Remaining Relevant

and employable in a changing world

Testers Edition

By

Rob Lambert
Remaining relevant and employable in a changing world

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This book is for sale at http://leanpub.com/remainingrelevant

This version was published on 2015-06-22

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My name is Rob Lambert.

I’m a veteran Test and Development Manager helping companies to create productive, happy, creative and awesome teams capable of delivering great software products.

I’m a serial blogger at www.thesocialtester.co.uk.

I’m an advocate for many important social causes, am obsessed with technology in society and have written a number of resources about testing, customer excellence and community building.

It’s my mission to inspire testers to achieve great things in their careers and to take control of their own learning and self development.

I am married with three wonderful sons and I live in historic Winchester, UK.

In my spare time I help people create knockout job applications and give them the tools needed to upskill, project themselves well and perform well in interviews.

You can find me on twitter: @rob_lambert

If you’d like help then visit http://thesocialtester.co.uk/remainingrelevant for more information.
Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beloved wife Dawn, who over the years has had to put up with my near obsession with blogging and writing about testing, as well as my frequent conference trips and late night community building activities.

This book is also dedicated to my amazing sons who provide me with a never ending supply of inspiration, humour and giggles.
Introduction

“I can’t find good testing jobs” said a tester to me at a large testing conference recently.

“I can’t find good testers” said a hiring manager to me at the very same testing conference.

So what’s the problem?

Is it because the hiring manager and candidate don’t know each other exist? Partly. Maybe conferences should have specific recruitment events, or tracks dedicated to connecting people?

Is it because the expectations of the hiring managers are too high, or weird, or abstract? Maybe.

Is it because the candidates aren’t good enough? In many cases yes but not always.

Or is it because many software testers just don’t know how to get themselves in front of hiring managers, show the best side of themselves and then get hired?

In my experience, this is the most common case.

The world of software testing is changing, and changing fast.

Getting a job (and keeping a job) in this fast changing world requires hard work and a commitment to remaining relevant to the needs of the company you work for, the demands of a changing technological world and the changing demands of testing.

Sometimes this commitment is a commitment too far for some people.

For others it’s a commitment they didn’t know they needed to make.
The market is swamped with certified testers creating a sea of conformity and standardisation.

In this sea how will you stand out?

- How will you get your next great job?
- How will you differentiate yourself from the next candidate?
- How will you add value to a growing number of businesses that want results, not best practices?

The Internet, improved communication channels, cheap global travel and the ability for people to relocate easily (or work from home) has meant that you’re no longer competing against people in your local area; you’re competing against people from all over the world.

It’s not all bad though.

I believe that there is a great number of testers capable of standing out from the crowd and filling the void that many hiring managers are talking about. Some already have the testing skills but lack the tools to communicate effectively, promote themselves and interview well. Others need to learn lots and commit to self improvement.

And that’s why I wrote this book.

I wrote this book for those testers who want to forge a career but feel stuck in a dead end job.

I wrote this book for those testers who don’t want the next standardised testing job where they are simply treated as a resource. They are wanting more.

I wrote this book for those testers who want to upskill but may lack the insights, structure and drive to do so.

I wrote this book for those great testers out there who aren’t projecting themselves well and creating compelling reasons to get hired.
I wrote this book with the hope that many hiring managers may also read it - after all they are often the ones creating the demand for standardised people.

But mostly I wrote this book to help testers, whether employed or not, remain relevant in a changing world by giving them the tools, approach and skills to wow hiring managers.

I sincerely hope this book will help to provide some enthusiasm, inspiration and ideas to help you remain relevant and employed in a fast changing world.

Stock CVs and Certifications

After sifting through hundreds of CVs and interviewing many candidates I realised a few things about recruiting testers.

Firstly, my interview process was being restricted by what I thought I needed to do. I was sticking to the conventions I’d seen in the mainstream industry and as such, I was bound by them. I needed to break this. I needed to make my own rules. I needed to interview in a way that was conducive to my thinking, my personality and the needs of the business.

