

Decision

POINT

By Amanda DeCook

Start your career path off on the right foot by carefully choosing your first job.

When deciding which offer to accept as my first job out of college, I recalled the advice given to me by my mentor — “Your first job may not be the defining moment in your career, but it is instrumental in your career path and success.” Those words weighed heavily on my decision to begin my supply management career at my current employer. My decision was made after three undergraduate internships — each at a different company in a different industry with different responsibilities. The hands-on experience I gained during the internships also factored into my post-collegiate employment choice. As my mentor also suggested, I used my internship experiences to gauge and identify what was important to me in my first career choice.

I knew that selecting the right company to begin my career was important, so I followed a detailed process to help me decide which job offer was the best opportunity for me, both professionally and personally. I started by listing five key criteria. They included:

- 1) Job/industry.** What will my responsibilities be? Will I have ownership over projects and deadlines? What industry will the role be in? Am I excited about that industry?
- 2) Training/long-term potential.** What is the employer’s training and education investment portfolio, both initially and long-term? Will the employer train me in the skills necessary to be successful? What are the long-term career development opportunities?
- 3) Company culture.** Will I fit in? Will I like working with my new colleagues on a daily basis? Do I share similar values with the company?
- 4) Location.** Is it an urban or remote location? How close is it to my family?
- 5) Salary.** Is the employment package competitive?

The list was based on my personal situation. Because everyone has his or her own unique situation, the criteria can and probably will change. The criteria for what is important in your first job choice may also be based on what stage you are at in the recruiting process. Other points that can be used in evaluating a prospective employer include work/life balance, green initiatives, corporate citizenship, financial health, global presence and so forth. The factors are endless, but limit the criteria to five for optimal impact.

Weighing the Options

The next step is to weigh each point based on its importance to you. This also will be different for each individual and may change over time. Following is the weight I gave to each criterion as well as my rationale behind each:

- **Job/industry, 40 percent.** After interning in several different industries, I had a good idea of what I liked and what I found exciting. The experiences taught me that it is important to be passionate about what you are doing. This was my first career step out of college, and I wanted to be sure that my job was rewarding because it would be the foundation for the rest of my career.
- **Training/long-term potential, 20 percent.** I knew this position would be the starting point for my career. I wanted to be certain that my employer valued and provided employee training. Additionally, I evaluated the long-term development opportunities at the company and the likelihood that it would enable me to achieve my career aspirations.
- **Culture, 15 percent.** It was important to me to have the feeling of belonging. I knew my coworkers would have an impact on whether I enjoyed my job, and I like to be happy at work.



- **Location, 15 percent.** Location, location, location — need I say more?
- **Salary, 10 percent.** Salary was by no means the deciding factor, but it was still a factor.

I created a weighted matrix based on my criteria and proceeded to score each prospective employer, as the chart below shows. Once the matrix was completed, the choice was clear. A.T. Kearney was the best option for me, scoring 47 out of 50 possible points; the runner-up came in with 33.5 points.

Justifying the Decision

The perfect score I gave A.T. Kearney in the job/industry category was based on my desire for a consulting rather than an industry position. Also, I believed my work assignments would be meaningful and challenging with a great deal of responsibility. The training/long-term potential category received a perfect score because of the training I would receive not only in my first month with the company, but also throughout my career there. One of my near-term goals is to attain my MBA; candidates with experience at A.T. Kearney are well-received by MBA programs — additional proof of the long-term value. Company culture received a high score, as well. Everyone I met during the interview process was extremely smart, and the collaborative work environment was apparent. Location received a score of four out of five. Ideally, I preferred to live near my family in Michigan; however, my assigned office in Chicago was only a train ride away. Finally, the company made a very competitive compensation offer. As a result, the company once again received a perfect score. Using this quantitative method to make a qualitative decision helped me keep everything in perspective, and ensured I considered all the criteria that truly mattered to me.

Another quality that weighed on my decision — although not listed on the matrix — was my prospective employer's support of undergraduate mentoring and career enrichment programs, such as the R. Gene Richter Scholarship Program, the largest nationally recognized scholarship program in the field of supply chain management. As I am a 2009 Richter Scholar, A.T. Kearney's continued involvement in the scholarships, which are awarded through Institute for Supply Management™'s Scholarship Fund and the R. Gene and Nancy D. Richter Foundation, made a lasting impression. It was an added bonus.

After more than a year on the job, I can still justify the "scores" I gave the company. I love living in Chicago. My team members are extremely smart and passionate about the work, and the company culture is very collaborative. The first weeks of training were packed with tools and applications I was unfamiliar with, but am beginning to master now. Additionally, I am involved in challenging, yet interesting and meaningful projects.

When facing the pivotal decision of where to start your post-undergraduate career, I recommend:

- Networking with mentors to gain their insights and advice
- Reflecting on what is truly important to you and what you want from your career
- Using a quantitative matrix similar to the chart below to help guide your decision.

Your first career step is an important one. Take the time to consider your options and carefully weigh what is important to you both now and into the future. **ISM**

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Weighted Matrix to Score Prospective Employers

| Criteria and Distribution | COMPANY (Scale of 1-5) | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| | Company X | | Company Y | | Company Z | | A.T. Kearney | |
| | Score | Weighted Score | Score | Weighted Score | Score | Weighted Score | Score | Weighted Score |
| Job/Industry (40%) | 3 | 12 | 4 | 16 | 4 | 16 | 5 | 20 |
| Training/Long-Term Potential (20%) | 4 | 8 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 10 |
| Culture (15%) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4.5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 6 |
| Location (15%) | 2 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1.5 | 4 | 6 |
| Salary (10%) | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 |
| Total Score | 14 | 29 | 17 | 33.5 | 15 | 32.5 | 23 | 47 |