A FREE GUIDE FOR WOMEN IN TECH & LEADERSHIP

Interview **them** back.

What to notice, what to ask and what to say, so a company doesn't get to take **your time, your ambition and your evenings** for granted.

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WHY I MADE THIS

My career has been shaped by **being a mom** since day one.

I married my high school sweetheart, and we had our first child when we were 24. Before my first full-time job, I was running my own graphic design business while studying and raising him.

I started that job just before our son's third birthday. A week in, during our first lunch together, my boss (no kids) told me he couldn't imagine having children and then not showing up for work because they were sick. Work and career are important. Being seen as responsible is important.

I honestly didn't know how to react. I smiled, nodded and said something about how, yes, balancing everything can be hard.

In my second month, our son got the flu for the first time. My husband worked full-time. Our parents worked full-time, too. There was no one else to step in. Being there for him was my absolute priority, so I took sick leave to look after him.

From that moment on, my relationship with my boss, to put it mildly, went downhill. A year and a half later, I found another job, but not without a toll on my mental health and my family.

That's when I realised I needed to work remotely. Back then, finding a remote job was quite an achievement. I did it, and I went on to help build the first fully remote cloud team at a global pharma company.

But it wasn't the last time. Over the years I met hustle culture again and again: 11–12-hour days, Slack in the evenings and at weekends, burnout as the unspoken proof that you're a productive employee. At one company, I heard that **anyone with a family should think about whether they still want to work there.**

And here's the thing. Even when I already knew a job was burning me out, and that I was sacrificing what really matters, the hardest part about leaving was the risk of the next one. Will the culture be any better? Will they give me flexibility by default? Or will I, at 30, 35, 40 and beyond, have to explain myself every time I need to pick my kid up from school, or stay home because of a fever?

Today I'm on the other side of the table, too. As a leader, I've hired, grown and promoted women in my product teams, and I've been part of many hiring processes. I've seen a thing or two. Let's just say my bullshit detector is pretty sensitive by now ;)

This guide is that detector, written down: **the red flags to watch for, and the questions that lower the risk before you sign.**

If you're building your career while planning a family, or with small kids at home, and you feel you're not giving 100% anywhere: this is especially for you.

Pati

START HERE · 5 MINUTES

Your **5-minute** checklist

Short on time? Start here.

Before each conversation

- ☐ **Do your homework on the company.** Part 5 (p. 25) shows where to look, by country.
- ☐ **Pick 3–5 red flags that would hurt you most.** Watch for them in every conversation. Not all 14, you'd sound like a lawyer xD
- ☐ **Open Part 2 (p. 13), check who to ask what, and pick 2–3 questions.** Short on time? Ask the one at the top of each topic.
- ☐ **Write down 3 non-negotiables and 3 things you can flex on.** Do it before the offer arrives. Once there's a number on the table, emotions get in the way.

During

- ☐ **Ask for examples, not values.** "Tell me about the last time…" beats "How do you value…" every single time.
- ☐ **Ask the same question to different people.** The recruiter, the hiring manager, a future peer. If the stories don't match, that's your answer.
- ☐ **Watch how they react to the question itself.** Curiosity is a good sign. Getting annoyed at a fair question is not.
- ☐ **Get asked something too personal?** Part 3 (p. 21) has calm, ready-to-use answers.

After

- ☐ **Fill in your red flag score.** It takes two minutes, while it's still fresh.
- ☐ **Look for patterns, not one awkward moment.** Not every clumsy question is bias. But a pattern is a pattern.
- ☐ **Vague answer? Ask again, in writing.** Steal the follow-up email in Part 4 (p. 22).

Before you sign

- ☐ **Get it in writing, and meet a future peer.** Level, pay, scope, reporting line and working model. The questions are in Part 2: The offer (p. 20).
- ☐ **Compare the offer with what you heard.** Anything missing, or suddenly different?
- ☐ **Be honest with yourself:** what's still unknown, and can you live with it?

> ### You never owe them your private life
>
> You can find out everything you need about a role by asking about **the job**: hours, travel, office days, leave, flexibility. You don't have to explain family plans, health or caregiving to get clear answers.

START HERE · YOUR SCORE

Your **red flag** score

Fill this in after each round. Not every box needs a tick. The point is to see where you're still guessing.