Secondly, I needed to re-evaluate the types of testers I thought I needed. The industry norms had suggested I needed to recruit against the standards defined by the certification boards. This is wrong. Recruitment is a local and contextual challenge, as such it requires a different set of thinking. Reaching for standard people for standard roles is a sure fire way of creating a standard test team that is ineffective.

Thirdly, I was shocked by just how little effort many people put in to their job searching and applications. Many CVs were poorly created and irrelevant for the role I was recruiting for. Some CVs were a good fit but didn’t scream “Interview Me”. Some of those with impressive CVs would fail during the phone interview. Some of those who passed the phone interview would fail during the assessment or interview. Very few people “wowed” at all stages.

Fourthly, most of the CVs I have seen over the last 8 or 9 years have promoted the fact that the candidate has a certificate as a main selling point. I get the impression that the certification is the USP; the unique selling point. The candidates however, often neglect to mention anything else about why they are valuable, what they bring to a business and how they are controlling and
organising their career. It often feels to me like testers are relying on their certification to land them a job. This might work in some industries, but in my experience, the good testing jobs are the ones that need skills, aptitude, initiative, good communication skills and an attitude focused on learning - not just a certification.

This book isn’t about bashing the certification schemes. Far from it. This book is about providing you with proven techniques to remaining relevant in the job market. Techniques (and ideas) that no certification scheme teaches. Yet.
Interviewing

Good stuff. You’ve got an interview. Awesome news.

Now you need to rock the interview.

Success in an interview can be practiced. Trust me.

With a few core skills you can improve your interview technique ten fold and hopefully land a winning job.

It’s my belief that everyone can do well in an interview. Some people are naturally good in interviews, others need more practice.

There are some standard techniques you can learn. Outside of my testing work I’ve spent significant time coaching others on how to succeed in interviews.

There was a period in my life where I would attend many interviews seeking that right job. It paid off. I found the right job and learned a lot about interviewing.

My friends would joke that I enjoyed going for interviews. Truth be told; I did.

I’ve since set up a small out-of-hours business coaching people from all walks of life on how to succeed in interviews and job applications.

What follows are some of the lessons I’ve learned from interviewing, being interviewed and coaching others.

The purpose of an interview

To succeed in an interview you need to understand why interviews exist, what the goal of them is and what role you play in that process.
Interviews are about exchanging information, often with the intent of making a decision or clarifying details.

You will be making a decision about whether you like the people, the job and the environment. The interviewer will be making decisions about whether they like you, whether you have the skills and whether or not you’re a good fit for the role amongst many other things.

No matter what format an interview takes you need to understand that an interview is a two way process. It’s about the gathering and sharing of information, on both sides.

I’m personally not a fan of just voice based interviews as a significant amount of information is communicated by non-verbal communication. Face to face interviews are still the best way to get this subjective information.

You will likely have little control over whether you have a face to face or a phone interview so be sure you’re good at both.

**Practice**

The best way to succeed in an interview is to practice. Practice at home with your family, ask your friends to interview you, attend real interviews and read about how to succeed in interviews. By practicing your interview technique you will feel more confident in the real thing. When you don’t have to worry about the basics you can focus on creating WOW moments in the minds of those interviewing you.

**Research**

Find out as much as possible before the interview and go prepared. By spending some time researching before hand you’ll be more
Interviewing

comfortable in the interview. You’ll also earn brownie points by actually knowing something about the interviewer, the company and the role.

You’d be surprised how many people I’ve interviewed who didn’t even visit the company website to find out what we do. This is a fundamental mistake to make.

It’s a really poor impression to enter an interview having not even looked at what the company makes, builds or sells. Most of this information is available on the corporate website or blog, so read about it.

Find out who is interviewing you and connect with them on LinkedIn or other social channel. Find out more about them, their skills and background and what views they have on the job role or industry. This can give you loads of clues and topics to focus on.

Find out where the interview is and plan accordingly.

Find out how the interview will be run. Who you will meet and when. How have the interviewers split up the sessions of the interview?

You’ve got to hope

Although you may practice and practice and get good at interviews you’re still at the mercy of landing a bad interviewer. The best interviews are when both the interviewee and the interviewer are good at doing interviews.

