


# Starting a New Job

Each work day, an estimated 100,000 Americans start new jobs, say the authors of *Fitting In*. The experience is exciting and a bit nerve-racking, whether it's your first job or fiftieth. It brings change in many areas of your life. You can ease the transition by knowing what to expect and preparing for it in advance.



The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary.  
Donald Kendall

**Quote**

## Form Realistic Expectations


Whether you realize it or not, you have imagined how your new job will be. You have expectations. It's important to examine and temper those ideas with a strong dose of reality.

The more unrealistic your expectations, the greater the likelihood that you will feel disappointed by your new position. The more realistic your expectations, however, the more likely that you will enjoy the experience and handle difficulties calmly.

The key is to strike the right balance. If you think everything will be perfect, you set yourself up for a fall. If, on the other hand, you think it will all be terrible, you may arrive at work with such a negative attitude that everything *seems* terrible. The truth is probably somewhere in between.

Realistically, you can expect that the first few days will be chaotic as you learn about the job, the people and the place. You can also expect to feel a wide range of emotions, some of them conflicting.

Of course, your own experience will depend on your personality, the type of work you do and the environment of your work site.



There is nothing more miserable and foolish than anticipation.  
Seneca

**Quote**

Here are some areas where you might form specific expectations. They are, in fact, what is "new" in a new job:

- Duties
- People
- Systems
- Procedures
- Atmosphere
- Expectations
- Work space
- Commute
- Lunch routine
- Equipment
- Attitudes
- Level of security

### A Texan Story

Cynthia recently moved to Houston with her husband. She found a new position and was very excited to start work. She thought the new company would be like the one she'd left behind in Tyler: the work itself would be fun and her coworkers would become like family to her.

She was wrong. Everyone seemed to have plans after work and they were so busy in the office that few people joked around. Cynthia felt very alone and isolated. She realized that the same type of job doesn't always land you with the same type of people. She even thought about quitting, but decided to give it some time.

Eventually, Cynthia became friendly with some of the people in her division. They ate lunch together regularly but didn't become the close friends she'd hoped for. Cynthia let go of that expectation. Instead, she found great friends in her neighborhood and through her volunteer work.



# School versus Work

If you are starting your first job or your first "professional" job, you may think that it will be a lot like school. Or that it will be nothing like school. The reality lies somewhere in between, as the table below illustrates. Reviewing the differences and similarities between school and work may help you form more realistic expectations about your new job.

## Comparison of School and Work

While there may be more differences between school and work than similarities, the factors the two have in common are vitally important. In these areas, school really does prepare you for work.

## More Rights at Work than at School

In high school, you don't have many rights. You're still considered a minor and often treated like a child.

In the work world, you have many rights guaranteed by law. Each of these rights comes with the responsibility to be honest and perform your job to the best of your ability.

### You have the right to:

- be paid the minimum wage, depending on federal, state, county and city law.
- work only the maximum hours established by law.
- receive overtime compensation at a rate of time and a half (if appropriate).
- work in safe conditions.
- report unsafe working conditions with no fear of being fired.
- work and be hired without discrimination against you based on your:
  - race.
  - religion.
  - gender.
  - national origin.
  - age (if you are 40 years or older).
  - physical or mental disabilities.
- be free of sexual harassment, whether blatant or environmental.
- organize and exercise your rights as a member of a labor union.

### If eligible, you have the right to:

- receive up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave.
- receive 60 days advance notice of major layoffs or plant closings.
- use pregnancy as a reason for sick leave.

**If under eighteen**, you receive special protection under the law. You:

- cannot work if you are under the age of 14.
- can work only in a limited way if you are 14 to 15 (and may need a permit).
- cannot engage in any hazardous work if you are aged 17 or younger.

DIFFERENCES	
School	Work
Many teachers	One boss
Frequent evaluation (e.g., exams, report cards)	Annual review
1-2 hour work cycle	8-hour-a-day work cycle
Summers off and long holiday breaks	One or two weeks off a year
New assignments and classes every semester	Slow change in job tasks and job titles
Annual promotion (e.g., junior to senior)	Infrequent promotion
Can slack off and then cram for exams, papers	Usually work at a steady pace every day
Can get perfect grades	No way to be perfect
Learn on one kind of equipment/software	Use different kinds of equipment/software
Form short-term relationships with classmates	Form long-term relationships with coworkers
Fellow students generally of your age and experience level	Coworkers generally of all ages and levels of experience
Told what to do and when it's due	Maybe told what to do or maybe have to figure it out; must be self-motivated
Judged on your "product;" appearance, behavior and demeanor often ignored	Judged on your "product;" appearance, behavior and demeanor
Can start fresh with a new professor every semester	Keep the same boss a long time
Answer only to yourself, usually; if you're late, it hurts only you.	Answer to other people; if you're late, others have to cover
Learn from your teacher or professor	Learn from coworkers as much as from your supervisor

SIMILARITIES	
School	Work
Must focus on the task at hand	Must focus on the task at hand
Must learn new skills	Must learn new skills
Must be patient with the learning process	Must be patient with the learning process
Must get along with different types of people	Must get along with different types of people

adapted from *Graduating into the Nineties* by Carol Carter and Gary June

adapted from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.