What I noticed	No signal yet	Good sign	Not sure	Red flag
01 The process isn't defined	☐	☐	☐	☐
02 Your time treated as free	☐	☐	☐	☐
03 Proving what's on your CV	☐	☐	☐	☐
04 Rushed at the end	☐	☐	☐	☐
05 Questions about your private life	☐	☐	☐	☐
06 Money questions first	☐	☐	☐	☐
07 "Fit" with no criteria	☐	☐	☐	☐
08 Testing how much you'll take	☐	☐	☐	☐
09 A different job from everyone	☐	☐	☐	☐
10 Talking badly about people who left	☐	☐	☐	☐
11 Overwork as a feature	☐	☐	☐	☐
12 Selling a future	☐	☐	☐	☐
13 Your questions make them uneasy	☐	☐	☐	☐
14 Everyone who decides looks the same	☐	☐	☐	☐

> **The rule of three**
>
> One red flag = dig deeper. Two = ask someone else. Three = that's a pattern.
>
> **And a pattern is your answer.**

What's inside

Part 1 · Red flags to notice in the process · p. 5
Part 2 · Questions to ask · p. 13
Part 3 · Things you can say · p. 21
Part 4 · Make sense of what you heard · p. 22
Part 5 · Do your homework · p. 25

PART 1

Red flags in the **hiring process**

Part 1 is about what you notice: how the process is run, what they ask you, what they say, and how they react to your questions. You don't need to ask anything here. Just pay attention. The questions to ask are in Part 2.

1. **How the process is run** (flags 01–04)
2. **What they ask you** (flags 05–08)
3. **What they say** (flags 09–12)
4. **How they react to you** (flags 13–14)

How to read each red flag

What you notice: what you might see or hear in the process.

Why it's a red flag: what it can mean once you're in.

Green flag: what a good company does instead.

What to do: your next step, and where to find the words for it.

How the **process** is run

01 The process isn't defined

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- Nobody can tell you the stages, who you'll meet, or what each round assesses.
- New rounds appear along the way: "just one more conversation, with the CEO".
- Interviews get rescheduled at the last minute, interviewers show up unprepared, and you repeat the same conversation with five people.
- No feedback, or weeks of silence without an explanation.

WHY IT'S A RED FLAG

The recruitment process is often a company's best attempt at making a good impression. If this is how they operate when they're trying to attract you, imagine what happens when you're already an employee. Of course, things happen. One rescheduled meeting doesn't tell you much. What matters is whether it becomes a pattern.

GREEN FLAG

A clear process from the first call: stages, people, timeline, and updates when they said they'd come.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask the recruiter for the stages and the timeline, in writing (Part 2: The process, p. 14).

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02 Your time is treated as free

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- "Just a small take-home task, should take a weekend."
- The task is real work: a full strategy, a campaign or go-to-market plan, a roadmap for their product, a working feature.
- Round seven. Then two weeks of silence.

WHY IT'S A RED FLAG

If a company already treats your time as free while it's trying to win you over, guess how it will treat your evenings.

GREEN FLAG

A time-boxed (or paid) task, clearly linked to the job, with feedback afterwards.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask how long the task should take and how it will be assessed. If it's real work, offer a shorter version or a conversation instead.

03 You have to prove what's on your CV

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- For a senior role, you're quizzed on the basics: "So... do you know what a roadmap is?" or "what's a funnel?"
- You're asked to prove what's already on your CV: "Let me just double-check you really did that."
- Interviewers question your experience instead of building on it, or interrupt you while you explain.

WHY IT'S A RED FLAG

A tough interview is fine. A bar that's higher for you than for everyone else isn't. If you have to prove the basics in the interview, you'll probably keep proving them in every meeting after you join. Or the role is more junior than the title suggests.

GREEN FLAG

Questions that match the level of the role, and interviewers who build on your experience.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask whether this is the standard assessment for everyone at this level. Part 3 (p. 21) has a calm way to say it.

04 You're rushed at the end

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- "We need an answer by tomorrow."
- "Other candidates are waiting."
- Weeks of silence, then sudden pressure. Or the offer differs from what you heard: a different level, title or working model.

WHY IT'S A RED FLAG

Pressure at the decision point stops you from asking questions. And details that change in the offer rarely change back once you've signed.

