble, there's likely to be evidence of it online if you look hard enough. If there's anything to suggest that they've been accused of discrimination or unfair practices, this is certainly a red flag. It's also possible that ex-employees have taken the company to court, the details of which may be in local papers or recorded in legal documents. If you can find any evidence of this, it's worth trying to find out more. Obviously, companies are sued for many reasons and it could be a frivolous suit by a disgruntled ex-employee, but it's still worth doing your due diligence and finding out what you can.