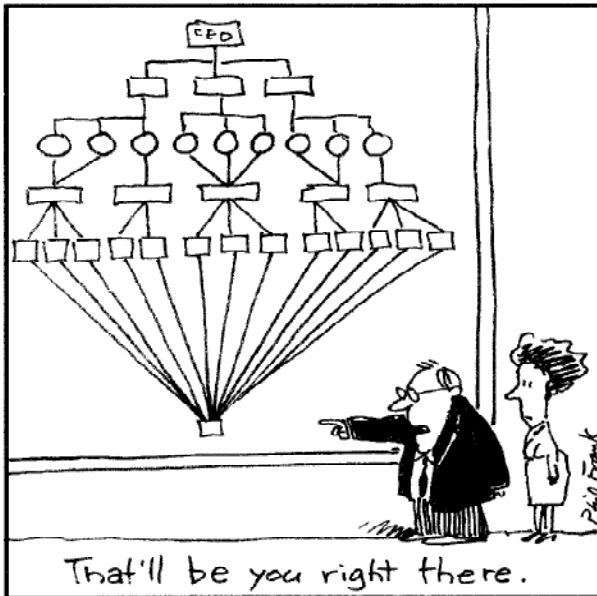


# My First Job Survival Guide



## Adapted from

- Doerger, Frank G. (1997), "Welcome to the Real Working World: What Every Employee Must Know to Succeed," General Publishing Group
- "First Job Survival Guide," Microsoft Corporation 2000
- Gatz, Jean (2000), "What you need to succeed in the workplace," National Association of Colleges and Employers: Bethlehem, PA
- Holton, Ed (Spring 2000), "Managing the Transition to Work," Journal of Career Planning and Employment, National Association of Colleges and Employers: Bethlehem, PA



# 12 Steps to First Year Success

## 1. Adopt the right attitudes

**Humility:** Graduation from college can leave you with a false sense of importance and capability. Be proud of your accomplishments and have confidence, but realize it's not the end of your learning experience. Be a good "rookie."

**Readiness to learn:** It's not as important what you know, but if you are willing to learn more! Take your training seriously. Ask questions. Study when things are slow.

**Readiness to change:** Be flexible, adaptive and open-minded. Leave preconceived notions behind. It's not going to be "what they told me it would be"!

**Respect:** Things happen for a reason in your organization. Understand WHY before you criticize. Realize you will not gain respect until you give it to your boss and co-workers.

**Long term perspective:** You are conditioned for 15-week timelines. Remember your employer views your development over many years. Understand that while you may not do exciting work for a while, the first year is really time to lay foundations for the future.

**Work ethic:** Professional life can be a lot more demanding than college. Show up early, stay late, volunteer, work extra hard at learning. Go the "extra mile," and do whatever is asked of you.

**Positive attitude:** No complaining. Period.

## Most Common Mistakes Made by New Employees

Misunderstood corporate culture	17 %
Didn't ask enough questions	16 %
Lacked integrity	6 %
Didn't follow the rules	6 %
Lacked attention to detail	5 %
Made job-related errors	5 %
Communicated poorly	4 %
Misinterpreted the job description	4 %
Other	14 %

Source: Diversity: Career Opportunities and Insights, Fall 2000

## 2. Adjust your expectations

Be realistic. The recruiter painted a rosy picture, but in reality your job won't be nearly as important, glamorous, or high level. "Student thinking," or the expectations your college experience has shaped, include:

- Work is boring.
- This is just grunt work.
- They don't want my new ideas.
- Nobody will tell me how things work around here.

These are normal first-year feelings. Accept and move on.

## 3. Master breaking-in skills

You're a rookie. Basic rookie rules include:

- You are an outsider until you prove otherwise: Not everyone will accept you right away. Be patient.
- You can't change the system until you're part of it: Don't criticize and don't expect your new ideas to be accepted yet.
- Avoid "big splash" strategies: Don't try to make big contributions and dream up great ideas for change yet. It won't make the good impression you think it will.
- Admit what you don't know. Keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut.
- Earn acceptance by fitting in, not challenging the system.
- Build a track record: Look for opportunities to be successful.

#### 4. Manage impressions you make

The first challenge in making a good impression is having the professional maturity to take time to figure out what the organization wants. Pay attention to the little things you do. Avoid anything that reminds people of college-student behavior (e.g. complaining, wearing crazy ties). Be very conservative.