GREEN FLAG

Reasonable time to decide, everything in writing, and details that match what you heard.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask for a few days and for everything in writing (Part 2: The offer, p. 20).

What they **ask you**

05 Questions about your private life

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- Do you have children? Are you planning a family, or a wedding?
- What does your husband do, and how flexible is his job?
- Do your grandparents live nearby and can they help with childcare?
- “How will you manage with little ones at home?” Asked “casually” counts, too.

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

This one might seem obvious, but apparently it still needs to be said. No one has the right to ask you about your children, your partner, your wedding plans, or whether you’re planning to get pregnant. In many places, using this in a hiring decision is illegal. That’s not just a red flag. It’s a massive red flag.

GREEN FLAG

They ask about the job’s real requirements (availability, travel, on-call), and nothing about your family.

→ WHAT TO DO

You never owe them your private life. Part 3 (p. 21) has calm ways to turn the question back.

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06 Money questions come before their range

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- “What are your expectations?” before they share anything.
- “And what do you earn now?”
- No range in the ad, just a “competitive salary”.

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

Without a clear range, the outcome depends on who negotiates hardest, and we know who usually gets called “difficult” for negotiating. In Poland, and in more and more places, asking about your current pay isn’t allowed (Part 5: Poland, p. 27).

GREEN FLAG

A range in the ad or in the first call, together with the level.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask for the approved range first. Part 3 (p. 21) has the words.

07 “Fit” questions with no criteria

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- “How would your team describe you? Would they say you’re easy to work with?”
- “We’ll see if there’s a fit.” “We’re looking for executive presence.”
- After a no: “Strong profile, they just weren’t sure about the energy.”

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

Vague criteria leave room for bias, including the unconscious kind. “Fit” too often means “like us”. Nobody will call you “too pushy” to your face. It shows up as “fit” and “energy” instead. I’ve been called “too pushy or difficult” more than once, for asking exactly the questions that made me good at my job.

GREEN FLAG

Observable behaviours and outcomes, the same for every candidate.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask what “fit” looks like in behaviours you could show them (Part 3, p. 21).

08 Questions that test how much you’ll take

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- “Are you okay with working outside office hours when needed?”
- “How do you handle pressure? We move really fast.”
- “Are you sure you can handle the pace here?”

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

When the questions are about your stamina, not your skills, they’re telling you what the job will demand.

GREEN FLAG

Questions about how you prioritise and say no, not about how much you can carry.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask them to walk you through a typical week (Part 2: Workload and balance, p. 16).

What they **say**

09 Everyone describes a different job

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- The recruiter, the manager and the team describe different roles.
- Each person adds another item to the wishlist for your role.
- “You’ll wear many hats.” “You’ll shape the role.”

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

You can’t succeed in a role if nobody agrees on what success means. You might be walking into a role with no clear direction and unrealistic expectations.

GREEN FLAG

Everyone describes roughly the same job, with the same priorities.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask everyone the same questions about scope and success, and compare (Part 2: The role: scope, success and resources, p. 14).

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10 They talk badly about people who left

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- They say with a smile that the person left and it’s for the best: “they were weak”, “not a culture fit”, “we’re glad she’s gone”.
- The manager describes the old team as incompetent, lazy or difficult.
- “Honestly, I had to do everything myself.”

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

How leaders talk about people who aren’t in the room can tell you a lot about how they might talk about you when you’re not there.

GREEN FLAG

They talk about people who left with respect, and own their part in what went wrong.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask why the role is open and how long people stay (Part 2: Why the role is open, p. 13).

11 Overwork sounds like a feature

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- “We’re like a family.” “We don’t really watch the clock.”
- “We know balance and flexibility matter, but right now we have momentum.”
- “Sometimes there are periods when we really have to push.” (Read: usually.)
- “The market is moving at a dizzying pace, and so is technology. We’re high-paced, too.”

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

Sometimes, what a company calls ownership is simply a lack of boundaries. And what it calls a high-performance culture is a system that relies on people constantly overextending themselves. If balance always waits for a better moment, it’s a promise with no date.

GREEN FLAG

Busy periods with a clear end, and real time off afterwards.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask about the last crunch and the last quiet period (Part 2: Workload and balance, p. 16).

