

Successfully Navigating a New Work Environment

By Accountemps

You're about to start a new job. The butterflies in your stomach are there for two reasons: You're excited about the opportunity but also worried about making mistakes during those critical first few weeks when you want nothing more than to make a great impression.

As the new employee in the office, your actions will be closely evaluated, at least over the short term. Your boss wants to verify that you can do your job well, and your new colleagues need to assess whether they can collaborate with and rely on you. Meeting expectations and adapting promptly to the work environment will be easier if you take time to note the nuances and unwritten rules within the organization. Here are some tips for Day One and beyond:

Clarify expectations

Meet with your direct supervisor within the first few days to discuss your responsibilities, immediate priorities and how your position fits into the company as a whole. The firm may offer a formal orientation or onboarding process, but it's important also to seek out your manager and schedule some one-to-one time. Find out how your performance will be evaluated and request a little informal feedback several weeks into the new role to make sure you're on the right track.

Be an observer

You can learn quite a lot about the everyday routine at your workplace just by "people-watching." Note the time your colleagues typically arrive at and leave the office, when most people choose to take lunch or breaks, and which coworkers regularly telecommute.

Determine preferred communication styles, as this can make all the difference in forming positive, productive relationships with team members. For example, are most conversations generally held in person or are emails or instant messages more the norm?

Additionally, pay close attention to how meetings are conducted. Are they structured or informal? Are participants expected to simply absorb information from the meeting leader or encouraged to be vocal? And what kind of "tech etiquette" is observed during meetings (e.g., do attendees use laptops, PDAs or other mobile devices while the meeting is in session)?

Make contacts

Following the initial meet-and-greet process in which you're briefly introduced to key personnel, quickly learn and commit to memory the names and roles of your coworkers. Pay particular attention to people you expect you'll need to rely on heavily or collaborate with frequently. Reach out to project leaders and other key influencers, as well, and seek out potential mentors who can share their secrets of success.

Participate

While you may spend the first few days or weeks on the job just "taking it all in," don't wait too long to start contributing beyond your everyday responsibilities. Of course, you should hold off on proposing drastic changes until you've proven yourself and built rapport with your coworkers, but do offer insightful observations and new ideas when appropriate.

Lastly, don't be afraid to ask questions. If you don't understand or know how to do something, your orientation period is the time to speak up before a minor issue becomes a major problem that could derail your progress. Taking the initiative to get the answers you need quickly so you can be more productive is one of the best ways to make a positive impression with your new employer – and earn the trust and respect of your colleagues.

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