

Chapter 3 – Got the job (First Days In The Herd)

“You have one chance to make a first impression.” ~ Unknown

You're hired! You're a member of a herd now. Congrats.

These first few weeks are a great time because you have no deadlines or demands by others. Basically no one knows you exist yet. *You're in a training period.* The company is excited to have you on-board because you're needed. You feel great because the feeling of being wanted is intoxicating. Getting your ego stroked is quite a high, so enjoy it. This is why everyone calls it the honeymoon period. The relationship is positive both ways and both parties have nothing to complain about – no stress, no criticism, no pressure, no demands, just all high expectations.

Don't Let Your Guard Down

For the first few weeks, before anyone knows about you, before people know your phone number/extension, your email, and before your boss has assigned anything to you, you're going to have lots of time and little responsibility. *Just because these times may appear carefree doesn't mean that you should let your guard down.*

Chances are:

- there will be no formal training;
- no one will take you under their wings;
- there will be no formal orientation or agenda

Use this time to make a good impression with everyone you meet and with your boss.

The Do's and Don'ts to make the first impression a positive (and lasting) one.

Do's:

- **Heed this famous sales axiom:** “You only get one chance to make a first impression.” The statement is obvious to some

degree, but is so well stated. On the surface, you need to be presentable. It is still better to be overdressed than under dressed at the workplace. Men: always wear a collared shirt and slacks. Carry a tie (men) and a second outfit (women) and leave it in your car or cubicle just in case. It is better to be conservative and professionally smart. Worst-case scenario, if you did not know the dress culture at your new company, you will after the first few introductions. You can always race back to dress down or dress up if needed. It may not need to be said, but make sure you have good hygiene. Store a toothbrush and toothpaste in your car or drawer, and be sure to carry some breath freshener with you at all times (mints or gum are great).

- **Greet people by their name.** When you are first introduced to someone new, learn their name and its correct pronunciation. One trick is to repeat it back to that person and ask if you said it correctly. Repeating their name will help you remember it. Another old trick is to find something about the person that links their name such as a rhyme or description. For example, you just met a Larry and he has little hair on his head. So Larry is “not hairy.” It is perfectly fine to ask for their business card (yes, even if they are fellow employees) and write on the back of the card how you met them and at least 1-2 points of interest. Try different techniques to help you remember people’s names.
- **Practice good manners and be respectful.** When someone extends their hand to shake, you should make a firm (not crushing), confident, genuine handshake at first introduction. Smile. Be respectful of every person regardless of their rank or role. I cannot tell you how many times I saw this old saying actually happen, “your peers could be your boss one day.” Short term, you will be surprised how helpful people are even though their rank or role may seem “low and useless.” More on this later. Reply to questions that will be mostly small talk. On that note, be genuine, confident, and respectful in everything you do at this point, period. No exceptions.
- **Consult Executive Administrators.** You will have lots of questions and many you will think are too petty to ask your boss or all the hard working people around you. So don’t take that risk by asking them. Ask the executive administration instead (or in the old days, they called this position “secretaries”). They know everything and everyone. Their title may fool you. They are more than simple administrators. They are really the Junior Vice President/Office Manager/Human Resource/Facilities gurus all rolled into one.

Don'ts:

- **Don't try to be the life of the party.** Think of yourself as the guest at a party, not the host. You're just a new employee, not a celebrity.
- **Don't talk too much and listen too little.** Another business saying states it perfectly, "you have two ears and one mouth." At the initial introduction, whether one-on-one or in a group setting (and that includes initial staff meetings), you will build a better image if you are less talkative, listen and observe more. You are in learning mode. There is also a great benefit from getting others to talk to you and tell you about themselves and what they do – they feel better about you because you made them feel better about themselves. People love to talk about themselves. You'll gain a fan because you expressed an interest in what they do and you allowed them to brag a bit. Listening more and talking less is really hard for some people to do. Some of you are naturally shy or non-talkative so you will default to this at this stage of your career in the company. This accidental behavior is a safety default.

Some of you, however, are on the other end of the continuum. You cannot help yourself. I cannot stress how hard you must resist the temptation to talk. I have the disease and battled it all my life. When I was in kindergarten, my mom said I was put in the corner a lot because I talked too much. Here are typical examples of what I've heard from new employees I've met – excessive small talk, jump into business talk, brag about where they went to school, brag about where they worked before, share improvement opportunities they see in the company already, how they use to do something at their last employment, etc. As the new employee, you will have time and better ways to share all that. I'm not saying you shouldn't build relationships at work. But this is too much, too soon.

- **Don't over estimate how important you *really* are.** Enduring the interviewing period and ending up with an offer is extremely exhilarating and a real ego booster. It's great to feel wanted. You imagine going to work on the first day and expect banners and signs and a welcoming committee. WAKE UP! Once you start the job, the courting is over. Don't be disillusioned. That's just how things work. Keep your expectations low. Don't expect everyone you meet to look at you as the savior. Even if you are going to relieve their workload, most people are busy with their own responsibilities and you may be a distraction away from whatever they are doing.

As the new person, you may even be a burden initially as they have to train you and tolerate your learning curve.

The 100 Day Plan

It is odd, but most organizations have an "assimilation program" for senior managers, but not for lower level jobs. Using a football analogy, the assimilation plan helps an employee get familiar with the team and the game: it's players, player's numbers, player's positions/functions, organization's policy and culture, and its support structure. Don't wait for someone to handhold you through the initial assimilation or orientation process. Take the initiative and create a plan.

Outline a plan of what you want to accomplish in the first 100 days on the job – we'll call it the 100 Days Plan. Start with the goals of the position you gathered from your hiring manager and others on the hiring team. Your direct manager should have a set of goals written or at the very least verbally communicated in a clear manner. And if you paid attention, and asked probing questions during the interviews, you would have gained valuable insight that can help to elaborate upon the goals, define new ones, or identify tasks associated with the goals.

For the first few weeks, your plan would obviously involve mostly general housekeeping items such as:

1. getting introduced to fellow employees, especially key co-workers, team members, key departments
2. getting familiar with the facilities (finding out where the various departments within the building are located and such)
3. getting your workspace set up
4. basic company policies and processes, such as getting a computer, an email account, forms for expenses and time cards (companies still use this in this 21st century) and so forth, proper parking area, etc. With some companies, you may be handed a Company Policy manual/binder
5. schedule for training if necessary (depends on the type of job)

The remaining weeks of the plan should involve the actual workings of your position and what action plan and tasks are needed to accomplish your goals. This will involve the following:

- Reviewing documents and files relevant to your projects and goals.

- Attending detailed meetings with key individuals that will play a role in your ability to accomplish your goals.
- Identify specific tactics for accomplishing the goals and the details that define your job function and its goals.

Key Actions Checklist

- Do all you can to make a good first impression. Make sure you're well dressed and well groomed.
- Make notes on every person you meet. Say their name somewhere in your greeting and/or departure.
- Respect everyone.
- Listen more. Talk less.
- Develop a 100 Days Plan.