12 They sell you a future that doesn’t exist yet

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- “We’re about to change everything.”
- “Things will get much better after the next funding round.”
- “You’ll have plenty of resources once we hire more people.”
- “The leadership team is finally aligned, and now everything will move forward.”

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

These things might be true. But you’re being hired into the organisation that exists today, not the one described in an optimistic presentation. Never evaluate a job solely on the promise of what it might become.

GREEN FLAG

Changes that already happened, with dates and owners.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask what has already changed and what is still a plan (Part 2: Plans vs. reality, p. 19).

How they **react** to you

13 Your questions make them uncomfortable

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- A frosty silence after a sharp question.
- Vague, polished answers that sound like the careers page.
- “That’s an unusual question.” Or they answer a different question.

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

Curiosity about your questions is a good sign. Defensiveness isn’t. If asking is a problem now, while they’re trying to win you over, it won’t get easier once you’re in.

GREEN FLAG

Curiosity, a real example, or “good question, let me find out”.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask once more, for a recent example. Or follow up in writing (the follow-up email, p. 23).

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14 Everyone who decides looks the same

WHAT YOU NOTICE

- Every decision-maker you meet is a man. The women you meet are there to coordinate, not to decide.
- An all-male panel, for a team described as “really diverse”.
- A lot about the women’s ERG, and nobody who owns a budget.

WHY IT’S A RED FLAG

Having women in the room isn’t the same as women being heard, or deciding. Representation is a start. Influence is the point.

GREEN FLAG

Women among the people who decide, in this process and above it.

→ WHAT TO DO

Ask about women’s influence (Part 2: Culture in practice, p. 19).

PART 2

Questions to **ask**

Here's what to ask, why it matters, and what a green and a red flag answer sound like. Short on time? Ask the one question at the top of each topic. The table shows who can usually answer best. Want these questions for the company you're talking to? BS Detector does that (p. 28).

Who	Best topics to ask about
Recruiter	Why the role is open · The process · Flexibility · Leave and care · Pay
Hiring manager	The role · Decision rights and trust · Growth · Plans vs. reality
Team	Decisions and disagreement · Workload and balance · Flexibility · Leave and care · Culture in practice
CEO or leadership	Decision rights and trust · Plans vs. reality · Pay · Culture in practice
Before you sign	The offer

Why the role is open

Best asked: Recruiter, hiring manager

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

Is this a new role or a replacement? What happened?

WHY ASK

High turnover doesn't automatically mean a toxic culture, but a pattern of people leaving combined with a lack of transparency deserves a closer look.

MORE QUESTIONS

- How long do people typically stay on the team, and what has turnover looked like over the past year?

GREEN FLAG

An honest story, including what the company could have done better.

RED FLAG

They beat around the bush, or simply don't know. Or "people move on, that's normal in tech". Or "it's a new role", but LinkedIn shows someone left it a few months ago.

The process

Best asked: Recruiter

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

What are the stages, who will I meet, and what does each one assess?

WHY ASK

A clear, fair process is the first sign of a company that knows what it's doing, and assesses everyone by the same standard.

MORE QUESTIONS

- How long should the task take, and how will it be assessed?
- How do you make sure every candidate is assessed against the same criteria?

GREEN FLAG

Stages, people and timeline in writing, a time-boxed task, and shared criteria.

RED FLAG

"We're still figuring out the process." Or they list the stages, but can't say what each one assesses. Or "we have a structured process", but nobody can say who makes the call.

The role: scope, success and resources

Best asked: Hiring manager (and ask everyone)

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

What would success look like after 3, 6 and 12 months?

WHY ASK

If a small, under-resourced team is expected to deliver an enormous amount of work, don't assume you'll somehow fix everything once you join.

MORE QUESTIONS

- How big is the team, and what budget and tools are already in place?

- What are the top two priorities, and what moves down the list?

GREEN FLAG

Concrete outcomes that everyone describes the same way, and resources that roughly match the ask.

RED FLAG

A list of activities instead of outcomes (“get to know the team, build relationships”). Or outcomes that would need a team three times the size. Or headcount “approved for next year” and a budget “being finalised”: everything you’d need is in the future tense.

Decision rights and trust

Best asked: Hiring manager, CEO

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

Which decisions would I own, and which need someone else’s approval?