All too often I have been for job interviews only to find I’m asked pre-defined questions like I’m taking part in a quantitative market research survey.

A good interviewer will make you feel welcome, remove barriers to communication, set out a good agenda, stick to the right time frames and ask good questions. They will typically do a combination of
structured, semi-structured and free form interview sections (i.e. some pre-defined questions, some re-active questioning to what you say and some open question time).

A bad interviewer will create an uncomfortable environment, typically ask you very structured questions from a checklist, not react to anything you say and leave no time for free form discussions.

Unfortunately you don’t get to decide who interviews you.

I once went for an interview at a small software house. The interview room was freezing cold, I wasn’t offered a drink, I wasn’t introduced to anyone, I had 5 people sitting in front of me (behind a massive table) and a further two people sat behind me making notes. It was really uncomfortable. I walked out.

The interview structure

In my experience interviews follow a pretty standard structure. There are obviously exceptions but most interviews will run with a similar structure to what follows.

There will be an introduction session where the interviewer welcomes you and explains the session. They will essentially set the scene and let you know how things will proceed.

They will typically summarise the reason for the interview by explaining the role, the reason why they are hiring and how the interview will work.

They will then kick start the agenda for the interview which may have multiple people interviewing you about different topics. For example you might get to meet one of the Directors of the company, someone from the technical teams and one of the line managers. You might also be interviewed by the HR team.

You may have to do a presentation, or a technical challenge.
The interview typically ends with a summary and the next step details.

Questions

All interviews revolve around some form of questioning. To become good at interviews it’s worth spending some time learning about the different types of questions so that you can spot them, respond appropriately to them and use these types of questions for yourself.

Closed (or Binary) questions

The interview (or parts of it) may be heavily structured with formal closed questions, typically used to clarify facts from your CV. These are often used to confirm facts about you and your experience. They are often yes / no style questions so be sure to be succinct in answering these.

An example is: “Did you manage a team of 10?”

Open questions

There will often be open questions which give you the chance to give a more thoughtful answer. An open question invites an answer that is more than yes or no. They are designed to let you give a lengthy answer.

Be sure to not go overboard though. Don’t keep talking after you’ve answered the question.

Informal discussions

There may also be an informal non-structured session where you chat loosely about the role and the company and of course, yourself.
These are often a series of many different types of questions. New questions are often created from the answers of other questions.

**Leading questions**

There will also be what’s called the Leading Question[41] which is aimed at teasing out the answer the interviewer is looking for such as “Will you be able to cope with managing 20 testers?”. The interviewer will know what answer they want - a resounding “yes”. You’ll have to provide it.

**Loaded questions**

The loaded question is where the interviewer is posing a controversial questions designed to dig out your views on a topic.

For example “All testers with certifications are better testers than those without. Wouldn’t you agree?”. This question posed to me is a loaded question. To others it might be a binary question.

**The paraphrase question**

You may encounter a paraphrase or mirrored question where the interviewer is clarifying something you have said. They may take a response of yours and repeat it back to you as a question. For example “So you agreed with my statement about X?”.

I use the paraphrase question a lot. I like it because it adds clarity to an answer and also helps to tease out inconsistencies in answers and thinking.

**Hypothetical questions**

There are hypothetical questions designs to see how you might deal with someone or some situation. I use these to tease out how people
think about situations they have never experienced before. It’s good to get them thinking about working in new environments.

The above are just a few types of questions you might get asked. Once you learn to spot these types of questions you can start to become expert at understanding more about your interviewer such as their motives, interview style and where they like to focus their attention.

Once you become aware of the types of questions you can then react and tailor your own responses to make the interview go more smoothly.

**Appearance matters**

It is true what they say - first impressions count.

The way you look and the way you carry yourself makes a big difference in the mind of others.

I don’t believe that you should always wear a formal smart outfit for an interview but you should dress appropriately. Make some effort and it will pay off. Turn up to an interview looking clean, tidy and well kept.

If in doubt about dress code then wear smart casual. Err on the side of smart. Even if you get the go ahead to dress casually I would still suggest you make an effort. Adopt smart casual rather than shorts and a t-shirt.

