How To Be Successful on the Job

Congratulations! You have secured your next step—whether that be an internship, a professionally related part time job or a fulltime offer. But your work is not done now that the interviewing phase is over—you still need to prove that you are a good fit for the employer. There are some key things you can be doing in the first few weeks of your new position that will help you transition successfully into your new role and also help you stand out in positive ways. As a new professional, you will need to observe your new environment, assess your role(s) within the organization and your position, and then act upon any changes you think are necessary so that you have a noticeable impact.

This guide is designed to help you navigate through those first few weeks and months. It will also help you create a strong foundation for continued career success.

That First Week:
We have all been in new and unfamiliar situations where it is normal to feel both nervous and excited at the same time. The goal is to make a good first impression. During the interview process you may have only met and interacted with a few of the staff. Now you are working with a larger team and everyone is wondering how the new person will fit in. While you might want to make an immediate impact and prove yourself, often times that can be disastrous. It is OK to take your time and get a better sense of the organization before heading full steam into a project you aren’t equipped to handle. It is important to set realistic goals for what you will be able to accomplish in the short term.

Take time in those first few days to get a better understanding of how things work, not only on a procedural level but also on an organizational level. Look for ways to apply your strengths and also ways for you to learn new skills. Get to know your colleagues as well. Look for ways to engage with them. Don’t expect to have the same type of relationships with everyone—as with your college relationships, you will connect better with some people than others. But the key is to be open to getting to know everyone.

Observe the Culture:
- Attire—what is everyone else wearing? Know what the office standard is in terms of the dress either by reading the employee manual or simply observing the appropriate staff. Sometimes there is a difference in dress code depending on the department you work in or the activity that is being done (i.e. in the office vs. on a sales call). In the first couple of days it is better to dress up until you know what is appropriate.
- Decision Making—How are decisions made? Do they come from the top down or are they made by committee? Are you expected to go to your boss with every question or just the big ones?
- Communication—How does communication happen? Meetings, emails, stopping by a co-worker’s cubicle? How formal or informal is the communication? Observing external vs. internal communication is important as you navigate how to handle different relationships.
- Time and Effort—What are typical employee work hours? How late do people stay? Do people; work from home or on the weekends? Put in the appropriate amount of time, but also remember that the quality and efficiency in which you do your work is just as important.
Transition Tools:
Each employer will have a different approach to welcoming new staff. There may be a formal orientation process or program. During this time, you learn more about the organization, the culture and how things work. There may also be an employee handbook that explains policies and procedures.

Other employers may take a very informal approach to training new staff. They might take you on a tour, show you the necessary things and that will be it. It will be important that you are proactive in this situation—ask questions. If you are uncomfortable asking your manager or immediate supervisor, identify other staff that will be resources for you. There might be CBA or Pitt alumni who are also working there. They would be good to seek out first.

Be sure to ask an employer about their training and transitions programs during the interview process.

Professional Mentors:
To own your career today it is important to actively build your network and create an expanding circle of mentors. However, to have a mentoring relationship, you need to be proactive about it.

- Watch out for formally assigned mentors they can be similar to forced friendships
- The business world is very dynamic so don’t limit yourself to one mentor
- Your first mentor can be your boss from an internship or full-time position, someone who will advertise your abilities and potential
- Your mentor doesn’t need to be the CEO, anyone a few years more senior than you can be an excellent resource
- Have your mentor make you accountable and follow up with your career goals
- Mentors are donating their time to you, show your gratitude with an e-mail or thank you note

Finding a mentor can be a formal or informal process. Some companies have a formal mentor program where you are matched with someone. This person is able to help you succeed in your position by supporting your career goals and also helping you get accustomed to the position. If your employer does not have a formal mentor program, establish a mentoring relationship with someone who can help you while you are learning about your new job and career. This person should be someone you trust, someone who knows the organization and industry and someone who is willing to spend time to help you succeed.

