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Want a job at Amazon? Here's how to get one.



When it comes to getting hired at Amazon there's emphatic agreement on one thing: If you're going to interview with the company, you better familiarize yourself with its 14 leadership principles.

TOPHER ALEXANDER



By [Robert J. Terry](#) – Senior Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal
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Early in [Amazon.com](#) Inc.'s rise from upstart online bookseller to trillion-dollar corporate leviathan, founder Jeff Bezos sketched out his company's five core values. One read: "High bar for talent."

Bezos, as recounted by author Brad Stone in his book, "The Everything Store," would constantly focus on attracting and retaining people who fit the Amazon mold as the company grew and branched into new business lines. He borrowed recruiting practices from software giant and Seattle neighbor Microsoft Corp., for example.

That included appointing "bar raisers" who participate in every step of the interview process and have the power to veto a job candidate. The idea, Stone recounts, is that the bar raiser helps safeguard a consistent hiring standard and keeps the company from compromising those standards to fill a seat or falling prey to groupthink.

It's an approach that's idiosyncratic, perhaps, but then again so is Amazon's culture.

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"The process itself is really one of the more rigorous ones I've been through. And like the rest of the company it's a little bit peculiar," said a former Amazon executive, who was granted anonymity to speak candidly about the hiring process and company culture.

When it comes to getting hired at Amazon (NASDAQ: AMZN) – which revealed Tuesday [it's splitting its highly coveted second headquarters between New York City and Crystal City](#), with 25,000 jobs planned for the region – there's emphatic agreement on one thing: If you're going to interview with the company, you better familiarize yourself with [its 14 leadership principles](#). They cover everything from obsessive customer service to taking calculated risks to having conviction and tenacity, even if it means disagreeing with conventional or popular thinking. They drive the Amazon culture and are used as a test to see if a job candidate's demeanor and problem-solving skills will align with the company.

“If you haven't read and studied the leadership principles, I don't care who you are and where you've been, you won't get through the front door,” said Charley Polachi, partner with Boston-based Polachi Access Executive Search who's done senior-level recruiting for Amazon and other big tech names.

The hiring process can sometimes take as little as two weeks, [according to reports](#), from phone and video calls to skills tests (writing software code, for example) to the final step, a day of in-person interviews in Seattle. That last step can be intense, working through technical questions on a whiteboard and meeting with people one on one.

The process is more deliberate and slower for senior-level hires. And the interviews themselves can be a bit off-putting for some, according to the anonymous former exec, because of Amazon's method. It involves asking a series of behavioral questions that are designed to probe for how you handled a particular business situation, what you learned from it and how the experiences and behaviors sync with the 14 leadership principles.

The interviewer takes detailed notes, which for some acts as a barrier to forming a personal connection. The system sacrifices engagement in order to capture as much information as possible that can be shared and analyzed among a range of people, including the all-important bar raiser.

About that culture: It's not for professionals looking for a 35-hour-per-week gig. It's hard charging and intense, as illustrated in [the now infamous New York Times investigation from 2015](#) that detailed its bruising workplace culture.

Polachi thinks the company learned from that portrayal and has worked to soften its corporate atmosphere. Amazon didn't respond to a request for an interview. And those kinds of media portrayals don't seem to have deterred job seekers – Amazon supplanted Google this year as LinkedIn's [best place to work in the world](#) and is the second-largest private-sector employer in the U.S., with a payroll of 566,000 at the end of 2017.

Amazon's base salaries tend to be lower than competitors but compensation packages include bonuses and restricted stock units. Unlike many companies, however, most of the shares don't vest until the fourth year of employment, then Amazon awards another backloaded plan. Amazon stock [closed at more than \\$1,631 per share](#) Tuesday.

Also, [you need to know how to write](#); memos are used to communicate, not PowerPoint (hmmm ...).

The company expects to hire 400 people in Greater Washington next year and 1,180 the year after that, according to the memorandum of understanding it forged with Virginia officials, jobs that will pay an average salary of more than \$150,000. By 2034, the internet giant expects to create up to 37,850 positions paying \$187,535. Amazon hasn't yet provided an occupational profile for the Crystal City – [sorry, National Landing](#) – base of operations but analysts expect [a sizable contingent of tech positions](#), especially software development engineers, software development managers and solutions architects. [Here's a link](#) to its current openings in Greater Washington.

As with so many things, the hiring philosophy that Bezos has imbued throughout the company hues remarkably to the vision he sketched in his famous 1998 letter to shareholders. In it – back when the company employed 2,100 – he

detailed how he [asks Amazonians to answer three questions before making a hiring decision](#):

- Will you admire this person?
- Will this person raise the average level of effectiveness of the group they're entering?
- Along what dimension might this person be a superstar?

“Setting the bar high in our approach to hiring has been, and will continue to be, the single most important element of Amazon.com’s success,” Bezos wrote 20 years ago.