# How the Job May Be

Some common threads run through the experience of most “new hires.” Here’s what you should expect from your new employer, regardless of the type of work you do or the type of company that hired you.

## Orientation

Usually on the first day, someone orients you to your new environment and helps you complete all the necessary hiring paperwork. The box below lists some items that orientations often include.

Some organizations, such as government agencies or large companies, have a formal orientation class for you to attend. Most smaller companies do not. Some may not even have a checklist to ensure that you get all the information you need. Come prepared with your own questions!

Formal orientations, while helpful, may sometimes seem boring and include parts not relevant to your department or job duties. Attend anyway and learn everything you can. You don’t know now what you’ll need to know later on.

Regardless of the orientation style, you will spend a lot of time filling out forms, detailing everything from emergency contact information to your insurance plan selection.

Often, someone from the Human Resources department leads the orientation and you may never see that person again while you work at that company. Still, don’t hesitate to ask as many questions as you need to in order to fully understand everything you sign and decide.

### Possible Orientation Items

Orientation typically covers the following items:

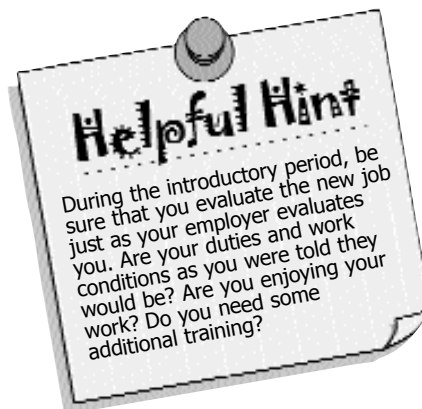
- bathroom location
- pay day information
- how to take time off work
- building/office key
- employee identification card
- tour of facility
- health and safety rules
- lines of authority
- work rules
- phone system
- parking
- evaluation process
- W-4 (federal tax form)
- direct deposit authorization
- benefits information

## Introductory Period


The first ninety days on the job serve as an introductory period for you and your employer to decide whether you fit in with the organization. If you are not a match, your supervisor may let you go or you may leave yourself.

This period often ends with a brief job review, which you can request. This review may provide valuable feedback about how well you’re pleasing your boss, coworkers and other customers.

Ask for feedback from your supervisor along the way, however. That way, you won’t be surprised at review time.



from a Texan



The first few weeks are about getting used to the environment, not really the work.

Randy, computer repairer, Amarillo

**Quote**

## Benefit Limits

In the beginning, you probably will not have access to all your benefits. You may accrue vacation time, for instance, but not be able to use it.

Your access to insurance, especially, has limits. Often, your insurance coverage will not “kick in” for a few months and you may need to delay non-essential doctor visits until it does. This policy protects companies from individuals who take a job just to get benefits, only to quit once they meet their medical needs.

## Training

Your employer may require you to attend some training when you first begin your job. The training may be formal, explaining procedures for certain tasks. Nursing home aides, for example, may learn the proper way to lift clients.

Other times, the training may be informal, consisting solely of something like, “Follow Joe around for a couple days. Help him with his work and see how it’s done.”

In some cases, the training may focus on social issues. Many organizations require new employees to attend diversity or sexual harassment training, for example, to maintain a harmonious work environment and ensure that newcomers understand the rules.

Even if you think you don’t need the training session, keep an open mind and positive attitude. Your boss may not be present but the trainer may report on how you behave.



## New Jargon


Every profession and company has its own language or jargon. Jargon may be unique words and terms, as well as special meanings to common terms. Emergency room workers, for example, refer to motorcycle drivers as “organ donors” because of the injuries and deaths that motorcycle accidents cause. That’s jargon.

Jargon also includes acronyms and initials. One software development firm, for instance, often speaks of WIBNs (pronounced “wibbons”). WIBN stands for Wouldn’t It Be Nice? It describes a feature or product that is, at present, impractical, as in “Using animated graphics in that software package would be amazing, but given our deadline, it’s just a WIBN.”

When you’re hired, first of all, it’s your responsibility to make as good and as strong an image as you can.

Mary Ellen Mark

**Quote**



You probably won’t understand all the jargon at your new job on your first day. No one does. Learning the jargon is part of the process of becoming an “insider” in the organization.

