

Seven Tips for Success on Day One of a New Job

By Kelly Eggers

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The first day at a new job is fraught with questions. Will it look bad if I can't remember everyone's name? When can I ask for my first assignment? Can I bring lunch from home?

While the specific answers vary between workplaces, career coaches and recruiters say that there are a few basic guidelines that apply to most people as they transition into a new role.

On Day One, make sure you demonstrate three fundamentals: Preparedness, enthusiasm and interest in your new position.

Things may not be perfectly lined up when you first arrive at the office. Requests for a new computer or an email account may not be completed, and some of your day might be spent at your desk biding time between meetings or onboarding sessions.

Stay positive through some of those inevitable ups and downs, and don't display your frustration. Instead, focus on observing your new surroundings and getting to know your colleagues and the company culture. Pay attention to the details, but don't let them preoccupy you.

Here are seven must-dos on that all-important first day.

Get to Know the Workplace

"At the end of your first day, you should know the primary logistics, like access codes, office hours, appropriate attire, the breakroom location, parking, and other day-to-day basics," says Kathy Downs, a recruiting manager for staffing firm Robert Half FA. "Get to know the lay of the land," says Lisa Quast, president of Career Woman, a Seattle-based career development consultancy. "Go exploring with someone from the department and have them walk you around the entire building or campus to train you on where departments are located, the restrooms, cafeteria, human resources, finance, legal, operations, sales, marketing, et cetera," she says.

It is also wise to start paying attention to the comings and goings of people around you, Downs says. What time do people get to the office? How late do they stay? Do they bring lunch or go out? Do they eat at their desks or at a table together? "Stay until the very end of the day when the majority of employees in the department go home," Quast says. "Better yet, stay late and get to know the employees working late—this is where you'll learn the really good stuff."

While being eager and enthusiastic are good things, being overeager can be as much of a career killer as showing no interest whatsoever. "Learn the company culture," says Bettina Seidman, a career adviser with New York-based Seidbet Associates, including "social practices, advancement practices, where and when to make recommendations and suggestions." Keep those factors in mind when you begin so you don't rub your co-workers the wrong way by volunteering to tackle every project, for example. You want to understand the environment and the breakdown of assignments among the team first.

Finish Paperwork

The ultimate way to ensure you do this by the end of your first day is to show up prepared in the first place. You'll likely fill out a laundry list of forms, everything from I-9s and W-4s to health insurance paperwork and emergency contact lists, says Downs. Bring multiple forms of identification, your plans for tax withholding and a voided check if you'll elect for direct-deposit.



Career Woman, Inc.

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Other considerations? Your vehicle registration and license plate number if you'll be using a company parking space, for example, and having a couple of employment references and a fresh copy of your resume aren't a bad idea either. Keep in mind that many government forms in particular have deadlines within 24 to 72 hours of your start date, so showing up armed with what you need can help you come off as eager, respectful and prepared.

Meet the People You'll Work With Regularly

You don't need to become their best friend or even have a one-on-one meeting with each of them on the first day. But learning who will be a day-to-day contact for you will clearly highlight your enthusiasm.

"Especially if you're brought on with a lot of other new hires, you'll probably go through some sort of orientation as a part of your first day," says Sara Ferraioli, partner in the HR Contracts division of Massachusetts-based staffing firm Winter, Wyman. Use that as a chance to get to know a few of your peers.

Even if you're not a part of a large hiring class, you'll still probably meet a lot of people on your first day. "You don't know what kinds of supplies will be at your workplace, so bring with you a pen and paper and spend the day writing things down," says Downs. "When you meet people, write down their names and job titles," she suggests, and if it is helpful, jot a quick note of something to distinguish them in your mind. Whether it is some of the things they're responsible for, or the fact that they have a pennant flag from your rival college hanging at their desk, it'll help you sort through the details.

Technical Setup

Once you start picking up full-blown projects, it'll be a blessing that you don't need to think about little things like email signatures and your voice mail recording. If you have a computer and phone at your desk, ask co-workers if there is a standard company format for your email sign-off, for example. Your attention to these sorts of details will be a timesaver down the line. You also want to make sure you can access any software or databases you'll need, Ferraioli says.

While it isn't critical, Downs says it can't hurt to figure out who you can contact about technical issues. "You don't want to waste time, especially at the beginning," she says. "Find out who's tasked with keeping up broken phones and computers," Downs says, and keep track of any email addresses or phone numbers you need to call for help.

Meet with your Manager

Time and schedule permitting, sitting down with your boss for at least a half-hour during your first day is a wise idea. Chances are they'll schedule that time on their own, but be sure you're armed with questions for your conversation.

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"You should go over with them the general expectations of the company," Downs says. "That includes things that are high priority, what you should plan to get started on, and how you'll be assessed."

In addition, you should determine what the team is currently working on, and how your boss expects you to get involved. "Find out from your boss the key goals, objectives and priorities for the department," says Quast. "What are they trying to accomplish and by when? How can you use your skills to help them and the team accomplish those goals?"

Ask Questions

"Ask a lot of questions, and be in front of your boss at the beginning so you can be sure you're getting what you need for the job to make it doable or manageable," says Ferraioli. (When we say "a lot," we mean a lot of legitimate questions that you haven't already asked. Being resourceful by finding some of the answers to your questions is a positive quality.)

"Not understanding how to get things done, how to access resources, and what sacred rules cannot be broken no matter how urgent the issue: These are the logistics that will trip up even the most talented new hires," says Roy Cohen, a New York City-based career counselor. Make sure you talk with your manager about the company's objectives, the organizational chart, and company policies or guidelines about volunteering for projects, interacting with clients and customers, or communicating with colleagues.

Don't Judge the Whole Job by the First Day

This is a big one to remember, particularly if you're feeling a little down after day one. "You have to give the job a chance to become what you know it will be," Ferraioli says. "You have this grand vision of what it's going to be, and sometimes it winds up being less organized than expected, or things aren't ready for you in terms of equipment and assignments."

A survey of 500 marketing and advertising executives conducted by the Creative Group last fall found that it takes nine weeks, on average, to determine if employees are well-suited for a new job. So while it is important to integrate yourself with the company soon after your start date, day one isn't the be-all and end-all. "People tend to make quick decisions about making a bad move or taking the right job," Ferraioli says. "It's all about giving it time and giving yourself time to have it all come together."

Write to Kelly Eggers at kelly.eggerts@dowjones.com