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Easing Your Way Into A New Job

After months of looking for a new opportunity at a new organization, you've been offered an assistant administrator position at a large and prestigious law firm. Although it may seem that the hardest part of your career transition is behind you, there's one more hurdle to clear: You have to get off to a good start in your new office.

How you handle yourself in the first days and weeks on the job is one of the most important and yet most frequently overlooked aspects of success in a new role. Whether it seems fair or not, others will be forming impressions about you from the moment of introduction.

Needless to say, you need to be prepared to sidestep the pitfalls a new job presents. Here are some hints for making a smooth transition:

Develop your organizational IQ. Spend the early days of your employment familiarizing yourself with key people within the firm and understanding how the office operates. Ask your colleagues about their responsibilities and why things are done as they are. Also, encourage them to offer suggestions on how to improve procedures that fall under your area of responsibility.

Take careful note of the spoken and unspoken cues you receive during your conversations. These cues can give you a feel for the underlying dynamics of the office and how the various functional areas and personalities interact with one another. Although you'll probably notice that some of the perspectives you gather are at odds, you don't have to immediately reconcile these differences. Simply use the information you've learned to operate effectively within the employer's culture.

Have a meeting of minds with your boss. Although you may feel that you already have a good grasp on your job responsibilities from the hiring process, you still need to review and clarify your manager's expectations. Your goal should be to make sure you share a common vision of your job. Ask your supervisor about organizational priorities, performance standards and preferences regarding workflow and communication. By reaching a mutual understanding on these matters, you can prevent many of the problems that develop in manager-employee relationships. These early meetings should also give you a better sense of your new boss's management style.

Don't rock the boat – at least not yet. It's not uncommon for newcomers to an office to quickly pick up on illogical policies or outdated procedures. Considering your experience with office management issues, you may be tempted to make improvement suggestions right away. But be careful not to alienate your new colleagues by pushing too hard or too fast for change. Wait until you've established trust and developed

chemistry with others in the office before lobbying for major changes. You should find, too, that as you become more familiar with the firm's inner workings, you can present a more persuasive argument for change.

Another pitfall to avoid is the temptation to make comparisons between your present and previous employer. Don't engage in this exercise – at least not publicly – unless you're specifically asked how something was done at your last office. And be careful about offering unsolicited opinions, especially strong ones. You'll earn a reputation for tactfulness and restraint if you don't try to weigh in on every administrative issue. When you do speak up, keep your comments brief and diplomatic. If you're uncertain whether your boss or others might take offense at a suggestion or comment, it's best to say nothing. You don't want to come across as critical or judgmental.

Earn a reputation for discretion and integrity. Next to your job performance, nothing will have more bearing on your success at work than your reputation for ethics and discretion. You will inevitably stand out in any office if you're perceived as someone who can be trusted.

You can build a reputation for integrity by practicing honesty in all your interactions and keeping office confidences. And don't say things about colleagues that you wouldn't say to their face.

Accept invitations to socialize. Especially in the early days of your tenure in a new job, be sure to join in if you're invited out for lunch, a coffee run or other social events. These out-of-the-office interactions can offer valuable insights into individual personalities and organizational culture. Moreover, you don't want to run the risk of being considered antisocial or standoffish by turning down invitations. Be careful though not to let your guard down too much when socializing away from the office. No matter how comfortable you feel with your new colleagues – or how much they reveal about their professional or personal lives – don't confide anything you would feel uncomfortable about if it came to be known in the office.

When starting a new job, keep in mind that others' initial assessments of your personality, work habits and professionalism may linger long after your first week. But by taking time to understand the workplace and your boss before suggesting changes, developing a rapport with colleagues and earning a reputation for integrity, you'll ensure a smooth transition and a bright future at your new firm.

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