Workplace Relationships:
You will more than likely be spending more time with your work colleagues that with your family and friends. All that time together will result in forming bonds and friendships. You may find you are relating in different ways to various staff. Depending on the culture and structure of the organization, you may find that the environment shapes the type of relationship based on title and position within the organization. In larger employers, vice presidents and higher level managers may have limited friendships with other staff whereas in smaller employers, staff may be more informal with each other. Regardless of the type of environment, it is always better to act professional with everyone.
• Your Boss-having a good relationship with your boss from the beginning is a very important part of being successful in the workplace. Simply stated: treat your boss like you would a client:
  o Do what it takes to make them look good
  o Make sure he or she is satisfied with your performance
  o Establish clear expectations with your boss from the very beginning to ensure you are on the right track and you are both on the same page
  o Be open to advice and feedback
  o Try to handle problems on your own and get your boss involved only when necessary. Always have solutions in mind if you bring the problem to his or her attention.
  o Think like your boss. Try to anticipate how he or she will react to a situation and what your boss might say so that you can approach situations similarly.

• Peers-you have to get along with your co-workers to be successful on the job. Keep these things in mind when you are establishing peer relationships:
  o Everyone from those on your team to the receptionist should be appreciated for what they contribute to the employer. Good manners go a long way-remember to say “Good morning,” “please,” and “thank you.”
  o Build strategic relationships outside your department. Get to know everyone as they will be able to help you down the line.
  o Help others on their projects. Besides further developing your skills and giving you exposure to other departments and staff, it will make you feel good and have dividends later. You can then ask for the return favor when you have a project that needs input from other staff.
  o Gain respect, not popularity, from your peers by doing your work, respecting others and their jobs; not bragging, or stepping on others to get ahead.

Differentiating Yourself:
Especially in larger organizations, there will be many other employees who will be holding the same position as you. While it is important to work well with all of your co-workers, it is also important that you stand out among these co-workers. After all, not everyone will be obtaining promotions and special leadership roles at once. Follow these tips to ensure that you differentiate yourself enough to be the first to accept a new role.

Get to know the culture of your company
  • Schedule meetings with your team to find out how they accomplish their tasks and how the company reacts to new ideas. You want to find out information such as whether or not the company embraces or avoids change.

Determine who the key stakeholders are
  • You should know who is affected by your decisions. Know the key people you will be reporting to, and work to develop relationships with them. Understand their concerns and their desired end results.

Find a buddy
  • It is important to get a buddy that has a similar role as you and has been working for the organization longer than you. That way, this person can introduce you to key employees and other stakeholders. Additionally, they can inform you of the office politics. Finally, they can help you with minutia tasks such as setting up your voicemail and ordering supplies.
Meet with your manager to discuss your career
- Talk to your manager about your career aspirations. This will show him or her that you are committed to growing professionally in the organization, and that you will be looking to advance. Make a physical document to help plan out your career path, and ask your manager for advice.

Make a 90-day plan
- Specify in a document what you hope to accomplish in the first three months on the job. It should include items such as tasks you hope to complete and people you hope to get to know. Share this plan with your manager because he or she may have some input as to what critical tasks you should accomplish in your first 90 days. Be flexible with this plan, so that you can more easily adapt to change.

Take on different tasks
- Take advantage of opportunities to work with different teams and on something that is outside your normal role or tasks. You will gain better understanding of the organization while getting to know new colleagues. This will also allow for you to contribute your skills in a different way and develop new ones. This should only be done if you are comfortable with your current workload and are meeting the expectations of your supervisor. Let them know you are a looking for a way to enhance your experience—they may have some suggestions on how to find other opportunities.

Teamwork:
Chances are you will likely be working in teams for the majority of your professional, adult life. To be successful, it is imperative that you develop strong teamwork skills, so that you can thrive in the workplace. Some teams will be easier to work with than others, so here are some tips to keep in mind.