Stand tall. Standing tall will give you confidence and this confidence will come across in the interview. If you slouch normally then work extra hard on keeping your head held high and your back straight.

Smile lots, but not too much that you look creepy. A nice gentle smile on first meeting people can often make you feel relaxed, diffuses what is often a tense part of the interview and gives the impression that you are a happy and amiable individual.
First impressions really do count.

**Tell a joke**

I’ve always had this bizarre act of trying to make people laugh at the beginning on interviews and meetings. I do it still today and have done it in every interview I’ve been in. I like to start a interview (or meeting) with a smile and a giggle - I find it eases the tension.

I assumed I did it as a control mechanism for my nerves. Maybe I did. Curiously though some research[42] is now suggesting that humour in meetings and the work place is a very good thing. It creates bonds.

Whether the research leads to deep conclusions or not I still think it’s a great way to ease the tension in the interview. If you succeed in making everyone laugh I believe it helps to ensure the interview has a more informal tone.

Just be careful about what sort of joke you tell though. Not all jokes work on all people, and not all jokes cross cultural boundaries.

You also don’t want to come across as a joker where nothing is serious to you. As with most things, a good balance should be sought.

Try it and see. If it doesn’t suit your personality then stop that approach, if it makes you feel relaxed and confidence then explore using humour at more points in the interview.

**Time keeping**

Be on time. In fact, turn up 5 or 10 minutes early.

Turning up really early to the interview, like 30 minutes early, is a “no no” in my books.
If you’re really early then pitch up for a drink, a snooze or last minute rehearsals, but don’t rock up to the interview. You’ll most likely find that you’re sitting in the reception for ages which can increase your nerves. Best to sit it out in a more relaxed environment like your car, a local coffee shop or just outside.

Only turn up to the reception or office about 10 minutes early at most. Spend the waiting time composing yourself, thinking about making a great first impression and reading any literature there might be in the waiting area.

If there are people working reception or other candidates waiting then take this opportunity to have an informal chat with them. It will ease your nerves and get your vocal chords exercised.

Be sure to have the contacts (hiring manager or recruiters) phone numbers stored in your phone but also written down and kept with you.

If you are using a sat nav make sure you have printed directions as well. Sat Navs and phones are still at that stage where total reliance in important situations is not feasible (for me anyway). Batteries run out, signals are lost and things can just break.

**Eye contact**

On first meeting someone make good eye contact with them. Eye contact is important in forming a connection.

When you are speaking or listening during the interview maintain eye contact. Eye contact is an essential feedback mechanism. It shows the other person that you are engaged in the conversation.

Don’t stare though. Don’t make them feel uncomfortable. Sense when you’ve kept eye contact for too long. Look away briefly, blink or re-focus on their mouths for a short time before returning to regain eye contact.
Making eye contact is not an easy skill to master so spend some time experimenting and practicing before the interview. Do you make eye contact with friends and family? Or people working in shops? If not, try it.

**Take the right things with you**

Think ahead and make sure you take the right things with you.

- Make sure you have any medicine you require with you.
- Make sure you have a notebook and a pen.
- Take a few copies of the CV you submitted with you. Print them on decent paper.
- Take supporting material like designs, plans, doodles, sketches etc.
- Maybe take a tablet device with you to show examples or other supporting work.
- Do you need a portfolio of work like examples of UX boards or other physical material?
- Prepare some questions and be sure to take them with you.

**Turn your phone off**

Turn your phone off, or leave it on but explain why you need it.

It is rude to have a phone ringing in an interview, it’s even ruder to take a call or text or to fiddle around with the phone. Leave it off or silence it unless you have a reason for it to be on.

If you need it on for emergency reasons then explain this and place the phone out of sight, or in the middle of the table out of reach.
It may seem petty to talk about this but it’s not uncommon for people to subconsciously reach for their phone, even during an interview.

I once had an interview candidate take a phone call and chat through his plans for the evening with his friend during the interview. He was asked to leave.

**Banish dis-comfort**

If you are uncomfortable in the interview then say something.