## New Equipment

The equipment and tools you use on the job may differ from those at your previous job or school. You may see differences in software brands, vehicle models and so on.

While the new worksite can seem “intimidating because of the new technology,” as administrative assistant Alberto discovered, unfamiliar equipment provides a wonderful opportunity to learn. Be grateful for it.

## New Policies and Procedures

Every organization has policies and procedures, whether written or not. Policies represent a company’s stand on a particular issue, as in “It’s our policy not to accept returns without a store receipt.”

Procedures, on the other hand, describe the approved method to accomplish some task, such as a blood bank’s procedure for taking donations.

Policies and procedures vary widely from company to company. Some organizations are very bureaucratic and require you to complete a form for everything. Others are more flexible and relaxed—even chaotic!—about their rules.

These differences extend into the simplest job functions. One company may ask that you say, “Hello. This is Company X” when you answer the phone. Another may want you to say, “Hello, you’ve reached Company Y. My name is Z. How may I help you?”

Learn your company’s policies and procedures and follow them. Do everything “by the book.” Later you can decide which rules you may bend—and how far. You may follow others’ example, but remember: You can be held responsible for not following a rule—or law—even if no one else follows it either.

**Helpful Hint**

Your employer expects you to perform in the way you are told. It may not be your way or the way you think it should be. And it may not be the way you see others around you doing things.



## “New Hire” Duties

When you begin any new job, you must expect to “pay some dues.” You will not earn as much, usually, as those who do the same job but have been there longer. You likely will not be assigned the best projects or tasks. And you probably will get the worst schedules.



You may have graduated at the top of your class at nursing school but you’ll still start out cleaning bedpans. That’s the way it is. For everyone.

New hire duties can be a temporary

Your initial responsibilities in an entry-level job... might be mundane, very routine, unchallenging, not at all related to [your training].

Paul Kaponya

**Quote**

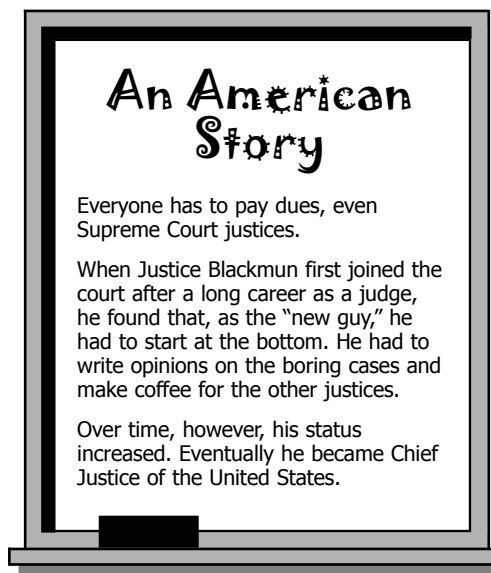
drag but they won’t last forever. Once you’ve paid your dues, they’re paid—until you change jobs again.

**An American Story**

Everyone has to pay dues, even Supreme Court justices.

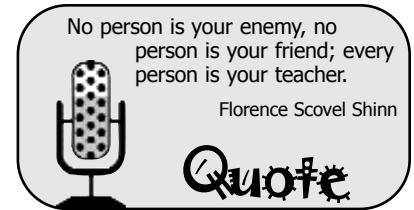
When Justice Blackmun first joined the court after a long career as a judge, he found that, as the “new guy,” he had to start at the bottom. He had to write opinions on the boring cases and make coffee for the other justices.

Over time, however, his status increased. Eventually he became Chief Justice of the United States.



## How the People May Be

You can start your new work relationships on the right track if you form realistic expectations about them. If you don't expect them to be perfect, you won't take any seemingly negative behavior personally and you'll enjoy positive interactions even more.



### Supervisor

Your supervisor's job is to help you be productive. That's it. Your boss is not your parent, not your friend, not your career counselor and not your enemy. These simple facts can set the tone for how you treat him or her.

Your goal in this relationship is to please your supervisor and learn how to help him or her help *you*. The better you know your boss, the more effective you can be. To succeed, you must adjust to his or her style because your supervisor will not change to suit you.

The box below lists some of the supervisor personality types you may experience. Which describes your boss? How can you adapt yourself to work with that style?

#### Types of Supervisors

The following are just *some* of the supervisory styles you may encounter at work. Despite the names, any type can be male or female.

Pay attention to which style you like. It'll help you pick a more compatible supervisor next time you're job hunting.

