

When it comes to his future in management and business, 22-year-old Paddy Spence has analyzed every possibility and says his career choices are clear. He knows he doesn't want to work in a fortress, and he's pretty sure that he won't fit in at an academy. The big question: Does he choose a club or a baseball team?

"I'm still turning it over in my mind. On one hand, I think I'd be happiest with the immediate opportunities on a baseball team," he reasons, "but then I can see the long-term advantages and rewards if I can be patient in a club."

Say what? Is this some sort of b-school slang, or has young Mr. Spence taken complete leave of his senses?

Neither. Spence, a recent Harvard graduate and aspiring businessman, works for Jeffrey Sonnenfeld at Emory University's Center for Leadership and Career Change in Atlanta. Sonnenfeld has done extensive research on corporate cultures, and he has found that most U.S. companies fit one of four distinct cultural patterns: the "fortress," the "academy," the "club" and the "baseball team." (See the sidebar on page 14 for a definition of each.)

Obviously, new graduates are much more likely to excel in a culture that suits their personalities and career goals. So Spence, in narrowing his druthers to a "club" or a "baseball team," is well on his way to what too few young grads achieve: a deliberate, informed early career choice.

"Every year, I see students wind up in the wrong jobs," says Gary Fredericksen, director of the career center at California State Polytechnic in Pomona. "In about every case, the students didn't really examine themselves and what they wanted in a job. They interviewed on campus, didn't examine the company that closely and took the first good job offer they got, mainly because it ended the job search."

Nothing can compare to the miserable feeling of a bad first job. Not only does your self-esteem take a beating, but "you have to start all over again," says Fredericksen. "And then you're forced to go through the examination process anyway. You might as well do that beforehand, and save yourself all the trouble."

Prof. Sonnenfeld, who was chairman of the M.B.A. placement committee at Harvard before arriving at Emory, fully agrees. "I've seen college students make major career decisions based on \$2,000 or \$3,000 extra a year," he says. "Amortize that over a year or more, and it's insignificant compared to your

happiness and the quality of your life."

How can you ensure that you and your future company are a perfect match? It boils down to a couple of key areas: Know yourself and know your company.

Getting to know you

Chances are good that your university placement office offers some basic self-assessment tools. California State Polytechnic-Pomona, for instance, uses a program that helps students determine the importance they place on various work-related values. Northwestern University's Kellogg Graduate School of Management stages a self-assessment workshop early on in its two-year M.B.A. program.

"It's extremely important that students evaluate themselves and then evaluate the corporate cultures and environments of the companies they're considering," says Roxanne Hori, Kellogg's assistant director of placement. "We think self-assessment is so important that one of the first things we encourage our M.B.A. students to do is take part in a self-assessment workshop [during the first month] of their first year, well before the job search

process begins."

Whether you have access to formal programs or not, you already have a wealth of valuable information and insight from which to draw, argues Sonnenfeld. He suggests that students should simply evaluate their lives in and out of school very carefully.

Study your tendencies, for example, even as far back as elementary school and high school. "Look back at what you did, how you spent your time," he says. "How did you feel about certain jobs and certain activities? Did you look forward to some or avoid others? That can help you understand what environments and corporate cultures suit you best."

Let's say you most enjoy individual sports such as tennis, golf or skiing, pursue solitary hobbies like chess or photography, thrive on independent studies or lab work, and prefer jobs where you have freedom, independence and are paid in direct proportion to your performance. Sonnenfeld says your personality may be best suited for entrepreneurial companies that he characterizes as baseball teams, where you have little security but are rewarded by what you produce. At such companies,

Fitting the Company Culture

By Greg Thompson