

## How Trustworthy is Glassdoor.com?

JULY 12, 2016 BY CANDACE NICHOLSON

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Created in 2007, [Glassdoor](#) is a sleek, supposedly neutral service. It provides job leads, salary information, and testimonials about businesses that operate in this modern, global economy where transparency is king. But is it neutral? Is it transparent? Is it even helpful?

Few Americans live in a world where they work for just one or two companies until retirement. And the methods for searching for work have changed drastically in recent years. So when a website promises to make the job searching process easier for a potential employee, it almost sounds too good to be true.

**“The site may be the business casual equivalent of Yelp, and dubious in its transparency, but it can provide insight if you want to be prepared for the worst.”**

And for some, it is. “I take Glassdoor with a grain of salt. It can be great to learn in just what way a company is failing, but it seems far too easy for companies to write a review and give themselves 5 stars to raise their rating,” says former Human Resources Manager Carol Milam. It’s also a sad commentary on the power of those reviews when even dedicated [HR professionals](#) don’t respect them.

Glassdoor.com can help you catch a glimpse of what’s going on behind closed doors at a business, but companies aren’t helpless in addressing complaints or bad reviews. Like its not-so-corporate counterpart, Yelp, companies can respond to negative feedback directly, as well as request current employees go online to leave positive reviews to counter-balance any low ratings they’ve received. Some companies have even contacted Glassdoor.com to request something be done about their poorly maligned reputation. “I worked for a company that received a glut of bad reviews within a 2-week period,” shares a former employee of a media startup who prefers to remain anonymous. “Their response was to call someone up at Glassdoor.com, and see if there was anything they could do to have the negative reviews removed.”



[Glassdoor](#) has useful information, but some skepticism is warranted (image by Sage Ross [licence](#))

We don't know if Glassdoor.com allowed the startup to remove any critical remarks about their company, but the fact that the business in question saw nothing wrong with tampering with a purportedly tamper-proof system is hardly a vote of confidence for that system. And yet, applicants seeking an upper hand in salary negotiations or scuttlebutt on how tyrannical management may be, will still browse the reviews as soon as a recruiter calls them in for an interview.

Why? Because despite the fact that Glassdoor.com [doesn't verify](#) any of the information employees provide, job seekers will trust an anonymous current or former employee over an article declaring Company X as #6 on a [Best Companies To Work For](#) listing. The unemployed are well aware no company is perfect, and even if the reviews are exaggerated or damning, it's better to know what fresh hell to expect once they accept the company's offer. And Fortune magazine (or any corporate entity) isn't going to tell them that.

In a job market where even late Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 – 1964) are switching jobs an average of 11 times before their 47th birthday<sup>1</sup>, no one is using an unflattering company review to turn down a job offer. They're using it to gauge whether or not they can tolerate working there for the next 2 or 3 years before either quitting for something better or getting laid off and moving on to the next opportunity.

Glassdoor.com serves the job seeker in that they can scour the negative reviews to see if there's a running theme. If a company has 10 reviews with half of them receiving less than 3 stars, applicants can go through the remarks, and make note of the writing styles. If they seem distinct in voice and vocabulary, it's likely the feedback was written by different people. Then review the details again. Is there a repetitive complaint about micromanagement? Are there numerous mentions of poor benefits and few raises? Are all the positives mentioning perks like free snacks and a casual dress code, but the negatives involve supervisors yelling at subordinates as a deadline approaches?



Even with its limitations, Glassdoor.com can be a useful tool for job searchers.

The site may be the business casual equivalent of Yelp, and [dubious in its transparency](#), but it can provide insight if you want to be prepared for the worst. The American workforce no longer operates the way it did 40 years ago. Remaining hypervigilant about the pros and cons of what a company has to offer usually comes down to “My unemployment is running out so...” or “Well, it can’t be worse than the last job.” In an economy with heavy underemployment, Glassdoor.com has its place. It’s not the best site to provide what it advertises—credible feedback—but if you know what to look for, it can help prepare you to recognize what’s headed your way after you accept an offer.

I can attest that Glassdoor.com shouldn’t be a job seeker’s only source of company information. I worked for a company where a manager declared “we want people to write positive reviews because we want people to want to come work here.” I also know the same manager was the cause for most of the negative reviews on the site. Yet, for all its flaws, Glassdoor.com does offer information we wouldn’t otherwise have at our disposal.

Not everyone is in a position to speak with current and former employees for every company they apply to. Nor is everyone able to fearlessly give negative feedback on a company without the danger of retaliation. Approaching Glassdoor.com—which may or may not allow company’s to pay to have negative reviews removed—with a strategic mind can assist you in determining if you want to work for that business. And in a nation of chronic underemployment, a little information can go a long way.

<sup>1</sup> US Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Number of Jobs Held, Labor Market Activity, and Earnings Growth Among the Youngest Baby Boomers,” news release, July 25, 2012, [www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/nlsoy.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/nlsoy.pdf)



Candace Nicholson is a freelance writer, editor and blogger covering business, community and culture. When she’s not pitching magazines, editing creative genius or penning blog posts, she’s a regular contributor to LAFRA’s Widows, Orphans & Disabled Firemen’s Fund.

For more from Candace Nicholson you can visit her website [here](#).