Your boss may be a:

- **Mystery Man:** withdrawn and distant, rarely present or really overseeing your work.
- **Drill Sergeant:** loud and aggressive; hurls orders and demands instant results.
- **Nit Picker:** insists on reviewing everything you do with a fine tooth comb.
- **Cheerleader:** heavy on the pep talks, light on actually accomplishing anything of value.
- **Bottom Liner:** expects you to complete assignments on time; doesn't care how.
- **Baffler:** doesn't know what she wants but expects you to produce it; talks in circles.
- **Social Climber:** always trying to advance at the company; may take credit for your work.

### Coworkers

You may spend a great deal of time with your coworkers—maybe more than with your family. Their ways can profoundly affect you.

A miserable coworker can demoralize a workplace, a vindictive one can terrorize it and a pleasant, reliable one can brighten it immeasurably. You will know coworkers of all kinds. Here's what to expect from them in general:

#### Forgetting You

When you first meet your coworkers, they usually are welcoming and interested. Once you begin working, however, they may seem unavailable. It's not that they dislike you. It's just that they're busy with their own work. Do not take it personally.

In fact, the authors of *Fitting In* recommend that you expect to be excluded at first, especially socially. Coworkers may not invite you to join them for lunch, for example. They probably aren't trying to exclude you; they just haven't thought of you at all.

#### Stereotyping You

People base initial judgments on appearance. If you show up with a lip ring and several visible tattoos, your coworkers will form an impression. If you wear clothes that you cannot afford on your salary, they will form a different impression. If you are a man, a woman, white or of color, tall or short, fat or thin, people will take all their preconceptions about that characteristic and assign it to you. It's human nature.

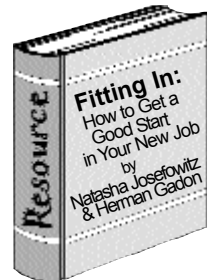
This stereotyping is not good or bad, but it does exist. Be aware that you confirm or contradict someone's stereotypes of you every day. Time and experience will help them see the real you. Meanwhile, try to see past the stereotypes you yourself hold.

#### Labeling Your Work Style

Coworkers will also label how you act, not just how you look. Are you easy-going? Are you hard-working? Will you threaten their position or make their jobs easier?

You have more control over this type of labeling. Make sure it's positive.

Demonstrate your openness, willingness and—most of all—respect. It is through your behavior that you help shape the labels that people may have about you.



### A Texan Story

Estela was a top salesperson at a windows treatment company in El Paso. She got along well with the clients, but her coworkers couldn't stand her.

She had temper tantrums in the office and even called her coworkers mean names. On more than one occasion, a fellow salesperson left work in tears. Eventually people began to quit to get away from her.

Soon after, the owner fired Estela. He decided that peace in the office mattered more than her top sales. Estela found that if you can't fit in, you're out!

## How You May Feel

You can realistically expect to have many conflicting emotions and impressions when you start your new job. *Everyone* does at first.

So don't judge the job on your first few months there. You don't have all the information yet and you can't trust your feelings because they swing up and down like a rollercoaster. Here's some of what you may experience:

### Overwhelmed

You may feel overwhelmed when you begin a new job; many people do. You receive so much information that you need to learn, but it's too much to take in all at once. At the same time, you have to cope with all your feelings. No wonder you might feel overloaded for a while.

### Lonely

It is very normal to feel lonely, left out and "different" when you first begin a new job. And it's realistic because people really may exclude you for a while. It will pass.



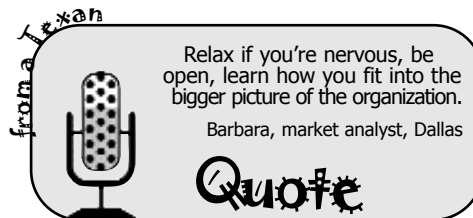
### Anxious, Doubtful

When you start a new job, you may feel a mixture of apprehension and doubt. You may question whether you can do the job or fear that the job will disappoint you. You may wonder whether you made the right decision in taking the job. The list goes on and on. Don't worry too much: Everyone has those fears!

### Dependent

In the beginning, you are dependent on others. You must rely on them for everything—from learning where the bathroom is and which tools to use to updating you on a project's status.

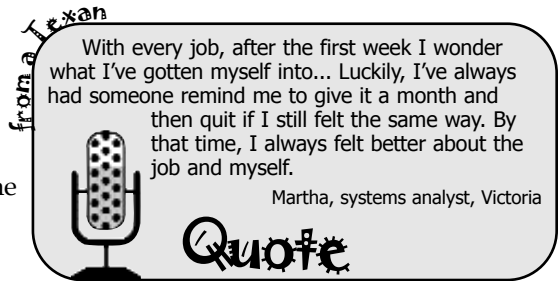
If you value self-sufficiency, you may dislike having to rely on others. That's OK—do it anyway. Being new gives you a chance to practice asking for help. It's an important skill to possess.