WHY ASK

Accountability without authority is a recipe for frustration. You can be held responsible for outcomes without having the power to influence them. And research has a name for a pattern women know well: the glass cliff. Women are more likely to be offered leadership roles when things are already going badly, often without the resources to fix them.

MORE QUESTIONS

- How do you know the work is getting done when people work remotely?
- What happens after someone makes a mistake?

GREEN FLAG

Named decision rights, a real budget, someone senior who will back you through a hard change, and check-ins about results, not hours.

RED FLAG

“We’ll see, once you’ve proven your value and earned the CEO’s trust.” Or the CEO signs off on everything. Or “you own it, but run it by me first.” Or “we use a tool that shows who’s online.”

Decisions and disagreement

Best asked: Team, CEO

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

Tell me about a recent disagreement on the team and how it ended.

WHY ASK

You might be entering an organisation where decisions are driven by hierarchy and politics rather than clear ownership and sound reasoning.

MORE QUESTIONS

- When priorities clash, who has the final say?

GREEN FLAG

A recent story where someone (ideally not the most senior man in the room) disagreed and was heard.

RED FLAG

“We never disagree.” Or “the CEO decided”. Then ask one more: does the CEO usually decide things like this? Or “we’re very collaborative, we decide together”, which in practice means nobody decides.

Workload and balance

Best asked: Team

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

When did you last work late or at weekends, and why?

WHY ASK

Every company has busy periods. The question is whether “right now” ever ends.

MORE QUESTIONS

- What happens when someone says the workload is too much?
- When was the last quiet period?

GREEN FLAG

A crunch with a clear start and end, a cause, and what they changed afterwards.

RED FLAG

“Everyone here goes the extra mile.” Or “this is a high-paced environment, so there can be tougher periods.” Or “people just say so and we reprioritise”, but nobody can tell you what was actually dropped.

Flexibility in practice

Best asked: Recruiter, team

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

Who on the team works flexibly, and how has their career gone?

WHY ASK

Flexible hours and remote work are a must-have if a company doesn't want to discriminate against women and parents. But only if using them doesn't quietly kill your career.

MORE QUESTIONS

- What does flexibility look like in practice: hours, office days, time zones, travel, on-call?

GREEN FLAG

Policy and practice match, and people who work flexibly also get promoted.

RED FLAG

"We're super flexible!" with no specifics. Or "we have a hybrid policy", but the team is in the office every day anyway. Or they name someone, but she's "a special case" or "had to negotiate it".

Leave and care

Best asked: Recruiter, team

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

What does parental leave look like here in practice, for every parent?

WHY ASK

You can ask about policies without sharing your plans. Ask about what applies to everyone, not about you. And leave on paper means little if people come back to a smaller role.

MORE QUESTIONS

- What happens when someone's child is sick, or they need to leave early to look after someone?
- How did the last person who came back from parental leave get on?

GREEN FLAG

Leave in writing, used by people at every level (fathers too), and people who came back to the same or a bigger role.

RED FLAG

"We follow the legal minimum." Or "it's flexible, just let your manager know", with nothing in writing. Or nobody can name anyone who came back.

Growth and promotions

Best asked: Hiring manager, team

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

How did the last person who got promoted get there?

WHY ASK

If the criteria aren't written down, they'll be decided in a room you're not in. And work nobody sees is work nobody promotes.

MORE QUESTIONS

- Who usually takes notes, onboards new people and organises team stuff, and how does that count in reviews?
- How have women in this function progressed over the last few years?

GREEN FLAG

A career framework, a realistic timeline, recent examples including women and people who work flexibly, and glue work that counts.

RED FLAG

"When you're ready, you'll know." Or "promotions are on hold until we hit our numbers." Or a woman's name comes up immediately for the notes. With a smile.

Pay

Best asked: Recruiter, CEO

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

What's the approved range and level for this role?

WHY ASK

Opacity about money almost always works in the company's favour, not yours.

MORE QUESTIONS

- How is pay decided, and can people see the bands?

GREEN FLAG

A real range, a clear level, visible bands, and a pay review they can describe.

RED FLAG

"We'll talk about money later." Or a range that's "flexible for the right person". Or "salaries are confidential", or "we pay at market rate", without ever having compared pay across groups.

