

## Chapter 6

# How To Start Your Job On The Right Foot

The initial weeks when you start your job provide you a good opportunity to take advantage of the “honeymoon” period to learn the lay of the land, to get up to speed and make a good first impression. Given the pace of work these days, new employees have less time to learn the ropes and are expected to contribute quickly. Employees who prove to be quick learners and contributors will make a great impression, gain credibility and confidence with co-workers and management. You need to have a plan to hit the deck running on the first day and this chapter will show you how.

### **What To Do Before You Start Your First Day**

Before your start date, there are a number of tasks you can do to put you in a position to be productive from day one on your job.

- Work with your new manager to make sure all your IT equipment and services will be in working order and ready for you to use on the first day. Submit all your IT needs soon after you accept the offer to give the IT department time to order equipment and set up. A few days before you start your job, follow up to make sure things are on track and in case of any issues, you have time to resolve. Don’t just trust that everything will be there in working order the day you start. Your manager may forget to follow up due to his busy schedule and he would appreciate a reminder from you. Moreover, ask your manager for a buddy – someone with a good reputation at work and is valued by the manager. This person is a valuable resource for you to learn the ropes. Ask the manager to set up a one-on-one meeting with your buddy on the day you start.
- Obtain approval and permission to access company services you need for your job. Your manager can help you with this and get the approvals needed. Double check with your manager and don’t assume it will be taken care of. For example, meetings conducted over video or audio conference are quite common. If you schedule these meetings, you need to have the system access code to use the equipment, or if you will need to access and use company sensitive data, you need to receive permission and the passcode since accessibility is restricted to certain employees. It’s frustrating and a waste of time when you start your job and have to wait a few days to be able to access the data.
- Familiarize yourself with company materials. Ask for company materials relevant to your job that you can read before you start. This may be your manager’s annual team plan, status reports on current activities or projects, product or project plans, last quarter’s CEO presentation, etc. Reading these ahead of time will give you a feel for the current state of the company business and insight about your job. Your manager should be aware of company policy on confidential materials to determine which documents you can have access to.
- Get settled in if you are relocating. When moving to a new town, you will need to take care of your living arrangements and other personal tasks. Try completing them before you start your job

so you don’t have to spend time and energy trying to settle in a new place and do work at the same time. These tasks can consume a lot of time and if you have to take time out of work to attend to them, that will slow you down. When you start, you want to focus your energy and time to get up to speed as quickly as possible.

### **What To Do When You Start Your Job**

Use your first couple of weeks to get a good picture and feel for the lay of the land as it relates to your job. Understand the ecosystem in the company – how things get done, how people work and communicate, important processes, key people you will be working with, decision makers and influencers, and how decisions are made. In addition, spend your time to obtain knowledge and insight on company products and services. Having a good understanding of company’s ecosystem is paramount to your job’s success. Imagine this ecosystem as the Global Positioning System (GPS) of a new city you just moved in for the first time. This smart system shows you the different routes to get from place A to place B, with all the variables that can affect which route you’re going to take, including speed limits, traffic flows and road closures. Moreover, these variables can change at any moment, depending on the time of day, weather condition and traffic flow changes. The smart GPS helps you determine the best route to take and navigate through these unpredictable obstacles. Without the knowledge of the company’s ecosystem, it would be similar to driving without a GPS in trying to get to your destination and not having a clue how to get there.