### Uncomfortable

You may feel uncomfortable when you start a new job. Your old comforts—routine, familiarity—are gone. Even if you didn't like how things were, at least you knew what would happen next! With a new job comes new possibilities and the sense that you are not as in control as you once were.

You may also feel discomfort for practical reasons. Your new work hours may upset your sleep schedule. Until you adjust, you may be tired—a very uncomfortable feeling indeed, especially when you want to prove yourself at work.



### Excited, Motivated

You may feel very excited and motivated at your new job. The people or equipment might cause part of it. As Roger, a shipping clerk in Midland, explained, a new job is "exciting. It's fun to be in new surroundings... to slowly meet people." Paul, an economist, added that he felt both "curiosity and motivation, with new people and a new computer."

Maybe the challenge of the job excites you. Or maybe you're just ecstatic that you'll finally be able to pay off some debts or buy new clothes.

Whatever the reason for your excitement, you feel motivated to prove yourself worthy of being hired. You're ready to start fresh, learn new things and let go of the past. This mixture of feelings gives you the energy to perform well in your first few days on the job.

### A Texan Story

Jan, a customer service representative at a discount store in Amarillo, loves her current job but she didn't always.

She says that when she first began working there, she "hated it, was depressed, and took two or three months to adjust."

Give the job some time if you don't like it at first. It may become your dream job, just as Jan's job became hers.

# Group Initiation

I still think it's good that you don't treat a rookie like a king... In a crazy sort of way [the initiation process makes] a young player feel as if he is one of the guys and part of the team.

Pat Curran, former manager  
San Diego Chargers



**Quote**

In some organizations and industries, "new hires" typically undergo some form of group initiation. Coworkers may send a new lab technician to hunt for a piece of equipment that doesn't exist, for instance. Or they have the new customer service rep speak with a regular customer whom they know is a little unbalanced mentally.

This type of group initiation can be obvious or subtle. Generally, the closer-knit the group, the greater the "rite of passage" for a newcomer to join it. Being prepared for some initiation makes it easier for you to handle it good-naturedly.

## Reasons for Initiation

Group initiation accomplishes more than a laugh at a newcomer's expense. It actually serves several purposes:

**Creates a common bond.**

You and others who have gone through the same thing have all made it through "bootcamp" together.

**Makes joining more attractive.**

The harder it is to get "in," the more desirable "in" becomes.

**Establishes the "pecking order."**

It reaffirms that you're the new person and must respect the "old-timers."

**Reveals your character.**

The way you respond shows how you handle yourself under stress.

**Proves your reliability.**

Your response indicates whether you will be loyal to the group or to yourself.

**Tests your competence.**

You demonstrate whether you are qualified for the job. Can you lift those boxes? Work those hours? The authors of *Fitting In* write of coworkers leaving extra money in a bank teller's box to test her honesty—a key job requirement. In some occupations, such as police work, your competence literally means the difference between life and death.

## How to Handle Initiation Rites

If you respond with grace, good humor and competence, the group will welcome you readily. If you argue, complain or "tattle," you may never be fully accepted. Here are some tips:

**Be prepared.**

You won't react as strongly if you expect some sort of prank.

**Laugh at yourself.**

Laughing shows that you have a sense of humor and can take a joke.

**Take it as a positive sign.**

See a prank or joke as the group offering you a chance to join.

**Get to know your coworkers individually.**

Meet casually with as many them as possible, as soon as possible. It's not as easy for people to play pranks when they know and like you.

**Don't complain.**

Don't go to your supervisor unless you've carefully decided that the situation has crossed the line into hazing.

## Initiation versus Hazing

Group initiation, which helps you join the group, is VERY different from harassment and abuse, which can also happen at work. The Associated Press reported on one incident in 1999, for instance, when trainees at a Texas jail alleged that they were "pinned down, hogtied and beaten as part of a hazing ritual."

This example shows obvious abuse but sometimes the distinction is not always so clear cut. If you have a question about any initiation experience, consult the chart below to help you clarify whether it falls under initiation or harassment.

Initiation	Harassment/Abuse
Happens to everyone	Happens to a select few (usually)
Stops fairly soon	Continues
Good humored	Mean spirited or sexually-driven
Harmless	Harmful
Tests your competence, sense of humor	Exerts power over you
Helps you join the group	Separates you from others
Handle it by being good humored, respectful, humble and quiet	Handle it by setting limits and, if necessary, reporting it to a supervisor

from *Fitting In*

Where do you think the phrases 'learning the ropes' and 'paying your dues' come from? You have to earn your place on the team.