You will not perform your best if you are uncomfortable. You’re entitled to be comfortable and most hiring managers will go out of their way to see the best of you, so don’t be afraid to ask.

If you need a drink then ask for it. If you feel hot or anxious feel free to ask for a quick break. If you need a toilet break then ask to be excused. We are all human.

If you feel you are wrong for the job at the start of the interview, or are not enjoying the questioning, then do something about it. Suggest that the interviewer change questioning, try to steer it down a different route or make your excuses and walk out. It’s not rude to ask to leave an interview. Why waste any more time?

I once went for an interview for what I thought was a testing role. It turned out I was going to be expected to cross-sell big vendor test tools to departments within its own organisation. The organisation was so large and so diverse that even test teams within it were using competitors’ tools; a side effect of massive acquisitions and mergers. It was not at all as described and not something I wanted to go near. I made it clear I was misled, made my excuses and walked.

I know someone who was interviewed in a tiny office with a window that would not close. This wouldn’t be so bad but it was blisteringly cold. When asked if they could move to another room
the interviewers said “no” and they started to get a little annoyed with the request. He walked.

An interview is a two way process and you are an adult. If you are not happy then make yourself heard. See if you can change what’s making you uncomfortable and if not then make a decision. It’s not always possible to walk. Only you will know what is right for you but stand up for your own views, thoughts and feelings.

**Ask questions**

You must ask questions during the interview.

Not asking questions shows a lack of interest or enthusiasm in the business, the hiring manager and the role.

Surely you have something you want to find out that’s not been covered already?

You may have a pre-defined “question” time or you may have a number of periods during the interview to ask questions. You may of course get no time at all to ask questions, this is especially true of very formal interviews where the interviewer is seeing the interview as a one way process. Believe me, this is very common.

I would advocate asking questions when you feel you need to. I typically ask lots of questions in response to the discussions that arise. I also have a big list of questions that I take with me to ask at the end.

I wouldn’t talk about salary, contract rates or other “package” information in the interview. If you are applying through a recruitment agency then leave all salary details to them, even if you get asked in the interview. There are a number of reasons I suggest this.

Firstly, the recruitment consultant may have advertised the role at a much higher salary than is actually being offered. This is very common. So if you talk about this high salary in the interview you
may discount yourself because you’re too expensive. You may also create a very awkward atmosphere as both you and the interviewer realise you may have been potentially wasting time.

Secondly, it can take time for the information you’ve gathered from the interview to sink in. On reflection of the interview you may realise you need to ask for more money, or would be willing to accept less because the opportunity would be amazing. Giving away your salary expectation before you digest new information may make it harder to re-adjust later.

Thirdly, unless you are a skilled negotiator you may find yourself out classed in any discussions about the package. You may find yourself accepting sub-par deals because you’ve been out negotiated. This may leave you feeling bitter about the experience which isn’t good for neither yourself or the company hiring you. I knew someone once who fell in to the same trap and ended up starting his job on a very sour note.

Fourthly, you’re using a recruitment consultant for a reason (if indeed you are using one). They should be well versed in negotiating the right deal for you. Be warned though, there are consultants who don’t appreciate the long term benefits of being honest and transparent. They will look at the short term and often take the best deal for themselves, which might not be the best deal for you.

Take notes

An interview can be a stressful environment so the chances of you remembering everything from the interview are slim. It’s therefore a good idea to take notes and jot down questions that pop in to your mind.

Notes will give you something to look back on and something to refer to both during and after the interview. Most interviewers will make notes so why shouldn’t you?
Be careful though not to make notes at the expense of listening and contributing. It’s rude to be writing everything down, but some amount of note taking is to be expected.

Write the note with enough detail that it will make sense to you still in 60 days time. This will ensure the note is accurate, clear and understandable in the future.

**Answer the questions well**

You will no doubt get asked lots of questions. Your success partly lies in your ability to answer these questions well.

Don’t answer open ended questions with one word answers. An open question is your chance to explain in more detail.

Don’t answer closed questions with a diatribe. Succinct yes or no answers are fine for binary questions.

