

**Q** I'm part of a search team that is reviewing resumes for a librarian position. One of the candidates who applied seems to have the very job I have dreamed of. Would it be unethical to invite the candidate in for an interview so I can learn more about that job?

**A** I'm not sure whether it would be unethical, but it may be very unfair—both to your present employer and the candidate. To begin with, your employer has charged you with assisting in the selection of the best possible candidate for the position—not with finding your perfect job. As long as you're working in your current position, you shouldn't be short-changing your employer.

## Even if the applicant is one of the top choices, is it fair to the applicant to use the time during his or her interview to investigate your perfect job?

If this candidate isn't one of the top choices for the position, you shouldn't consider interviewing him or her. Even if the applicant is one of the top choices, is it fair to the applicant to use the time during his or her interview to investigate your perfect job? Welcome to the intersection of business ethics and serendipity. Librarians understand the latter concept and rely upon it to help uncover answers. You might have run across this job posted on a professional job list, online discussion list, Facebook, or another social media site—but you didn't. As librarians, we hold ourselves out as ethical role models. Can you perform the task you've been charged with and at the same time pursue your dream job?

I thought we could benefit from the advice of a human resources expert and consulted Dan Quillen, division manager of human resources with the city of Aurora, Colorado. Quillen has nearly 20 years of human resources experience, including 10 years as the director of human resources at one of the largest employment law litigation firms in Colorado. Following is Quillen's advice.

"Thanks for the opportunity to weigh in on this question, Susan. To the individual who asked this question, my initial reaction is that it would be unethical at worst and inappropriate at best for you to invite the applicant to interview just to learn about his or her current job.

"Those who interview candidates for positions within their company have an obligation to their employer to seek out and hire the best qualified candidate for the position. Sometimes that means subordinating our own personal wishes and desires. For example, if I were interviewing someone who was to be a peer, it would be unethical for me to hire the second- or third-most qualified candidate because the most qualified candidate(s) might provide stiffer competition for me in potential promotional opportunities at a later date.



"It is also patently unfair to the candidate. He or she has high hopes for this position and will prepare, worry, rehearse answers to potential questions, and get hopes up.

"If the candidate is not selected for an interview, or if they are interviewed but not the successful candidate, I think it would also be inappropriate to contact the candidate to learn more about his or her current job. It's just one of those things that, though you'd like to figure out a way to do it, simply isn't appropriate to do. (Then again, I get miffed at people who continue to drive in lanes that are ending in hopes of finding a slot well up the line of cars so they can slip in ahead of the rest of us who obediently stay in the continuing lane.)

"Bottom line, I think you need to treat this situation as though the person is any other candidate, make no effort to learn more about the candidate's current position, and certainly not use your influence to change the outcome of the decision because of this factor."

Thanks to Quillen for his very sound advice. To the person who asked this question, I would also caution you to ponder why this candidate is willing to leave what you consider to be a dream job. He or she may have logical reasons, but it may be possible you are seeing greener grass on the other side of the fence. Ask yourself why this job appeals to you. Is it the geographic location? Is it the title or responsibilities? Would it be possible to attempt to create those responsibilities within your current position? ■

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## For the candidate to learn—or even suspect—that he or she was invited to interview so you could learn about his or her current job would be a gross disservice to that person.

candidate's former job if they are hired by your employer. Since you are one of several individuals evaluating resumes, perhaps you merely go along with the recommendation of the other reviewers regarding this candidate. Even that scenario is less than desirable—your employer would be robbed of your insights about the candidate. But it may be the best alternative.

*Are you in a sticky situation with a colleague? Looking for ways to discuss advancement with your supervisor? Send your questions to columnist Susan Catterall at [scatterall@charlottelaw.edu](mailto:scatterall@charlottelaw.edu).*