Gary, graphic designer, Abilene

**Quote**

## A Special Note for Women

Research has shown that men and women tend to treat initiation behavior differently. While men see it in terms of relationships, women often perceive it as a power issue. They are more likely to view it as harassment and complain to their supervisor.

Especially in traditionally male-dominated fields, women should examine whether the treatment they receive is typical of what other newcomers receive. If so, they might view it as an opportunity to join the group and not as an effort to expel a woman from the ranks.

# Gossip

According to Webster's *New College Dictionary*, gossip is "rumor or talk of a personal... nature." It usually means talking negatively about *someone else's* personal life but it's possible to gossip about yourself as well. In moderation, gossip can be helpful, but often it hurts. Here are some of the consequences of gossiping and how to handle gossip when it arises. Because it will!

## Gossip Can Help

Gossiping can help you in many ways. It:

### Reveals the corporate culture.

If people talk about how so-and-so always leaves work early, it reinforces the fact that this behavior is not acceptable.

### Warns of potential problems.

Before takeovers or layoffs, rumors usually fly. Paying attention to those stories and "staying in the loop" can help you prepare for the future.

### Shows enthusiasm (if work-related).

It demonstrates your interest in your career—making you seem to be an "up and comer."

### Provides a reality check.

If you have personal difficulties with someone, it can help to know that others have the same problem. You still need to find a solution for yourself, but at least you know you're not alone.

People hate [or gossip about!] those who make them feel their own inferiority.

Lord Chesterfield

Quote

## Gossip about You

You may someday find yourself the subject of gossip. You can respond in many ways:

### Ignore it.

If the rumor isn't damaging, just let it go.

### Confront it.

Ask the gossiping person to stop it and/or retract it publicly.

### Report it.

Tell your supervisor and/or Human Resources department verbally and in writing about the rumors. If the problem escalates later, you'll have a "paper trail" to support you.

### Be skeptical of it.

Beware of "friends" who tell you about other people's rude comments about you. How do you know they're telling the truth? And why are they tattling instead of standing up for you?

## Gossip Can Hurt

Spreading gossip can harm you and others. It:

### Ruins people's reputations.

When the rumors are serious—whether they're true or not—they can destroy careers and even lead to legal action. The consequences of gossiping can be more grave than you think.

### Makes you look bad.

Spreading false rumors shows you are a liar. Telling mean stories exposes you as cruel. Complaining about bosses or coworkers demonstrates that you're negative and divisive. And making fun of other people reveals your own weak spots since we dislike in others what we dislike in ourselves. However you gossip, then, it reveals your own poor character.

### Causes people to distrust you.

Even if they listen eagerly to your stories of others, they won't trust you with personal information because they know you're a blabbermouth. And they will not inform you of potentially important changes and opportunities because they know you'll spread it around.

### Makes people question your judgment.

You can do great harm if you gossip about your own life. People will see you as indiscreet. Worse, they will perceive you as having poor judgment. You'll seem less competent than you are, which may prevent you from moving into positions of greater authority.

### Leads to retaliation.

Gossiping makes you a target. Others, particularly those hurt by your rumors, may try to sabotage you personally or professionally. Gossips always have to watch their backs.

### Can get you fired.

Spreading customer or personnel information can be particularly destructive. Discussing clients' medical conditions or purchase histories, for example, may lead to lawsuits and firings.

If you hate a person, you hate something in him that is part of yourself. What isn't part of ourselves doesn't disturb us.

Hermann Hesse

Quote

Don't gossip about others in the office until you know exactly what games are going on around you.

Cosmopolitan magazine

Quote

## Gossip about Others

You can use different strategies, including those listed below, to deal with gossip that you encounter. Whatever you do, remain respectful. Acting "high and mighty" only makes you a target for the next rumor. Instead, you can:

### Ignore it.

If someone begins gossiping to you, don't respond with questions or comments. Just say "hmmm" and then change the subject. If you overhear others gossiping, simply ignore them or move away.

### Re-direct it.

If a coworker begins gossiping (especially complaining) about someone, encourage the gossip to speak with that person directly. "It sounds like you're really angry. Have you talked with her about it? That might help." This statement redirects the negative comments and enables you to be helpful.

### Challenge it.

If a coworker speaks negatively of someone else, you can defend that person—even if you don't like him or her either. You can also subtly attack the gossip's credibility. Saying "There's no way to know what's going on inside another person's head," for instance, may be enough to defuse attempts to malign someone's motives.

### Express discomfort with it.

Calmly and with good humor say "I hate to think of what might be said about me when I'm not around, so I don't want to talk about anyone else." By focusing on yourself and not the gossip, you can express how you feel—maybe even get a laugh—and then move on.