Answer the question fully but as simply as possible. Don’t be afraid of leaving silence after you’ve answered. Don’t be tempted to keep talking if you’ve finished answering the question. Silence is a cue for the interviewer to respond. Don’t fill it with more ramblings.

Answer the question being asked. Far too many people wander for miles around the question often never answering the original question at all. Politicians are especially good at this. Politicians are infuriating to observe being questioned. Do you want the interviewer to feel the same way about you?

Answer the questions honestly. Sometimes you will have to shine a light on your negative attributes. This is fine, but be sure to understand how you can make something positive from this. For example, you may explain that your attention to detail doesn’t sit well with the laid back agile environment you’ve been working in. This is fine, but then explain that you’re working hard on addressing this by consciously extracting your thinking to a higher
level or showing more appreciation for the way other people work. Everyone has learning points, behaviours they need to change and weaknesses. Be honest about them, but be sure to articulate how that doesn’t detract from you as a candidate.

You will no doubt get asked about your strengths and weaknesses so work out what they are. You may be asked to talk about a time when X happened or you worked with a Y type of person. Practice your answers to these.

You may get asked about your achievements and things you’re most proud of. Make sure these tie in with your awesome CV. Make sure you’re consistent in your answers.

You may get asked off the wall questions like “What one word describes you?” or “What sort of flower would you be?”. Be prepared for these types of questions.

Work out what techniques you’ll use to stall whilst you think of answers to questions that truly stump you.

Work out how you will deal with the question you simply cannot answer. Sometimes “I simply cannot answer that question” is better than a made up answer you don’t believe in.

You may also get asked to demonstrate your skills or experience with no prior warning. If you’re honest about your skills and ability in your application, your CV and the interview then this shouldn’t be a problem. Be prepared for this to happen.

Try to avoid Jargon when answering questions. An ability to clearly explain something technical is a skill rarely seen in many people. Practice it and you’ll no doubt stand out from the crowd.

**Answer the person asking questions**

If there are multiple people in the interview then answer the person who asked the question. You can keep switching eye contact and
focus between the interviewers but ensure it’s clear whose question you are answering.

It’s not nice to ask a question and have the answer directed at someone else in the interview. I know of many people who have lost out on jobs with this reason cited in the feedback.

**Know what you wrote**

At all times be in total control of your message. You should know what you wrote on your CV, cover letters, blogs and other social presence.

Good interviewers will have done their research on you and will look to explore any inconsistencies.

I’ve interviewed people who didn’t have a copy of their CV with them and couldn’t remember a large amount of what they wrote. That’s because they made most of it up. Good interviewers will challenge you and see right through anything you’ve fabricated.

**Don’t be negative**

When answering questions be sure to remain positive. Try to avoid being negative about people or work. Hiring managers want to be wowed, not depressed.

Try techniques to focus on the positive aspect. Even the most dire experiences often have positive angles. Explore them and articulate positivity as often as possible.

**Smile and be polite**

Always try to smile and always be polite. Be cautious about bad mouthing where you work or have worked.
Be cautious about swearing or using slang. Some interviewers may not mind swearing, slang or bad mouthing, but some will. You’ll probably not know your interviewer’s preferences so be diplomatic, polite and keep smiling.

**Draw to explain**

If you feel more comfortable drawing out an idea to explain it then go for it (assuming you have the facilities to). When I have a candidate who uses visuals, or other techniques rather than verbal explanation I’m deeply impressed.

I’m impressed because it shows they are able to walk through their thinking and explain it in ways that aren’t typically associated with interviews. It shows courage to ask to draw, doodle or use other mediums. And isn’t that weird that we should feel embarrassed to ask to deviate from a verbal answer?

Showing how your mind works and how you get to a conclusion is as important (if not more important) than the actual conclusion.

**Get a tour**

I can’t stress this enough; GET A TOUR OF THE WORKPLACE!

It’s crucial. A tour of the work place reveals the real company, not the one the hiring manager told you about.

You’ll hopefully get to see the people, the equipment and hardware they use, the breakout/lunch/chill-out rooms, the whiteboards, the vibe, the buzz/hum of the office and the general look and feel.

