

GUIDE TO YOUR FIRST YEAR ON THE JOB

FIRST STEPS

- ✓ Manage your expectations early and set realistic goals for yourself.
- ✓ Create for yourself a career plan, and decide where your first job fits among your ideas.
- ✓ Maintain a “learner’s” attitude on the job during your first year and beyond.

FIRST YEAR BASICS

Why Is The First Year So Important?

Myth: Everyone is excited to leave college and enter the working world.

Fact: Many recent college graduates are experiencing feelings of loss and anxiety about leaving behind their college friends and lifestyle during their transition into the professional world.

Myth: Your employer expects you to know everything when you begin.

Fact: In reality, you will make a positive impression during the first few months if you show the maturity to ask for help in the areas you do not know well. Employers know that college has only partially prepared you for work in their organization; they are not expecting you to know everything about the company when you begin.

Myth: To make a good impression during your first year, individuals should ask few questions and shed the new employee image immediately.

Fact: Learning the ropes of the first-year is important for beginning a successful career. Each organization has a different culture of norms and regulations. Spending the time to learn about the organization will increase your ability to make a good impression and be successful. Employers expect you to ask questions and have an attitude of curiosity.

Myth: It is only my first-year on the job. How important can it really be?

Fact: While a rocky first year on the job will not spell disaster for an individual’s entire career, he or she may have to work harder for a longer period to recover from a rough first-year.

Myth: My first year on the job will determine the rest of my career path, so it’s important I make the right choices about the job.

Fact: While making the “right” decisions now may seem like it will determine the rest of your career and life, many people switch not just jobs, but careers, several times in their lives.

MU CAREER CENTER

Lower Level,
Student Success Center

☎ (573) 882-6801

📧 career.missouri.edu

✉ career@missouri.edu



POTENTIAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COURSEWORK AND “ON-THE-JOB” WORK

College	First Year
Highly structured curriculum and programs with lots of direction and deadlines	Unstructured environment and tasks with minimal direction; set your own deadlines
Frequent, quick, and concrete feedback (grades, advisors, etc.)	Occasional and random feedback given by supervisor
Few specific changes of expectations and course requirements	Frequent and unexpected changes in supervisor's expectations and requirements
Flexible schedule	More structured schedule
Frequent breaks and time off	Limited time off and infrequent breaks
Personal control over time, classes, interests	Required to respond to others' directions and interests
Intellectual challenge	Organizational and people challenge
Choose your performance level (A, B and so on)	A-level work required all the time
Focus on development and growth	Focus on getting results for the organization
Create and explore knowledge	Get results with your knowledge
Individual effort is rewarded	Team effort is rewarded
Independence of ideas and thinking is encouraged	Supporting the organization's way of thinking and acting is encouraged
Professors	Bosses
Less initiative required to find and start projects	Lots of initiative required to find and start projects
Personally supportive environment	Environment may be more competitive than supportive

Twelve steps to first-year success

1. Adopt the right attitude
2. Adjust your expectations
3. Be willing to learn
4. Manage the impressions you make
5. Build effective relationships
6. Become a good follower
7. Understand your organization's culture
8. Develop organizational savvy
9. Understand your “new hire” role
10. Develop the skills to be resourceful at work
11. Master the tasks of your new job
12. Acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities you need to be successful

**Adapted from the 1996 CPC Job Choices & a University of Wisconsin-River Falls Career Services handout.*

Managing Your Career

If upward mobility within the organization is possible, beginning a career with an end goal in mind will help you think about your fit within the company and areas that have opportunities for progress.

Learn from others, but more specifically, find a mentor (or mentors). A mentor can be someone who possesses a good work ethic and a good reputation in the company. It can also just be someone with whom you genuinely connect with. Learn from your mentor how he or she was able to succeed in the company. Discuss the mistakes he or she made, how he or she sees the job evolving, and what steps you should begin to take in order to be promoted. Mentors can also help you learn more about the unwritten rules of the company's culture and network with colleagues. Finally, a mentor should be someone willing to “go to bat” for you and have your back in times of need.

Develop a career plan. Where would you like to see yourself in the company, or in your profession, in

two years? How about in four years? It is important to manage your expectations as well as your career. Learn what a realistic goal is for promotion within your organization and start laying a strong foundation for the rest of your career.

Be successful on the job. Do your job well. Focus on the job you are currently being asked to do. Also, volunteer for additional projects that may be more challenging and that you know you will be able to do well. This will show the organization that you have strong initiative. Consistency and effective work performance are valued and expected by all supervisors, but taking initiative on projects will build management's trust and confidence in you as well.

Be aware of additional educational opportunities. Continue to seek formal training and developmental opportunities that are available through the company, including seminars and workshops, tuition reimbursement programs, and professional organizations in your field.

