

# Your First Year on the Job

Your first year on the job is a great opportunity to learn more about yourself, assess your strengths and weaknesses, and start devising a long-term career path.

It seems like a lot to accomplish in 12 short months, but as any seasoned employee will tell you, the first year is one of the most crucial for both personal and professional growth, so it's important to get as much as you can from it.

## Master the Basics

As a new hire, it's natural for you to want to dazzle your boss with your knowledge, revolutionary ideas, and unwavering team spirit. These are all important, but your first job is to demonstrate that you have mastered the basics: Show up on time every day, ready and willing to work, and dressed appropriately.

Sound simple? Many employers report an alarming shortage of qualified, enthusiastic job applicants who can be trusted to report to work each day. Your first job in your new job is to demonstrate your reliability, trustworthiness, and enthusiasm.

## Know What's Expected

It's critical that you understand your job, your supervisor's expectations, and how you fit into the larger picture of the company. Consequently, ask as many questions as you need to do your job well and learn about the organization and its culture. Don't worry about looking foolish; it's more foolish to pretend you know something (and risk getting it wrong) than to admit up front you don't.

It's also important to find out about your organization's performance review process and terminology—such as “meets expectations” and “exceeds expectations.” You can't meet or exceed expectations if you don't know what they are!

## Watch and Learn

While it might be tempting to contribute ideas at every staff meeting or team-building session, it is generally better for you as a new hire to sit back and observe your co-workers before jumping into a discussion. You don't want to come across as a “know-it-all,” or as dismissive of the knowledge and insight those senior to you have. Listen. Pay attention. Not only will you gain information that is relevant to your job, but also you will learn about your company's culture and your co-workers' distinctive personalities. You will also learn quickly that the working world is very different from the insular life on campus.

During your first year (and beyond) it's important to have a mentor. Long term, a mentor can help you reach your career goals, but initially, your mentor's main role is to help you navigate the unwritten rules of your organization, coach and counsel you, give you feedback and insight, and help you get on—and stay on—the right path.

Many organizations have formal mentor programs: If yours does, be sure to take advantage. If there is no formal program, seek out an informal mentor or mentors.

### **Closing Out the Year**

New hires in virtually every industry can expect a yearly performance review, and some employers require them at the end of the 90-day probationary period, or after the new hire's first six months of employment.

Seek out constructive feedback periodically so there are no surprises at your review. This will also help you correct mistakes or improve your processes quickly. Use your performance review to your professional advantage. Build on your supervisor's comments to assess your work style and improve your performance. Your review can help you get to the next step in your career.

With the right combination of a strong work ethic, the willingness to learn and improve, and the ability to accept constructive feedback, this year can be an amazing learning opportunity, and can help you lay the foundation for later career success.

Courtesy of the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#).