Plans vs. reality

Best asked: Hiring manager, CEO

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

What are the business goals for next year, and where does the business stand today?

WHY ASK

Compare the company's ambitions with where it stands today (see Part 5, p. 25). If your bonus or promotion depends on targets built on wishful thinking, they land on you.

MORE QUESTIONS

- What has already changed, and what is still a plan?

GREEN FLAG

Targets that match current results, changes that already happened, and an honest plan B.

RED FLAG

Everything is "about to" happen. Or a vision, not a plan: big words, no numbers. Or doubling revenue with nothing to back it up.

Culture in practice

Best asked: Team, CEO or leadership

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

How do people find out about important decisions, and when?

WHY ASK

Every company has values. The real question is whether they ever cost the company anything. What happens when someone says no, or when a woman wants a seat at the table, tells you more than any value on the wall.

MORE QUESTIONS

- What happens when someone sets a boundary, like not answering messages after hours?
- Who are the women in leadership here, and which decisions do they own?

GREEN FLAG

People hear about decisions before they're final, boundaries are respected, and women own real budgets and decisions.

RED FLAG

"We have all-hands meetings where we announce decisions, so we're all aligned." Or "nobody expects an answer at night", but everyone answers anyway. Or "we just hire the best person, gender doesn't matter here."

The offer

Best asked: Before you sign

IF YOU ASK ONLY ONE

Can you confirm level, pay, scope, reporting line and working model in writing?

WHY ASK

What's not in writing doesn't exist. And you can always ask for time.

MORE QUESTIONS

- Can I talk to a future peer before I decide?
- How much time do I have to decide?

GREEN FLAG

Everything in writing, a conversation with a future peer, and reasonable time to decide.

RED FLAG

"We discussed it on the call." Or "it's our standard contract, everyone signs it." Or "take your time", followed by a call every day.

PART 3

Things you **can say.**

You don't owe anyone an explanation. One short sentence, then a question back. Let them do the explaining. You're not responsible for making an uncomfortable moment comfortable for them.

"Do you have kids? Are you planning a family?"

> *"Is there something about the role's schedule or travel you're concerned about? Happy to talk about that."*

"How will you manage with little ones at home?"

> *"The same way everyone on your team manages their life outside work. How does the team usually handle that?"*

Any question that feels too personal

> *"Can I ask how that relates to the role?"*

"Why do you want to work flexibly?"

> *"Because that's how I do my best work. How do you measure results on this team?"*

"Are you sure you can handle the pace here?"

> *"What does the pace look like? Walk me through a typical week on the team."*

"How would your team describe working with you?"

> *"Clear and direct. I'd rather raise a risk early than late. How does the team handle disagreement?"*

"We're looking for a culture fit."

> *"What does a great fit look like here? What do your best people do differently?"*

You're quizzed on the basics

> *"Happy to. What would you like to understand about my experience? And how does this map to the day-to-day work?"*

"What are your salary expectations?" (before they share a range)

> *"I'd like to understand the approved range for this level first. What is it?"*

The scope keeps growing

> *"I'm hearing a lot of priorities. Which two matter most in the first six months, and what moves down the list?"*

You need more time to decide

> *"Thank you, I'm excited. I'd like a few days to review it. Can I come back to you by [day]?"*

PART 4

Make sense of **what you heard.**

You don’t need to score a company as “good” or “bad”. You need to know what you still don’t know, and which trade-offs you can live with.

Check	Ask yourself
Specific	Did they give a recent example, a clear policy or a real number?
Consistent	Did different people describe the same reality?
Owned	Is there a name behind the decision, the process, the follow-up?
Followed through	Did they do what they promised during the process?
In context	Does it make sense for this role, team, location and company stage?
Matters to me	Would this trade-off hurt something I really care about?

> **Repeated defensiveness, ridicule, pressure to share personal details, contradictory promises** are more worrying than one imperfect answer. You can pause, redirect, ask the recruiter to follow up, or decide this one isn’t for you.

A follow-up email you can steal

When an answer was vague, ask again, in writing.

> **Subject: A few questions before the next step**
>
> Hi [Name],
>
> Thank you for the conversation, I really enjoyed it and I'm interested in the role.
>
> Before the next step, I'd like to clarify a few things: [question 1], [question 2]. Could you share the relevant policy, or connect me with someone on the team who can tell me how it works in practice?
>
> Best,
>
> [Your name]

A message to someone who left

People who recently left are much more likely to tell you how it really is. On LinkedIn, find who held the role before, or who left the team in the last 6–18 months.

