Adjusting to your new job

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Having done the hard work in winning your new job, you might find fitting into a new environment to be just as demanding. Don't make the common mistake of focusing solely on work and getting results. You need to pay equal attention to nurturing good relationships with your new colleagues. Here are a few more hints to help ensure that you get off to the best possible start.

Find out early about the culture of your organization and how its employees treat each other. Then, be prepared to respond to the new culture and absorb it. Get to know the management style and the unwritten rules as well as the written ones. In particular, get to know your new boss or bosses and their working habits. This will be your chance to learn quickly what is expected of you, to find out how your boss prefers to communicate and to lay solid foundations for your future relationship. Your boss may want to discuss your initial impression. Be constructive rather than critical, and choose a more appropriate time to suggest changes or improvements. You have been recruited for your skills and experience, but nobody likes to hear that the way things are being done is not particularly good or effective. Note any opportunities for improvements and introduce your suggestions in a collaborative way to avoid turning people off.

It takes time and effort to win acceptance and respect. You may think you are great, but that doesn't mean that others will automatically accept you. Cultivate an open and friendly approach, get to know people and let them make their own minds up. You'll do better using a strategy like this than by expecting respect because of your past experience or qualifications. Try to be yourself, and don't pretend to be something you are not. You cannot 'act out' your entire career. You will not feel comfortable, and in the long term, you will inevitably revert back to your true character. Building relationships with influential people in your organization now will

pay dividends in the future. Working across departments is much easier if the people you work with in other offices or departments know you and can put a face to your name.

Taking the time to meet people, introduce yourself and get to know others and their roles (and limitations) better is all part of your 'charm offensive'. You will learn a lot of useful information about the organization such as the following:

- Who the informal leaders are
- Who sets the pace
- Who makes the decisions
- What is the real power structure
- Whose opinions are valued most in decision-making

Remember, the organization chose to hire you because you have the qualities that they want. You have the ability to succeed. Channel your energy constructively and carefully. In the early months, the watchword is 'observation' and not innovation, unless you have been specifically asked for your input on a particular issue. Take your time... watch and learn.

- Don't seek to make an immediate impact or rush into dramatic changes
- Be conventional in your approach
- Be positive
- Refrain from talking about your old job or making comparisons

By adopting this approach, you are far more likely to gain acceptance and respect from your colleagues and managers. And once you have achieved that, you have the perfect platform to make your mark.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

Part of the learning curve of fitting into a new environment involves understanding

the basics. Although these considerations might seem trivial, they can help you to fit in more quickly.

Dress code

Whether you work in an office or a lab, there might be a dress code. Appropriate attire might be formal, formal except for dress-down Fridays, or formal only for interdepartmental meetings but casual for departmental staff meetings. This is not a major issue, but you might be embarrassed if you turn up in a business suit when everybody else is dressed casually.

Food and drink

This topic might also seem inconsequential but is part of the culture of an organization. Are there vending machines? If so, are they free or do you need to have the proper change? Do people eat in their offices or labs or go to a canteen or off-site? Is there a break room for coffee breaks? Do people keep their personal snacks or coffee supplies there? The last thing you want to do is to use the boss's special coffee mug and private coffee supplies!

Transport and parking

Choose a route into work that won't leave you running into your new place of work at the last minute each morning. This does not leave a good impression. Arrive at work well before you are scheduled. This is often a good time to socialize with colleagues before work starts. Also, car parking may be limited. Getting to work earlier may mean that you are lucky enough to claim a parking space!

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