Your First Job Out of College: *How to Hit the Ground Running*

Are you a soon-to-be college graduate getting ready to start your first professional job? If so, congratulations! That's exciting…*and* a bit intimidating, no doubt. After all, nearly every aspect of your current life is about to change dramatically as you transition from college to career. And big transitions take time, energy, and effort.

Flash back to your freshman year of college, for example. Finding your way around campus to get to your classes, adjusting to the rigors of college coursework, and making new friends was *a lot* of change all at once. Yet, you did it …so well, in fact, that by your sophomore year, college life was your new normal.

Keep that in mind as you start your first professional job. But, don't be surprised if you feel like a college freshman all over again (at least for a while). After all, you'll need to learn the ropes of the job and the organization. It's a lot all at once. Therefore, knowing what to expect from your first job can shorten your learning curve.

To hit the ground running in your first 30 days on the job:

- **Understand the expectations**

  Think back to the first day of class in college. The professor passed out the course syllabus. It detailed your assignments, associated due dates, and the grading rubric. From day one of the class, you had a clear understanding of what you needed to do to get the "A".

  Similarly, in your first month on the job, talk with your manager about how to succeed in your new role (not only day-to-day but in the long term). Along with the daily tasks on your plate, what else is expected of you? With a clear understanding of your manager's expectations of your work performance, you'll make better use of ongoing feedback about your work performance.

- **Prioritize your learning**

  In college, you couldn't take upper-level classes until you met the necessary prerequisites. And that makes sense, doesn't it? After all, you had to learn the basics before you took on more complex coursework. Along similar lines, you have much to

learn in order to become productive in your new job. It can seem overwhelming at first. But the good news is no one expects you to know it *all* immediately.

Therefore, to ease the transition into your new job, start by prioritizing your 30-day learning objectives. Which ones are the most time sensitive? In what order? Is it better to focus on learning the company products, internal processes, or the systems and software first? If you don't know, ask! Speak with your manager to get input on your learning priorities.

Perhaps most importantly, find out who to go to when you have questions. Some organizations have a formalized on-boarding process including a "buddy" to go to when you have questions about the work tasks, procedures, and processes. If that's not the case in your work environment, find a friendly person who can point you in the right direction.

- **Find the quick wins**

Savvy college students approach exams strategically. To get the highest grade possible, they answer the "easy pickings" test items first. They skip past the questions that leave them feeling uncertain, circling back to tackle the tougher stuff later, if time permits. In other words, smart test takers prioritize the "quick-win" exam points.

As the newbie in the workplace, you're tasked with learning as much as you can so that you can add value to your team and the organization as soon as possible. To identify the "quick wins", ask yourself:

- Where can I quickly make an impact?
- Am I prepared to take on these tasks / this project?
- How can I make my impact visible?
- Are these quick wins aligned with the team's and organization's priorities?

Seek input from your manager and peers to uncover gaps that you can help to close. Develop a realistic timeline for taking on these tasks or projects. Resist the urge to launch into longer-term projects since your contributions and results are less likely to be visible and valued immediately.

- **Keep things in perspective**

  Starting a new job can be overwhelming at first. You may question whether you'll ever be able to learn it all. You'll make mistakes along that way. That's perfectly normal. Have faith that you *will* get there!