

A Hi there, Eric, how's your son doing? He's going to graduate this year, isn't he?

B Yes, he's starting to look for his first job now. He wants to find a good job in a big company based in London or New York.

A Well, in that case don't you think he's likely to be making a mistake? Wouldn't it be better if he looked for a first job in a small company, where you have more chance of advancing quickly?

B I'm not so sure. A large company is large for a reason. Success breeds success, and working in that environment is a good way to start your career. You're entering a system that's been around a long time and that's well organised. You know what your job is, your promotion path is clear, and you can progress quickly.

A But in a big company you remain pretty anonymous. Unless you're working near the top of the organisation, the CEO will probably never hear about you. But in a small company, good work can be seen by everyone. You'll be able to stand out as you develop skills, and your actions are much more significant. At the beginning of your career especially, working for a small company is a great way to develop your skills, get references and build a reputation that can follow you for years.

B But the opposite is also true. If you make a big mistake, everybody knows, and you can damage your future career quite badly.

A Isn't that a rather negative viewpoint?

A young person with energy would find it difficult to work in a large company, where change happens very slowly. Even if your company is open to new ideas - and many are not - getting your department to budge, to innovate or develop a new product can take a very long time. You have to go through a lengthy process of getting approval, which involves written reports, meetings, and all that's time-consuming. In a small company you can go and knock on your boss's door, explain your ideas, problems and solutions, and get a rapid answer. Small companies can be highly reactive, and that's far more interesting for a keen young graduate.

B That may be so, but a big company can offer lots of different opportunities. They need a lot of people working in a wide variety of jobs. Even if your job is a specialised one, it's often possible to change positions and explore a new area without leaving the company.

A But in a small company, in a start-up for instance, you can develop new skills. If there's a small number of workers, everyone has to be in multi-tasking mode - you just have to join in with your co-workers to get the job done. And you'll know them all. That's just not possible in a company with several thousand workers. One drawback of being an anonymous worker is that some aspect of your job will at some point be affected by a person who doesn't know you and whom you've never met - it might be a promotion you're expecting, or even a serious problem. It may be difficult or impossible to speak directly to the person who determines where and how you work - the CEO or the head of the unit.

B There's another aspect that needs mentioning. Larger companies, in general, are much better about providing benefits like private health insurance, retirement plans, holiday allowances and so on. Most small companies can't afford to provide their employees with those kinds of perks, and you could wait a long time before the company becomes big enough to offer them.

A I don't think young people are too concerned about those things. The most important thing for them is the working atmosphere and a reasonable salary. A small company with minimal hierarchy, where everyone knows everyone else and has the same goal, is by far the healthier working environment.

B But remember that small companies often have no legal or human resources departments, which may be nice because it simplifies things, but it does mean that if there's a serious legal or human problem somewhere in the company, things can be difficult to resolve.

A Well, whether he chooses big or small, do let me know how he gets on.

Outline Is a young graduate better off choosing a big company or a small company to begin their career? Large companies are well organised, you know what your job is, your promotion path is clear, and you can progress quickly. It is often possible to change positions and explore a new area without leaving the company. In general, they are much better about providing benefits like private health insurance, retirement plans, holiday allowances and so on. In small companies, you can stand out as you develop skills, you can go and knock on your boss's door, explain your ideas, problems and solutions, and get a rapid answer. Small companies can be highly reactive, have a minimal hierarchy, and everyone knows everyone else, which is by far the healthier working environment.

Questions

1 What kind of work environment would you prefer for your career? 2 Is opportunity preferable to security in a job? 3 Is it possible to have a friendly and flexible working atmosphere in a big company? 4 What skills and qualities do you need to run a company?