> Hi [Name],
>
> I'm in the hiring process for [role] at [company], and I saw you worked there. Would you be open to a 10-minute chat, or a few lines here, about what it's like day to day? I'll keep it confidential.
>
> Thank you either way,
>
> [Your name]

Your notes

What did I hear that made me more confident?

Which answer was vague, inconsistent or missing?

What do I still need to check before I decide?

Which risk matters most to me, and what would make it smaller?

PART 5

Do your **homework** before the first call

A proper check takes a few hours per company, and it can save you months. Start with the 15-minute screen that works everywhere, then go deeper depending on where the company is based.

Everywhere: the 15-minute screen

- **Who sat in this seat before?** On LinkedIn, search the job title with the “Past company” filter. Three people in two years is your answer to “is this a replacement?” Then send them a short message (p. 23).
- **How long do people stay?** Check the tenure of the team you’d join, and of its manager.
- **Has this job ad been posted before?** The same role popping up every few months is a revolving door.
- **Reviews from the last 12 months only** (Glassdoor, Indeed). Look for trends and repeated words, like burnout, micromanagement or “family”, not the average score. And check how the company replies to criticism.
- **News:** search “[company] layoffs”, “lawsuit”, “discrimination”, “restructuring”, “new CEO”.
- **Current employees’ posts:** are people proud of their team, or suddenly “open to work”?
- **The job ad itself:** three jobs in one, “fast-paced”, “wear many hats”, no pay range.

> **What you find online is a lead, not a verdict.** Anonymous reviews skew negative, and registers lag behind reality. Use what you find to pick your questions in Part 2.

US United States

Public companies have to show a lot. Startups and private companies, much less.

- **SEC EDGAR** (public companies, free): the annual 10-K, quarterly 10-Q and 8-K reports. Read "Risk Factors" and check revenue, profit and cash.

  RED FLAG Shrinking revenue, losses year after year, a "going concern" warning, 8-Ks about restructuring or executives leaving.

- **Earnings call transcripts** (on the Investor Relations page): how leadership talks about the business, and about people.

  RED FLAG Every quarter is about "efficiency" and "cost discipline".

- **Crunchbase** (startups): the last funding round, how much and when.

  RED FLAG Two-plus years since the last round and no clear revenue. Ask about runway.

- **WARN notices** (warntracker.com, warnscan.com): larger employers must announce mass layoffs 60 days ahead. Search by company name.

  RED FLAG Recent or repeated layoff notices, especially in the team you'd join.

- **layoffs.fyi:** layoffs in tech companies.

  RED FLAG Several rounds in a short time.

- **Blind:** anonymous reviews from tech employees, verified by work email.

  RED FLAG Threads about layoffs, toxic leaders, sudden return-to-office mandates.

- **InHerSight, Fairygodboss:** women rate parental leave, flexibility, pay and promotions.

  RED FLAG Low scores for maternity leave, flexible work or equal opportunities for women.

- **Levels.fyi:** real pay and levels in tech. In several states (incl. California, Colorado, New York, Washington, Illinois) job ads must include a pay range.

  RED FLAG No range in an ad where the law requires one.

- **EEOC press releases and news:** discrimination settlements are public.

  RED FLAG Settlements over pregnancy or sex discrimination.

UK UK & Europe

Company accounts are public almost everywhere in Europe. In the UK, so is the gender pay gap.

- **Companies House** (UK, free): annual accounts, filing history, directors.

  RED FLAG Late accounts, a "proposal to strike off" notice, frequent director changes, losses year after year.

- **UK gender pay gap service** (gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk): employers with 250+ staff publish their gender pay gap every year.

  RED FLAG A big gap, a growing gap, or no report when there should be one.

- **National business registers:** e.g. North Data (Germany and Europe), Pappers (France), KvK (Netherlands).

  RED FLAG Losses, late filings, insolvency proceedings.

- **EU Pay Transparency Directive:** by June 2026, EU countries had to give candidates the right to a pay range before the interview, and ban questions about pay history. Not every country has implemented it yet, so check locally.