MONEY AND LIVING

Managing Your Money

Budgeting is necessary. Budgets ensure your money is spent on necessary items, so you can be sure that your hard-earned money is spent wisely and effectively. Creating a budget generally requires 3 steps:

1. **Identify your income and compare to your expenses.** Figure out how much money you earn each month and compare that to your necessary expenses (rent, utilities, and groceries). This will allow you to see how much excess money you have to spend on “extra” expenses (going out to eat, going to the movies, etc.).
2. **Evaluate and track your current spending.** You want to make sure that you are not spending more than you earn. Track your spending to see where your money is being spent.
3. **Set financial goals that reflect how you want your money to be spent.** After evaluating where your money is being spent, set goals for you to meet in the future. Goals can range from implementing a spending limit, starting a savings account, planning for a trip, or anything else you deem important.
4. **Stick to your goals and stay within your budget!** One of the hardest things to do after setting a budget is sticking to it. Stay on top of your finances and make sure that you know where your hard-earned money is going!

Use computer software to help you keep track of your budget. A personal finance program such as Quicken or www.Mint.com is helpful.

Don't become overwhelmed by your budget. Concentrate primarily on the categories you need to expand or cut, but do not become overly consumed by details — it will make you go crazy!

Be aware of cash “leakage.” Be aware of the amount of money withdrawn from ATMs, “cash back” from cashiers, etc.

Spending beyond your limits is dangerous. If you are currently spending beyond your limits (i.e., spending more money than you make or racking up a lot of credit card debt), it is time to make budget cuts!

Beware of luxuries dressed up as necessities. When your income does not cover your costs, it is important to recognize that some spending you might think of as necessary is really more about luxury (i.e., you might want caffeine to get through the day, but Starbucks coffee every day is not a necessity).

Think about saving. Aim to spend less than 90% of your income. Save the other 10%.

Don't count on money that you are not sure you will receive. When you are determining the amount of money you will have to live on, do not include year-end bonuses, tax refunds, or investment gains you are not sure you will receive.

Beware of the spending creep. As your income increases, beware of the natural tendency to spend your raises, etc., on luxury items. Instead, continue and/or begin to invest or save this new income instead.

** Adapted from CNN Money*

Investing Your Money

Investing your money will have tremendous future financial rewards. Meet with a financial planner who can help you strategize an investment plan based on your budget. Until then, consider the following before investing:

- Plan monthly expenditures (see budgeting above!)
- Establish a good credit rating by using credit responsibly (speak with a financial planner about loan consolidation, etc. & pay off high interest loans)
- Purchase needed insurance products (auto, property, life, health, disability income)

** Adapted from Financial Stewardship by Dr. Craig Isrealson*

Questions to ask yourself:

- How much money can I afford to invest?
- How much money should I keep in my banking and savings accounts?
- Should I hire a financial advisor, broker, or place an order through a discount brokerage firm?

Where to go for more investment information:

- Yahoo Finance (finance.yahoo.com/)
- Edward Jones (<http://www.edwardjones.com>)
- CNN Money (<http://www.money.cnn.com>)

Taxes

How will I know which tax form(s) I should fill out? Consult the IRS website or a tax consultant; although the 1040EZ or 1040A form is usually used by recent college graduates.

Where can I get the tax forms I need? You can get them at most libraries, post offices, and the IRS website (below).

What can I deduct on my taxes? You can deduct many things you may not think of, such as interest paid on student loans and moving expenses not reimbursed by employers. For more possible deductions, consult the IRS website (below).

Additional sources of tax information:

- A tax consultant—they can help with local tax codes and other tax specifics
- The Internal Revenue Service (www.irs.gov)
- H&R Block (www.hrblock.com)
- Local Accounting Firms (Look in the yellow pages of phone books for their contact information)

Moving

Individuals and organizations to notify before you move

- Update mailing address for the University (Alumni Association)
- Department of Vehicles/Driver's License
- Post-Office
- Voter Registration
- Credit Cards/Charge Accounts
- Employer
- Magazines/Subscriptions
- Insurance Company
- Banks/Credit Unions/Loan Companies
- Investments
- Doctors/Dentists/Other Medical Professionals

Things to remember when looking for a place to live:

The Internet can be a great resource when looking for a house or an apartment in a specific area. Check out <http://www.apartments.com>, <http://www.rent.com>, <http://realestate.com>, and <http://www.realtor.com> to get started.

Ask your employers to recommend areas of town to live in. Oftentimes, they can be a valuable resource in terms of finding safe areas of a city and close proximity to the office. Also, get in touch with any friends, family, and acquaintances that live in the area.

Call beforehand and set up tours with the apartments or houses. There may be apartment location services where you are moving that can be helpful. A real estate agent can guide you through the process of buying a house and show you houses.

Write down what you need in a place to live beforehand. Write down even the petty things. Know exactly what you want because they might try to sell you things you might not need.

LEARNING THE CULTURE

Organizational Culture

What is organizational culture? Organizational culture is the unspoken beliefs, customs, and attitudes of a company or organization. For example, some companies strictly adhere to rules and procedures while other companies are more lenient. In fact, some rules may be implicit or explicit. You will simply need to be observant and ask questions during your first year on the job.

What is organizational management style? Organizational management style is the way management makes decision and relates to their employees. It affects services, programs, and every other aspect of the work environment. Management styles vary greatly by company, even within the same industries, so be observant!