- Create the ecosystem map. With help from your buddy and manager, start putting together an ecosystem map pertinent to you and your job. This is a chart of important people whom you will be working with, key influencers, decision makers and potential executives who could be your champions. This group includes people in your organization as well as other functions. Make notes of their title, organization, job responsibilities, keys to working with them, and if possible, their reputation in the company. Then get to know them because your success depends on how effectively you work with them and help them be successful in their job. A second key part of the ecosystem is to capture how things are done in the company – decision making process, communication method, operational processes, project management, teamwork dynamics and unwritten “rules.” Your buddy and manager are great resources for this.
- Meet with your buddy and spend a good amount of time with this person on the first day. Ask him to share with you how things get done, how people work and communicate, key people you will be working with, how decisions are made, and who the influencers, decision makers and potential advocates are. Use the information to help complete your ecosystem map. Find out the best ways to do things at work, major issues and “elephants in the room” you should be aware of. In addition, get your buddy’s thoughts on your manager – the best ways to work with him, his hot buttons and his strengths/weaknesses. Also ask your buddy to show you how to access and use the company IT system, and take you on a tour of all the facilities so you can be familiar with the buildings and the people working in them.
- Use your computer and IT systems to go through the login process to make sure the systems are in working order and you have access to the services you need. If you run into any issues, call the helpdesk. You should also get into the company’s internal website and familiarize yourself with company’s services, including Human Resources, market research and IT support. In addition, through the company internal website, you can learn about other organizations and their role in the company.
- Meet with your manager. Talk with him to understand his expectations, how best to work with him, his hot buttons, how he wants to be updated, and his key challenges and priorities. Also ask the manager similar questions you ask your buddy, especially the important co-workers and managers you need to be on their good side as well as people who can be your advocates. If time permits, discuss with him about your annual plan. Otherwise, schedule a meeting for this.

## Excerpts from “Thriving At Work: What They Didn’t Teach You in School” by Michael Dam

Typically, every company requires the manager to have a yearly plan for each employee. This plan is critical to your performance review and it includes the objectives/goals, expected results and timelines.

- If you are working remotely and will not have regular face to face interactions with your manager, make sure you and your manager work out a way to stay connected and to keep you in the loop. The most common feedback I hear is that remote employees feel disconnected from the rest of the company, don’t know what’s going on and don’t receive real time information. Since you and your manager will not be able to touch base frequently, commit to having regular one-on-one meetings. Moreover, discuss how to keep you in the loop. Some managers are not on the ball when it comes to sharing information, especially sending a message out to their team. It’s not top of mind and they tend to share information verbally and often, informally. This doesn’t work for you. I would suggest using a portion of your weekly one-on-one meetings for your manager to update you. In addition, find out if your manager uses or would consider using a trusted onsite employee to help him disseminate information to the rest of teams, especially remote employees.
- Schedule one-on-one meetings with key people you will be working with, including project lead, team members and other managers. Try to meet with them in the first two weeks. Your goal is to get to know them, find out their needs, expectations, priorities, any issues or concerns they have, and how you can best work with them. If possible, meet with them over lunch where they’ll have more time to talk with you. Finally, since it’s not feasible to meet everyone, especially people who work remotely, send them a greeting email to introduce yourself.
- If your company offers product and/or service training, take them as soon as you can. Other types of classes may also be available, including meeting facilitation, public speaking, project management and time management. This is the time to take advantage of these classes. You get the knowledge you need and gain the confidence to do your job. In addition, attend the company orientation and meetings set up for new employees with company executives. This is an opportunity to hear directly their thoughts and ask them questions.
- Attend team and other company meetings to get a feel for how the company works, key issues and challenges it’s dealing with and its decision making process. The people you work with will let you know what meetings you should attend. Ask your buddy and manager for suggestions on meetings that you can tag along to observe even though you’re not required to be there. In addition, find out about customer visit and briefing events where customers meet and talk with company representatives about a variety of topics. Contact the company speakers for approval to come and observe. Even if your job doesn’t require you to interact with customers directly, this is a good way to learn about company information being shared with customers, their issues and needs, and observe how the company representatives interact with them.
- If there are data mining and analytic programs you need for your job, learn and practice using these programs during this time. Moreover, if there are external services available to the company from industry service firms, request access to these services if they are relevant to your job. These services include industry reports, research projects and consultation.
- Keep your regular work hours when you start your job, or better yet, stay a little later at work. Since you probably have a lot to learn, it’s a good idea to use the extra time to get up to speed. Coming in late or leaving early leaves a bad impression.
- Familiarize yourself with the company “look and feel” guidelines for creating media and other materials. For example, when you create presentation slides for a meeting with company suppliers, you need to use the company’s content and style guidelines. It helps you present a consistent company image and saves you the headache of hearing from the “brand” police.