12 Cs of Successful Teamwork

It is important to realize the value of working in a team. It is also important to understand that those teams will probably be made up of people who are completely different from you—in the way they communicate, the views they hold on getting the work done and also in levels of motivation. Often work that needs to get done doesn’t because of team members not being able to get past these differences.

1. Clear Expectations – Have your supervisors communicated their expectations regarding your team’s tasks? Does your team understand these expectations and how to accomplish them? Are your supervisors and the organization supporting you to accomplish these tasks?

2. Context – Does your team understand why a team will accomplish the expected goals? Does your team understand how its actions and achievements fit in with the organization as a whole?

3. Commitment – Do team members want to participate? Do they understand the mission, and are they committed to meeting the goals set? Does your team feel excited and challenged?

4. Competence – Does the team feel they have the necessary knowledge and resources to complete their tasks? Do they have help and support?

5. Charter – Have responsibilities been designated to a team member? Has the team specified its goals, strategies, desired outcomes and timeline? Does the team’s supervisor support these topics?

6. Control – Does the team feel empowered to take ownership of their project? Is everyone’s level of both accountability and authority understood by all teammates?
7. **Collaboration** – Does the team understand the overall process of the project? Are there team norms and rules for conflict resolution, decision making, and meetings? Are responsibilities assigned and understood?

8. **Communication** – Is the organization supporting your team with regular updates and information? Is there a method for giving and receiving constructive feedback? Does everyone bring diverse opinions, and is everyone honest with each other?

9. **Creative Innovation** – Is the organization supporting change as well as new, appropriately risky ideas? Does it stimulate new thinking? How does it reward new ideas?

10. **Consequences** – Is there a system of rewards and recognition in place? Is there a method in place for conflict resolution? Does the organization recognize individual and team performance?

11. **Coordination** – Is there a central leadership team to organize the team and gather their resources? Does the team maintain a customer and process-focused mentality?

12. **Cultural Change** – Does the team treat failures as learning experiences? Do they support moderate risk? Is the team prepared to adapt to change?

**Etiquette:**
As a professional you are expected to understand the culture of an organization. This includes professional etiquette, which can have a long lasting impact on your career growth. The basics of professional etiquette stand on ethics and a display of courteous behavior.

**Basic Etiquette Tips**

**Conversation Etiquette**
- Listen attentively and do not interrupt others, also be aware of your nonverbal communication
- Keep conversations short and to the point, remember this is a business setting
- Maintain strong eye contact and always be polite regardless of how others are speaking to you
- Profanity has no place in a work setting. Do not assume others are comfortable with it.

**Handshake Etiquette**
- Offer a firm handshake, but avoid the bone crushing shake
- Limit the time to 2-3 seconds and maintain eye contact throughout

**Dressing Etiquette**
- Wear clothes which you are comfortable in and can carry well, that still abide by the dress code
- Business Casual is considered nice pants and a dress shirt or polo for men and nice pants or a skirt and a sweater or blouse for women. Some organizations require ties for men.
- Professional Dress is always a suit for men and women.
- Visual body art and piercings are not appropriate in a professional work setting. Take care to cover or conceal these.
- Remember: It is always better to be overdressed than underdressed

**Electronic Communication Etiquette**
- Always use proper grammar when communicating online; a professional e-mail isn’t the same as a Facebook wall post
- Address the individual by title unless you are told otherwise
- Remember to include a subject so it is easy to see what the e-mail is regarding
Leadership:
Being a leader goes beyond being a group leader. In other words, you can be a leader in your new job without actually being a manager of other people. In fact, many new college graduates will be obtaining entry level positions where they are not in charge of other employees at all; however, employers are still looking for these graduates to stand out as leaders. To be successful as a leader in an entry level position, consider these tips:

Master time management
- Unlike school, many of your tasks that you need to accomplish will most likely have to be done during the work day. In other words, you won’t have as much homework, nor will you be able to pull all-nighters to finish up a project. That said it is imperative that you manage your time to complete your assigned tasks by the due dates. While it may seem trivial, entry level employees can stand out as leaders when they are known for always accomplishing their tasks by the due dates.

