

5 Tips for Starting a New Job – Be Proactive & Strategic!*

Starting a new job comes with excitement, anticipation, and anxiety. You want to be successful, but do not know what to expect. To set yourself up to be a star performer, you need to be proactive and have a strategy. Here are five tips to help you transition into your new role.

1. Create a Strategy & Plan

As you gradually transition into your new job, develop a strategy and plan that will benefit your long-term career development. What skills do you want to develop? What exposure do you need to excel and one day get a promotion? What type of difficulties will you encounter in this particular position? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Seek to understand not just what you bring to the table, but what you bring to your team as a whole. This is critical to developing a great strategy and understanding how you can complement structures already in place. Always keep in mind where you would like to be professionally and in your career in the long run. For more detailed advice on how to create a strategy and plan, read our article entitled “Job Transition Survival Guide – Tackling the First 90 Days.”

2. Set Distinctive Career Goals

Aside from wage increases and job promotions, what do you really want to learn and what is your “big picture” career goal? Consider what your short- and long-term career goals are, and write them down so that you know exactly in what direction you would like to go.

Consider the skill sets that you want to develop. Do you need to better understand accounting principles? Are you looking to improve your presentation and pitching skills? Understand what you need to know to excel and use that as a guide for your future career advancement. Map these out during your career planning process and evaluate the effort needed to reach your goals. Be clear about your goals, but also be aware of the effort you must exert. The adage “no pain, no gain” often is true when trying to climb the career ladder.

3. Be Proactive – First Handle Your Responsibilities

Before you can start adding extra pizzazz to your team’s projects, you have to start with the basics. Remember you need to do the job you were actually hired to do and do it well before you can add to your plate of responsibilities. Crawl before you can walk. Soon enough, you will be sprinting. After you prove yourself through what you have been tapped to accomplish, begin looking to go above and beyond so you can stand out as a key team member.

As a University of Illinois study has shown, being proactive – characterized by “innovation, political knowledge, and career initiative” – has a positive correlation with career progression. Start by looking for potential tasks that enable you to add value and be a self-starter. Search for areas where you may have a chance to develop professional and soft skills, and work on tackling your weaknesses.

For example, if you participate in voluntary conferences and give speeches, this may give you an opportunity to practice and improve your communication and presentation skills. Volunteer for additional work so you force yourself to grow and demonstrate you are a team player. Also, be aware of the importance of connecting with the right people so you can develop key relationships to advance and position yourself for new opportunities.

4. Ground Your Expectations in Reality

Being realistic about your expectations means getting comfortable with the fact that it takes time to score wins, build momentum, and establish your reputation. Understanding that you cannot have discernible impact overnight will help you manage any disappointments.

Remember the learning curve might be steep and no one can conquer Mount Everest in one day. Your

5 Tips for Starting a New Job – Be Proactive & Strategic! continued...

colleagues might be better at the job simply because they have been there longer. They have institutional knowledge, understand protocols, and have more training and exposure. So always remind yourself that learning is a gradual and continuous process. What is important is to be consistent. It takes time to prove yourself in your boss' eyes and earn recognition. Take a few steps back, rethink your goals, evaluate your progress and any pitfalls, and modify your initial strategy as needed.

5. Know Your Real Job is to Support Your Boss

What is your real job in any organization? It is to make your boss' job easier and not harder. The sooner you understand this in your career, the quicker you will realize success. If you add to her burdens, need too much hand-holding, or create more problems than solutions, then you are on the wrong path and destined for failure. Your manager hopes that you will handle the workload on your own, relieve her stress level, ask questions when needed so you deliver what she expects, and elevate the company's performance to the next level.

Be a valuable asset to both your team and your boss. Be concise during communications, and be strategic by always having your goal and the team's objectives in mind. When you are creative and come up with solutions to roadblocks, you become invaluable. Be a part of the solution so you will be seen as a star contributor.

Final Thoughts

As Plato put it, "the beginning is the most important part of the work." If you are transitioning into a new job, begin with a strategy, plan, and goal. Then go above and beyond while having realistic expectations, and understand your real job and true value. Entering an unfamiliar environment might be intimidating, but taking these steps will make the transition smoother and set you up for excellence.

The key to success lies in always thinking ahead, exceeding expectations, learning from any failures, and delivering consistent results.