How are employees rewarded? What is the reward system like? Are employees rewarded for their individual performance, teamwork, or something else? By spending the time to observe some of the unwritten rules regarding adherence to deadlines, earning a promotion, and how to create a positive impression within your company, you will be able to have a successful first year.

Where are the financial resources channeled in the organization? Often, financial resources will be directed towards accomplishing the company's main mission. By knowing the organization's mission, you can begin to understand the organization's priorities and how money is budgeted to ensure those goals are achieved.

Building Relationships

Knowing how to build supportive work relationships is a crucial component of learning about the organization's culture and having a successful first year. The following are some advices on how to develop positive relationships with your co-workers.

Relationships with supervisors. One of the most important relationships formed during your first year is the one with your supervisor. Learn what they expect from their employees and then deliver it! Being a good employee requires making your boss look good by finding solutions, not problems at work.

Identifying mentors. Find someone in the organization that has a good reputation and has been with the organization for a longer period than you have. This individual can provide you with insights into the company's culture and help you understand and navigate the company's political landscape. Schedule regular times to meet with this individual (lunch, etc).

Other helpful hints

- If a good relationship with your supervisor is developed, he or she can be your ally in the organization. In fact, other opportunities may open up for you if positive rapport has been built.
- Don't use co-workers as confidants.
- Observe which employees have a good reputation in the company and spend time with them. Be friendly to everyone, but don't join a group of co-workers who are often complaining about work, etc. The complainers will probably not progress in the company, but you will!

Requesting Time Off

The first few months of your new job set the stage for your future at the company. One way to develop a good reputation and demonstrate your commitment to your new position and company is to be mindful of the amount of time you ask off, as well as your punctuality to work! Please keep the following things in mind before requesting time off during your first-year:

Limit your requests for time off. This advice applies even if you see others requesting time off or taking time off during the day to run personal errands. The difference is that you are *new*; it is important to establish a good reputation at work. Asking for time off to relax or run errands will send a negative message to your co-workers, and most importantly, your supervisor!

Plan ahead. If you have plans that will require time off during your first year, let your boss know as soon as possible. In fact, the best time to mention it is when you are offered the job. Most managers understand and will try to accommodate you, but they would rather know about it from the very beginning, not a few weeks before you need off.

Vacation time can vary from none up to 3 weeks or more. The typical amount of vacation time for an entry-level position is 2 weeks for the first year, and often you cannot take time off during the first several months.

Don't be late for work. Companies vary in how they define "tardy". Some companies view three minutes late to work as being tardy while other views 30 or more minutes as being tardy. Play it safe and arrive to work 10 minutes early. *You should be settled in and ready to begin work at your appointed time.*

Earning a Raise or Promotion

During the first year, a raise or promotion is not typical. The first year is important for demonstrating your ability to exercise initiative and promise for future promotional opportunities and raises. In fact, *earning* a raise is the real key to getting one. In order to become the employee that has *earned* a promotion, consider the following questions:

- Do you perform all tasks to which you are assigned, in addition to going out of your way to help others or to take on new assignments?
- Are you pleasant and easy to get along with? If you are difficult to approach, or not a team player, you will need to improve those interpersonal skills.
- Are you positively contributing to the company? How?
- Do you take initiative at work? When?
- Are you a dependable employee?

WHAT IF IT DOESN'T WORK OUT?

During your first year on the job, you may experience more downs than ups.

Before you quit, give some thought to the following.

- What are causes of your unhappiness?
 - Is it the job? The organizational culture? The work environment?
 - Or is it the natural transition and adjustment to the first year on the job?
- Realize that in every job there will be days and even weeks that are rough.
- Create a pro/con list for your job
 - What do you like about your job?
 - What do you not like about your job?
- Try to improve the situation before you quit
 - Be active and create a plan of action.

What if it still just will not work out?

- Make sure you are really leaving your job for something better—a job that meets the specific criteria you are lacking in your current job.
- Avoid quick fixes. Not every day at your job is going to be perfect.
- Do not trade one set of problems for another.
- Make sure that this is a career you want to pursue and the job you will be starting is really in the career field you want.
- Give at least two weeks' notice and avoid burning bridges in your career.
- Avoid criticizing your employer. You never know when you will need a reference in the future!
- To ensure a smooth transition for both you and for the place you are leaving, be sure to make them aware of your appreciation for opportunities that you took advantage of while with them.

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Truman T. Tiger
1234 Main Street
Columbia, Missouri 65203
(573) 555-5555

Human Resources
Company Name
1234 Big Business Lane
Columbia, Missouri 65203

Dear [Name of Human Resources Manager]:

This letter is to inform you that I am resigning my position as [Position Title] with [Employer Name]. My last day will be [Date of last day].

Thank you for the opportunity to work with your company. I have learned a great deal and I hope that our professional paths will cross again in the future.

Sincerely,

Truman T. Tiger

NEXT STEPS

- ✓ Come to the MU Career Center to talk with someone about your job offers and to consult resources about full-time jobs.
- ✓ Visit <https://career.missouri.edu> and click on the "Resources" Tab to visit [Mizzou Career Tools](#), where you can search our site for more handouts on this and other topics relevant to you!