

FIRST-YEAR JOB ADVICE

Initial impressions on a new job are important. Here are some guidelines:

Get to work early. You could come in ten minutes late and work one hour late, but you'll still leave a negative impression. Coming in early makes a much better impression; ask any supervisor.

Come to work every day. Call in sick only when actually sick. Let employer know immediately if stranded or late due to unforeseen events. Make dental, doctor, lawyer and wedding dress fitting appointments after work or during lunch hour. Be assured that should you ever need a reference or recommendation, some likely inquiries will be about promptness and attendance.

Be courteous, friendly and helpful. Smile and say hello to everyone every time you see them, whether you know them or not. Remember the names of those to whom you are introduced; jot down names until you remember them. Open doors; help finish reports; assist on projects; thank those who help you; and look for opportunities to offer sincere praise to the boss, the secretary, the custodian and everyone in between.

Be friendly, but not friends. Go to lunch with colleagues or boss (remember that you should never invite your boss out to lunch before he/she invites you), but don't make it a regular habit, and be especially careful not to become identified with any cliques. Going out drinking with your boss and/or colleagues is not recommended. Be wary of revealing your weaknesses. Once others realize what your weaknesses are, they may begin to exploit them, whether consciously or unconsciously. This is not cynicism, but a most painful truth. It should go without saying, but never become romantically entangled with anyone at your office, especially your boss. This can be suicide for your career.

Keep your personal life private. You will be tempted to share personal information with friendly, warm and well-meaning colleagues. Unless you want your private life discussed by all your co-workers, don't open up your life to them.

Be loyal to the absent. (Don't gossip!) Never talk about anyone in his/her absence, and when you hear others gossiping or criticizing others behind their backs, defend the victim, change the subject, do not engage in the conversation or simply walk away. This will offend no one, and you will gain a reputation as a person of integrity.

Dress as well as or better than your co-workers. Remember that you dressed up for the interview to create a favorable impression. Consider a professional wardrobe as an investment rather than an expense. Some people rebel against dressing for success. They feel that "substance" should count for more than "image." In the perfect world, this may be true, but the workplace is far from a perfect world. If you want to advance in your career, you must invest the time, energy and money it takes to dress the part.

Speak and laugh softly and when appropriate. Never tell off-color, sexist or racist jokes; if exposed to them, politely excuse yourself. Compulsive and/or loud talking or laughing annoys others, wastes time and reveals insecurity. Pay attention to your own talking and laughing habits, and take appropriate action.

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Don't move too fast. For the first month or two, say very little, ask a lot of questions, but don't offer suggestions or opinions unless asked. This is often the most difficult thing for a recent graduate to do, because in the academic environment you are taught to debate, offer suggestions and find a quick solution to problems. The very thing that you have spent years perfecting becomes the least valuable attribute to the new employee! Listen and watch for clues as to which behaviors are valued and which will get you into trouble.

Ask for feedback. As often as you feel it is appropriate, ask how you are doing. Ask your co-workers and your supervisor for constructive criticism, and then accept it and use it. Don't get defensive, offer explanations, get angry or embarrassed. Being able to take criticism and suggestions for improvement is the mark of a mature person and will go far to cementing your place in the company.

Be honest with yourself and others. Telling lies, deliberately misrepresenting or hiding facts may be the quickest way to the unemployment office. That goes without saying. But there is another kind of lie that can get you into just as much trouble, and that is the lie you tell when you make a promise that you don't keep. If you aren't positive that you can deliver the goods as promised, don't make the promise.

Identify potential conflict early. If you start feeling stressed, angry, confused or resentful; if you begin to drink heavily or rely on drugs; if you experience health problems, especially headaches, stomach problems or back problems, seek help from a therapist, a member of the clergy, or a trusted friend. Most companies have either insurance coverage or an employee assistance program, but even if they don't, get help before you fall into a pattern. Many lives are turned around by simple techniques for communicating more effectively. On the other hand, chronic stress may be a signal that your job is not the right match for you.