  RED FLAG They ask about your current salary, or won't give you a range at all.

- **Glassdoor, Indeed, kununu**: employee reviews (kununu is the go-to site in Germany, Austria and Switzerland).

  RED FLAG The same complaints coming back over the last 12 months.

PL Poland

Financial statements are public and free, and pay transparency is already the law.

- **eKRS – Repozytorium Dokumentów Finansowych** (free): financial statements of sp. z o.o. and S.A. companies. Easier to browse on **rejestr.io**.

  RED FLAG Losses year after year, negative equity, statements not filed.

- **KRS:** management board and shareholders, and how often they change.

  RED FLAG A new board every year.

- **Krajowy Rejestr Zadłużonych (KRZ)**, free: restructuring and bankruptcy proceedings.

  RED FLAG Any open restructuring or bankruptcy proceeding.

- **Pay transparency, since 24 December 2025:** employers must tell candidates the starting pay or range (in the ad, before the interview, or at the latest before you sign), and can't ask about your current or previous pay.

  RED FLAG No range before the interview. And if they ask what you earn now, that's not just a red flag: it's against the law.

- **Listed companies (GPW):** annual and quarterly reports on the investor relations page.

  RED FLAG Losses, profit warnings, restructuring announcements.

- **GoWork.pl:** employee reviews (read with a pinch of salt).

  RED FLAG The same complaints repeating over the last year.

Don't have a few hours per company? Let BS Detector do it.

BS Detector is an AI skill for Claude and ChatGPT, made for women in tech. It checks a company's public record for you, with sources and dates, and turns it into red flags to watch and questions to ask. From $49. More on p. 28. **patismus.com/bs_detector**

BS DETECTOR

This guide is the map. **BS Detector walks it with you.**

This guide shows what to look for in any company. BS Detector does it for the one you're actually talking to. It's an AI skill for Claude and ChatGPT, built from the same experience as this guide. My bullshit detector is pretty sensitive by now ;)

WHAT IT DOES, STEP BY STEP

- **Before the first call:** a report on the company. Financial health, layoffs, leadership changes, turnover in the role, recent reviews, pay transparency, and what it's like for women there. Every finding with a source and a date.
- **Before each interview:** the red and green flags for this company, and the questions to ask at each stage, with what a red-flag answer sounds like. Plus messages you can send to people who recently left.
- **After each interview:** paste what you heard. It shows which answers were red flags, whether the stories match, what's still unanswered, and what to ask next.
- **When the offer arrives:** it checks the offer against what they promised, compares the pay, flags the clauses worth a second look, and drafts your negotiation email. Two offers? It puts them side by side.
- **If you say yes:** a first-90-days plan, with your own warning signs to watch.

FULL JOURNEY · $49

Everything, from the first call to your first 90 days: debriefs, offer check, comparison, 90-day plan.

FULL JOURNEY + 1:1 · $149

Everything in the Full Journey, plus one hour with me when you need it most: a decision, an interview debrief or your start in a new role. 5 spots a month.

One-time payment, 3 months of access, as many companies as you like. Public information only, always with sources. A lead, not a verdict.

Check your next company before you say yes. Get BS Detector.

Get the Full Journey, or add an hour with me. **patismus.com/bs_detector**

ONE LAST THING

It’s **never easy.**

Asking these questions can feel risky, especially when you really want the job.

But the price of asking now is much lower than the price of finding out six months in.

A good company likes good questions. And the people with strong values will respect you more for asking them.

Companies like that exist.

For balance, here’s what I look for in a company, and what I build as a leader:

> **Results, not hours.**
> **If I hired you, I trust you.**
> **Context, not control.**
> **“How can I help?”**

If a company can show you real examples of these, it’s a good sign. If it can’t, you’ve got your answer.

We’re not robots. **Choose a company that knows it.**

> **I stand with and mentor women in tech.**

Let’s stay in touch

I write about company culture, leadership and women in tech on LinkedIn. Come say hi: **Pati Smus** on LinkedIn and at **patismus.com**.

Prefer longer reads? I also write on Substack: **substack.com/@patismus**.

This guide is practical career guidance, not legal advice. Employment and anti-discrimination rules differ by country and region. If something in a hiring process concerns you legally, check with a qualified local adviser.