### Make amends for it.

When you gossip (and you will!) make amends as soon as possible. *Don't* tell the person you gossiped about unless she/he already knows. Your apology will only cause unnecessary hurt.

Instead, go to the people you gossiped to and take responsibility. Explain why you did it: you were jealous, angry, you wanted to tear someone down. Ask them to forgive you and forget everything you said.

# Succeed Your First Day

The day has finally arrived. You're ready to start your new job. Here are some strategies for making your first day at work a success:



[S]end thank-you's to the people who helped you get the job you did take. It would be very bad form for them to find out from someone else [about it].  
Ron Fry  
*Your First Job*

**Quote**

## 1. Prepare for Orientation

You can start out on the right foot if you prepare for your first day long before you arrive:

- Know when you will get paid and roughly the amount you will receive.
- Bring a personal item for your work space to claim it as your own.
- Bring a calculator to figure out benefits and deductions.
- Ask the questions listed below.

## 2. Be Ready to Start Fresh

Before you begin your new assignment, tie up the loose ends of your job hunt. It helps you begin with a clean slate.

- Thank all the people who supported you during your job search. Offer to help them some day.
- End your current job on good terms. Your current employer can be an ally during your next job search; don't "burn any bridges" just because you resigned.

## 3. Research the Company

Research your new employer so that the people, places and information you'll encounter on your first day will make sense, recommends Ron Fry in *Your First Job*.

Ask for a copy of the employee handbook and most recent newsletter. Once at work, continue the research by asking your boss and coworkers about their personal experiences with the company.

## 4. Encourage Yourself

Remind yourself that they hired you for a reason. You are qualified and valued and you can handle this job! Given all your life experiences, you've been preparing for this job for years.

As Ron Fry explains, even elementary school taught you about "deadlines, pleasing the boss (the teacher) while pleasing... co-workers (the other kids)." You already have many of the skills you need!



## 5. Relax

Finally, now that you're here on your first day, relax. There's no need to prove yourself right now. You can make friends later. Enjoy the fact that no one expects much from you today! Just breathe deeply and take it all in.

### Questions to Ask

#### BEFORE YOU START WORK

Sometime between accepting and starting the job, ask your new supervisor these questions:

##### Reporting

- What time should I arrive?
- Where do I go when I arrive?
- To whom should I report?
- Do I need to bring any of these documents:
  - Birth certificate
  - Driver's license
  - Social Security card
  - Work permit (if under 18 or non-citizen)
  - Results of physical exam
  - License (e.g., driver's, bartender, LVN)
- Do I need to bring any tools, equipment?
- Should I bring lunch or lunch money?

##### Dress

- Will I need to wear a uniform? If so:
  - What does it include?
  - When and where do I get it?
  - Do I have to pay for it and how much?
  - What care am I responsible for giving it?
- Are there items I need to wear/avoid for safety reasons, such as:
  - Safety goggles
  - Steel-toed boots
  - Earplugs
  - Jewelry

#### ON YOUR FIRST DAY

As your new employer orients you to your new job, don't forget to ask these questions:

##### Supplies

- Where are they kept?
- Who's in charge? Who is that person's boss?
- How can I order them?

##### Phones/Email

- How does the system work?
- Who—if anyone—answers when I'm out?
- Do I answer for anyone? Who? How should I communicate with them?

##### Breaks

- Do I need to find a replacement when I go on break or use the rest room?
- Am I allowed the usual 15 minutes break every four hours in addition to meal breaks?
- How long are meal break(s)? When are they?

adapted from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

# Understand Your Paycheck

Many first-time workers feel shock when they receive their first pay check. They don't realize how much of their income is withheld for Social Security, federal income taxes, insurance and other expenses.

## Keep It Accurate

Computers don't make mistakes but the people who use them do. Always check your paystubs and time sheets for accuracy—EVERY pay period.

If you have questions, ask them. Don't worry about bothering anyone or asking more than once. Your time and talents are valuable and it's up to you to ensure that you get paid what you deserve.

## Timesheets

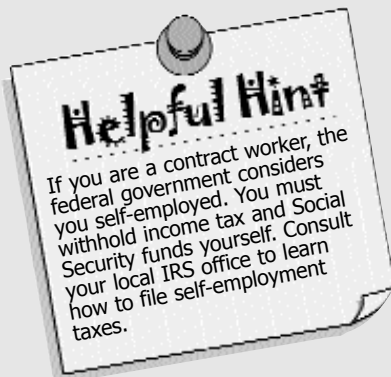
Accurate timesheets ensure that you receive credit for all the hours you work, especially holiday time and over-time, which often pay extra. Your hours affect your pay, as well as your vacation and sick time accrual, so they're very important.

## Paystubs

Whether your employer deposits your pay electronically into your bank account ("direct deposit") or you cash a check, you receive a statement about the amount. This statement is the "paystub."