Take the chance to speak to people.

Say “Hi”, ask questions and draw attention to things that interest you. Ask for someone to talk you through the business process and
ask about who does what. Ask to meet some people from other departments too.

The tour is a chance to really explore whether this company is where you want to be. I appreciate not everyone will have the luxury of choosing whether a work place is right for them, but if you do have that luxury use the tour to help make up your mind.

I once took a job after being interviewed in a special meeting room located off the main reception area. It was nice, clean, simple, elegant and tidy. I was impressed.

I then started working there. On my first day I went through the big double doors to the real workplace. There were ceiling tiles hanging off, ancient computers, contractors sat around on fat cat wages playing Solataire. There were holes in the floor, holes in the walls, holes in the ceiling. There were broken coffee machines, broken computers and broken lights. I didn’t even have a computer for the first two days. It took me a further two days just to get a login to the intranet. What a disaster. I left after just six days. Two days of which were spent trying to find someone to hand my notice in to. I learned a very valuable lesson from that job - always get a tour.

If they can’t or won’t do a tour think hard about whether this is the place for you - after all, what are they hiding?

The tour can give you insights, can help you relate to where you may be working and can help you to appreciate the context in which you will be expected to operate. Keep your eyes peeled for:

- Hardware and equipment.
- Proximity of employees to each other.
- Open office? Or cubicle based? Or bench desks etc? Which is your preference?
- Facilities such as drinks and food.
- People’s faces (happy, sad, stressed)
• Volume (is it deathly quiet or loud and boisterous?)
• Look and Feel (new, old, well kept, invested in?)
• Whiteboards, story cards, defects, monitors (are they showing mature product information, lot of bugs, problematic products, broken builds, information radiators)

I think most people will get a good or bad feel for a place immediately. It can be a real deal breaker.

Remember though that you’ve only seen a snapshot of a workplace. A snapshot at a time that might be stressful and focused on a near deadline. What you see might not be normal operating, but I suspect you’ll get a gut feel about the place that should inform your decision.

Close the interview like a pro

At the end of the interview, either before or after the tour, make sure you close the interview well.

Start by saying thank you. Then say something positive about the company, the role or the hiring manager; but only if you believe it. Then summarise the next step. Then smile and shake hands. Then leave.

By saying “thank you” you are showing that you appreciate the opportunity of the interview and the chance to meet to align expectations.

By saying something positive such as “I’ve really enjoyed meeting you and seeing how a vibrant, productive and high performing company operate”, you are communicating to the hiring manager that you are positive about the role. Don’t say this unless you mean it.

By summarising the next steps you’re clarifying what is happening next. You might say something like “I look forward to recruiter X
getting in touch with me after you give them the feedback”. You are ensuring you’re aligned with the hiring manager on what’s happening.

By smiling and shaking hands you are saying goodbye and communicating the close of the interview.

By leaving immediately you are signalling that you’re off home, or to work, or somewhere else. The hiring team may get together straight after the interview to gather feedback on you and make a decision. You make this hard if you hang around for a while after. I once had a candidate sit in the main building reception all day “watching” what it was like day to day in the building. It was creepy.

You want to try and avoid awkward conversations and avoid walking away not knowing what’s happening next in terms of the process. Be sure you leave knowing what is happening and that you ended the interview well.

Reflect

After an interview it’s a good idea to find somewhere quiet, get a drink and start jotting down your thoughts. This allows you to capture your feelings and thoughts in close proximity to the event. Things will be fresher in your mind.

Write down what you liked, what you didn’t like and any other thoughts about the people, the company, the office and the expected role.

These notes will form the basis of any decision you make about the job. The ideas you write down will also help form the basis of where to direct your future applications. You will learn what your preferences are and what types of environments you will most likely flourish in.
Speak to the recruitment consultant

Ensure you speak to the recruitment consultant as close to the end of the interview as you can. This will ensure the interview is fresh in your mind and you can have an honest conversation with them.

I would advocate doing the reflection first as it gives you time to sort out your own thinking before committing to anything or giving feedback that isn’t accurate.