

Success on the First Job

Tips for Handling Your First Job

Be punctual. Arrive at work on time and leave work on time and preferably a little later. Come back from lunch on time.

Find out from your supervisor exactly what he/she expects you to do. Be sure you understand assignments and deadlines. If you feel overwhelmed with work, set priorities with your boss.

Become acquainted with your co-workers. Seek out other co-workers. Don't wait for them to come to you.

Be prepared for some hostility from co-workers. Some employees may see you as a threat. Perhaps they envy your youth! You may not encounter any negative reactions, but it is best to be aware they can occur. Best approach -- do your job well. Be friendly and cooperative. Most people can be "won-over" in time.

Be willing to do some menial tasks. Even the most interesting jobs have some unexciting aspects. As you prove yourself with the menial tasks, you will have fewer of them to contend with.

Get the job done--and done on time. If that means some overtime, do it. Establish an early reputation as a hard worker.

Keep the lines of communication open--to supervisor, co-workers and subordinates. Feel free to ask questions, ask for feedback, discuss problems, etc. Learn the system used within the organization--telephone, memos, etc. If there are memos, who gets copies? Always return telephone calls within 24 hours. Also, be aware that practically nothing remains confidential within an organization...watch what you say and to whom you say it.

Avoid extremes--dress, mannerisms, and even friendliness. Extremes "turn-off" some people.

Learn the organization's formal and informal structure, policies, products, etc. Know who counts--who runs the organization.

Develop an understanding of corporate politics. Doing a good job is not enough. Avoid the rap of becoming totally immersed in your job and not being aware of what is going on around you. Let the right people know the good job you are doing. Spend some non-working hours with peers, subordinates, and supervisor.

Learn to delegate responsibility. Your success as a student was largely the result of individual effort. In the work world, it is teamwork that counts. You need to make the transition from individual to group effort.

Solicit feedback on your performance. Try to arrange informal chats now and then.

Accept criticism without becoming defensive. Especially at performance evaluation time you will be given negative feedback. Be sure you understand exactly what your supervisor is saying. If it is unclear, ask for examples of that kind of behavior. Express a willingness to improve.

Don't undervalue subordinates, especially secretaries. Remember, a manager is judged by how he/she develops subordinates. It is not too early to begin that now if someone reports to you. Don't look down on someone with less education, status, etc. That person may be a vital part of the informal power structure and may have access to inside information.

Sources: **College to Career** - John Shingleton/Robert Bao; "You're on the Job...Now What?" - James Wickender; College Placement Coun

Suggested reading: **Men and Women of the Corporation** - Rosabeth Joss Kanter; **Games Mother Never Taught You** - Betty Lehan Harragan

Problems in transition from college to your first job

Expectations Gap	College	Work World
Environment	Free - Responsible only to yourself. You can cut class whenever you want or come late, sleep in late if you don't have a class. Although there are deadlines for papers, projects, etc., there is always an "easy" professor who will accept your excuse for lateness	Restrictive - Controlled, you have regularly scheduled hours determining when you get up five days a week. There are penalties for lateness or unauthorized absences. Even how you spend your time is monitored. Deadlines are strictly adhered to.
Knowledge	Know Everything - You feel you have the latest, most up-to-date knowledge possible. Perhaps you are well known on campus or in certain circles. Your peers look up to you. Faculty respects you.	Know Nothing - You know next to nothing about this organization and the people you are working with. Your theoretical knowledge may not even be applicable to the job. No one knows you or respects you (yet). You are at the bottom of the heap.
Relationships	Independent - You write your own papers and take your own tests. Your grade depends on the quality of the work <u>you</u> do. If you do not like another student, you ignore that person. If you do not like a professor, you can limit your interaction with that person. He or she is one of a number of "bosses" you have. Actually you have had more than one at a time since 7th grade. So the odds are that you have always had some "bosses" that you liked at any one given time.	Interdependent - You no longer work alone. You are part of a team. What you do affects others. What they do or don't do affects you and how your performance is rated. If you do not like a co-worker or your boss, you cannot limit your interactions with them. You have to find a way to work with them despite how you feel about them. You will only have one boss with whom the relationship is crucial to your advancement within the organization.
Promotion	Automatic based on Performance - You have been promoted from grade to grade for the last 16 years. You have to be a pretty poor student not to pass and advance. Performance at a minimal level is required.	Difficult to Achieve - Promotion is never automatic. It is not based solely on performance, but marginal performance is certainly not going to lead to advancement.
Feedback	Frequent and Positive - Frequent feedback in terms of grades is built into the system. You get positive as well as negative feedback.	Less Frequent and Negative - Formal feedback in the form of performance evaluations will come once or twice a year. Intermediate feedback tends to be negative. Positive feedback is hard to get.
Problem Solving	Right vs. Wrong - All problem solutions are generally right or wrong.	More Complex - Real-life decisions are more complex. Answers are not necessarily right or wrong.
Value	Anti-Materialistic - Education world values humanism and knowledge for knowledge sake.	Materialistic - Profit is the goal in business. Even non-profit organizations have to concern themselves with money. Theoretical knowledge is not valued for its own sake. It is not the kind of person you are but what you produce that counts.
Challenge	You Control Challenge - You can be challenged as much as you want to be. You can use your abilities to the fullest.	Limited Control over Challenge - You may not always be challenged as much as you like, especially in the beginning or at any point when you have been working at one job for a long time.
Responsibility	Some Depending on Parents and University - You are not totally independent unless you are paying for your education and living expenses and are not receiving financial aid of any type.	Independent - You are now self-supporting. You discover that an entry-level salary does not go quite as far as you hoped it would. You now experience all the hassles of life in the world outside academe. Many more decisions to make.

41 Action Ideas for Advancement

1. Seek additional responsibilities.
2. Complete assignments immediately.
3. Make suggestions instead of critical reviews.
4. Solve problems instead of just identifying.
5. Praise others for good work.
6. Develop new skills through training.
7. Seek assignments that offer exposure to managers.
8. Search for the reason behind each assignment.
9. Look at problems from a management viewpoint.
10. Do not underestimate your social responsibilities.
11. Nurture personal friendships in your peer group.
12. Ask for certain work assignments.
13. Study the normal promotional channels.
14. Develop your personal life outside the organization.
15. Make professional contacts outside the organization.
16. Seek line, not staff, responsibilities.
17. Be patient for rewards but go after challenges.
18. Beware of "assistant to" titles. Watch go-fers.
19. Avoid internal politics and cliques.
20. Show your enthusiasm for the organization.
21. Discuss ideas, never people.
22. Advertise your abilities by superior performances.
23. Keep records of your work to show later.
24. Work on your public speaking skills.
25. Talk to subordinates as friends. They make you.
26. Never allow pressures to compromise quality.
27. Maintain personal and organizational ethics.
28. Make a written appraisal each year for your review.
29. Ask your superiors for advice about your career.
30. No negative criticism does not equal positive praise.
31. Rate your supervisor's promotional possibilities.
32. Get help if an assignment is over your head.
33. Accept criticism and ask for it. Use it to improve.
34. Never argue.
35. Rethink your plans if the pressure bothers you.
36. Be prepared to relocate if promotion merits it.
37. Maintain organizational loyalty and advertise it.
38. Learn to delegate authority.
39. Accept blame for poor work of subordinates.
40. Expect two to three year plateaus in promotion.
41. Watch for earning ceilings.