Learn to thrive under pressure
- One of the greatest challenges of an entry level position is learning to handle the pressure from your managers and co-workers to maintain high levels of productivity. It is easy to feel overwhelmed in this type of high pressure work environment, so be sure to manage your time wisely as mentioned earlier, and ask questions if you are confused. Most importantly, keep to your word. Employers will see you as a leader if they can give you tasks knowing that you will accomplish exactly what you promise to do.

Ask for extra work
- If you find yourself with extra time at the end of the day because you were able to manage your time well and complete your assigned tasks, then it is a great idea to ask your supervisor for extra work. This will show him or her that you not only can beat deadlines, but you also want extra responsibilities. Your supervisor will see you as a dependable, conscientious employee, and when it comes to finding a group leader for an upcoming project, he or she are more likely to consider you because of your hard work.

Value your experienced co-workers
- Many new employees are entering fields where their co-workers will be much older and more experienced than them. This age gap can cause conflict because the more experienced employees may not consider the new employees as credible or capable of leading a group. To stand out as a leader among this staff dynamic, make a sincere effort to get to know the experienced employees. They know much more about the company than you, and they can assist you in adjusting to the workplace and getting used to your new job. In return, your efforts will allow them to see you as a credible employee capable of leading them in the future.

Human Resources:
Your human resources office is more than just the department that handles hiring. They are charged with the overall responsibility for implementing strategies and policies relating to the management of individuals connected to the employer. Common areas under the HR prevue are the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, compensation and benefits, employment termination, sexual or racial discrimination and sexual harassment.

Dealing with Sexual Harassment
According to the Equal Rights Advocate, sexual harassment is defined as: unwelcome verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is severe or pervasive and affects working conditions or creates
a hostile work environment. Most commonly, harassment occurs when an employer or colleague creates an uncomfortable and hostile working environment for another employee that often involves sexual demands or overtones that include suggestive comments.

While this guide does not replace any specific policy set by your employer, it can serve as a general guide for dealing with sexual harassment. Your employer should have some type of procedure for dealing with this issue. It is best to consult with your HR rep or supervisor if you find yourself in a situation where you are being harassed and learn your employer specific guidelines.

In general, here are some tips for dealing with Sexual Harassment:

- Tell the harasser to stop the offensive behavior. Ignoring the problem usually doesn’t discourage the harasser.
- Document all incidents of harassment.
- Notify your supervisor or other appropriate persons of the harassment.
- Know your employer’s policy on sexual harassment and follow its procedures.
- Consider filing a formal grievance or complaint if the preceding steps do not remedy the situation.
- Stay on the job.
- Find support from family, friends, or other groups to help you through the situation. Your employer may have an employee assistance program in place. This is a good resource to utilize to help you get through the situation.

Probationary Period and Performance Reviews

Most employers will have a probationary period for all new hires. This is an opportunity for both you and the employer to make sure this is a good fit. At the end of the probationary period, a review of your performance and ability to meet job expectations should occur.

Periodic reviews, whether a formal protocol or an informal meeting, can help you adjust to your position by setting and keeping you on a successful course. If reviews are not formally planned by your employer, talk with your supervisor about setting up a regular meeting to review your progress and address any concerns either of you may have with your performance.

No one is without areas of improvement. If development areas have been identified in your work, seek advice on how to address them. Feedback on your work is an opportunity to gain information on how to become a better employee. It is important to stay positive and to not turn it into a personal attack on your supervisor or other members of the organization. If you don’t agree with any of the statements included in your review, you should have the opportunity to attach a written response that addresses the areas you don’t agree with. It is important to keep the tone professional and factual-free from emotional and personal attacks.

You should always consult with your HR office on how to handle performance review rebuttals.

Sources:
http://humanresources.about.com/od/involvementteams/a/twelve_tip_team.htm

Career Directions: The Path To Your Ideal Career, Fifth Edition, Yena