#### 5. Build effective relationships

Putting in long hours on a project may be partially smart as a new worker, but the only way you will learn how to become successful in an organization is from people. Learn from others all the unwritten ways to get things done. Take the time to develop relationships with as many people as possible, including support staff.

- **Understand the nature of working relationships.** You don't have to be friends on a personal level.
- **Develop good communication and relationship skills.** Understand your own style, respect other styles, learn to manage conflict and negotiate differences.
- **Learn to work in teams.** College is largely a solitary pursuit; work is not. Learn to share your success, involve others, become less competitive and possessive about your ideas and be open.
- **Network, network, network!** Who you know is as important as what you know. Take advantage of social functions, meetings, seminars and events outside your organization, such as professional group meetings.
- **Find a mentor, coach, or sponsor.** If a structured program is available, take advantage of it or seek out older, respected and more experienced employees to learn from. Listen carefully to their advice.

#### 6. Become a good follower

There is no more important person than your boss on your first job, to get you opportunities to showcase your talents, get you the training you need, shape the organization's opinion of you, determine your advancement and socialize you to the organization's culture. Give top priority to this relationship.

You have likely never been taught how to be an effective subordinate, but employers don't want to see your leadership skills in the beginning. They want to see your "followership" skills:



#### **Keys** to being a good subordinate

- Never surprise or embarrass your boss
- Respect your boss' authority
- Keep your boss informed
- Offer solutions, not problems
- Accept criticism and feedback
- Do what is asked and do it well
- Ask for help (but not too much)
- Make your boss look good
- Do more than you're asked to do
- Help your boss manage time
- Keep disagreements behind closed doors
- Don't waste resources
- Motivate yourself instead of waiting to be motivated
- Work with, not against, your boss
- Make yourself indispensable

## 7. Understand the organization's culture

"Around here we..." Every company has a unique personality which defines "how" you do "what" you were hired to do. Basically, organizations want employees to "fit" and embrace their culture enthusiastically. You aren't allowed to deviate from the culture until you are accepted and have a proven track record. Pay attention to critical elements of culture such as:

- Mission of the organization
- Behavioral expectations (e.g. what time does everyone arrive, what do people wear, etc.)
- What gets rewarded
- Communication norms
- Attitude of employees
- "Sacred" beliefs and events

## 8. Develop organizational savvy

Learn how an organization really functions. "Politics" is not a dirty word; it's the way things get done when people work together -- the process of sharing resources and power and influencing others. As a new employee, don't get involved in politics! Instead accept the realities you will face: Things aren't always fair, logical, fun or welcoming to change and newcomers; people aren't always nice, helpful or motivated. Accept and adjust and you can be happy and successful. Also, master the way to get results. Don't get lost in the "official" procedures. There is always a "back door" for getting information and getting work to flow more quickly. Watch people and ask questions.

## 9. Understand your new-hire role

No one likes being "the new guy" but everyone's been there. There is an important transition period in which you should understand, accept and act like being new. The quicker you do this, the quicker you can leave it behind. You may have to pay your dues doing "grunt" work, but don't take it personally. Try to see the organization's big picture -- while your first job is extremely important to you, the organization's needs go on. The best way to score points? Do the "new kid" role with a smile and to the best of your ability. Figure out what the organization wants you to do and do it.

## 10. Develop work savvy

Work savvy is the nuts and bolts: Develop professional skills including time management; writing; setting and meeting deadlines; making oral presentations; setting priorities and motivating yourself.

## 11. Master the tasks in your job

Make the most of training and assume training is conducted in a particular way for a reason.

## 12. Acquire knowledge, skills and abilities

Employers expect you will need ongoing development. Take advantage of training and help. Don't be embarrassed -- you have responsibility for your learning, and no one will force you to do so. Use your performance review as a guide and develop a plan with your manager.



### What Every Employee Needs to Know

- Tend to your workplace reputation: Arrive on time, return phone calls and emails, stay organized, follow through on commitments, and be a team player.
- Blow your own horn -- selectively and subtly. Demonstrate and document value-added.
- Learn the jargon spoken in your business and use it with co-workers. Avoid using it outside your profession.
- Assume that your email is not private and is monitored by your employer.
- Keep your personal life in order.
- Start saving money for a rainy day on the first day of your new job.
- Have a plan ready in case you lose your job.