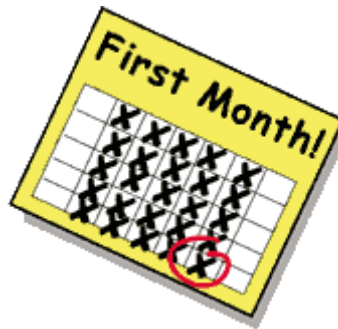


Your First Month on the Job



Learning

You may feel non-productive during your first month on the job. There might be a bit of reality to this feeling because, in fact, you are still in the learning phase. At this point, you should have a handle on your responsibilities at the new job. You know where to go when you get to work in the morning. You also know where to get coffee and where to eat lunch. And you know who to ask for help. However, you may still be wrestling with the larger issues.

- Where you fit in the company's big picture: You've likely gone through new staff orientation and been given a company handbook if there is such a thing. Continuing to ask questions is your best strategy for further learning.
- Your initial tasks and routines have probably been outlined. Clarifying exactly what is expected of you is important. You may be assigned tasks which you find menial. Take all jobs seriously! If your employer can see that you have a professional attitude and respect the fact that all tasks, no matter how small, are important, it won't be long before you find yourself working on the more complex and interesting jobs.
- Politics of the company: This may be the most difficult aspect of your job to deal with. Company politics is what is going on beneath the surface of day to day activities.

Answers to these questions come from many places

- What do your co-workers spend time on? (Is socializing acceptable? Don't be afraid to ask your colleagues.)
- Rituals; Does the workplace celebrate employee birthdays? Are awards given out?
- Is the actual physical setting of your workplace conservative or relaxed?
- Do others strictly adhere to start and stop times? Is overtime expected?

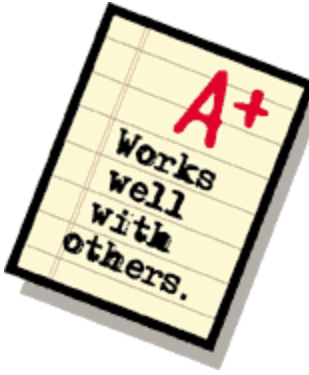
Each workplace and situation is different, but existing research has identified three common grouping tendencies:

- camps for and against management, the union, a co-worker, or whatever the cause
- cliques: people who stick together exclusively, both in and outside of work
- critics: hold very negative views of some aspect(s) of the workplace

Try to avoid having to make a choice as to where you fit into the picture. Find the middle ground in all work relationships.

Relationships

By the first month you will have established some kind of relationship with co-workers and supervisors. It's still early, don't judge too quickly!



Mind Games

Feelings of doubt are not uncommon during the first month. You may find yourself asking: What am I doing? Is this the right place for me? Does everyone really hate me? Am I as popular as I think I am? Learning something new, and adjusting to a new environment don't happen over night. One month is really not enough time to judge everything, don't panic. Concentrate on performing your tasks. Talk to a co-worker you trust about issues which are concerning you. Often times your feelings of insecurity can be easily dismissed.

Assessment

Toward the end of the first month it is appropriate and beneficial to review your new job and assess your satisfaction with the direction things are going. A personal assessment can be as simple as asking yourself a few questions.

- Am I happy?
- What do I like about this job? What don't I like?
- What can I change?
- Where can I go from here?
- Do I feel I am making progress?
- Have I updated my resume to include my new skills and experience?

Asking family or friends for feedback will also help in your assessment. People close to you will be able to offer insight into any change in your behavior (good or bad) or mental well-being (including stress level) since you started at the new job. Personal assessments are beneficial not only at the end of the first month but throughout the duration of any job. The best way to prevent issues from getting out of hand is to stay aware of how you are dealing with them. It is a lot easier to change them before they grow too unmanageable.

Performance Reviews

Many companies conduct performance reviews of employees. These usually don't occur until the three, or six month mark, but it is important to prepare for them or at the very least have some idea what they entail. A performance review is an evaluation of how well you are doing your job. It will likely cover:

- both the specifics (team work, time management) and your general performance
- discussion of your strengths and weaknesses
- creation of plans to improve on problem areas
- setting objectives for the next year
- discussion of potential for promotion
- discussion of the possibility of a raise

Very few people look forward to performance reviews. Anticipating an analysis and evaluation of yourself can be nerve racking. Accepting criticism is never easy but it is essential. The best way to learn and grow is to know your weaknesses so you are able to work on them. And the truth is, it is usually easier for others to identify those weaknesses. We can always improve. Accepting this fact graciously and working to strengthen your weaknesses will both demonstrate your professionalism and allow you to move ahead.