The paystub details exactly how much pay you received based on hours worked ("gross"), how much was deducted and how much you actually take home ("net").

If you are underpaid, bring it to the employer's attention; no one else will. If you are overpaid, again notify your employer. Eventually someone in Payroll will realize the error and you will have to repay every extra cent you received.



To avoid a surprise, you need to understand your benefits and deductions well before you receive your first paycheck. They may vary widely, depending on your employer and position.

## Benefits

Your employer likely offers you a number of benefits beyond your base wages. Some of these you pay for with money deducted from your paycheck. Benefits may include:

### FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act)

Your employer matches your contribution to your Social Security fund.

### UI (Unemployment Insurance)

Your employer sets aside funds that you can claim if you lose your job under certain circumstances. Known as "collecting unemployment."

### Workers' Compensation Insurance

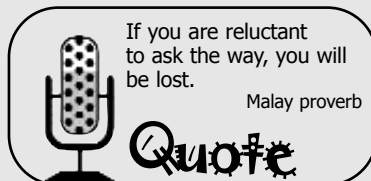
Your employer partially pays for time off and medical expenses if you are injured on the job.



## Other

- Health insurance
- Employee assistance program (counseling)
- Credit union
- Educational assistance/tuition reimbursement
- Discounts at local stores
- Legal assistance
- Concierge services
- Child care
- Health fairs
- Company-funded picnics and/or parties

adapted from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.



## Possible Payroll Deductions

This list details items that your employer may possibly deduct from your paycheck.

### Required by Law

- Federal income tax
- State and local income taxes (not applicable in some states, including Texas)
- Social Security (gets credited to your Social Security retirement account)

### Voluntary or Required by Employer/Union

- Retirement fund (may be mandatory, especially if you work for a government entity)
- Health insurance
- Union dues (in certain occupations only)

### Voluntary

- 401K (or other long-term investment account)
- Life insurance
- Disability insurance
- Medical reimbursement account (allows you to set aside pre-tax money for the medical expenses you expect to pay during a one-year period)
- Child care reimbursement account (allows you to set aside pre-tax money for the child care expenses you expect to pay during a one-year period)
- Short-term savings
- Charity donation
- Child support
- Stock options
- Past-due taxes

adapted from *Job Savvy* by LaVerne Ludden, Ed.D.

# Develop Positive Work Relationships

You can choose your friends but you (usually) can't choose your coworkers. Still, you must rely on them to succeed. Here are some ways you can begin to build harmonious and productive work relationships with anyone at work.

## Learn Names

Building relationships begins your first day on the job, as you learn your coworkers' names and titles.

Take a few minutes to speak one-on-one with each coworker. If their position is the same as yours (you're both waiters, for example), you can ask how long they've worked at that company and others. If their position is different, learn how their job connects with yours.

Take notes and include descriptions of each person. It'll help you remember them all later.

### A Texan Story

When Sarah began teaching at a middle school in Lubbock, she quickly discovered that teachers celebrated many social occasions—most of which required gifts.

Sarah wanted to participate the way everyone else did, but she worried about the expense. She asked some of the more experienced teachers about the typical price range for gifts, which helped her avoid over- or under-spending on her purchases.

These days, Sarah simplifies her shopping by estimating her gift needs for the whole year and purchasing all her presents and cards (plus some extras) in the fall before classes begin.


She simplifies further by selecting a standard gift for each type of occasion. Now when an event arises, Sarah just goes to her closet, grabs a box (pre-wrapped in occasion-related paper) and signs an appropriate card. In minutes, she's ready to go.

## Learn Norms

Each organization has cultural norms — the unofficial “rules” for work and for social interactions. Cultural rules may differ from the “official” rules.

When you first arrive, pay attention to what others do and follow suit. “In time, you become an insider, and can risk being different yet still... part of the group,” explain the authors of *Fitting In*.

from a Texan



Look to your coworkers to learn informal rules. See who's moving up and who's not.  
Brian, data analyst, Austin


**Quote**

The cultural rules for work include such things as how you keep your workspace. In one office, a clean desk shows an ordered mind; in another, it means you're not working.

Cultural norms also extend into socializing outside work. People in some companies lunch together and meet after work—but never with the boss. Elsewhere, people treat supervisors as they would peers.

Participation in social activities *at* work is another cultural norm. If possible, attend parties and group lunches. Contribute to the various collections for wedding shower, baby showers and funeral flowers. You don't have to spend a lot but your involvement sends a message that you want to be a part of the team.

from a Texan



Don't confuse friendliness with friendship. ... Friendships in the workplace should be construed as bonuses, not requirements.  
Judith Briles  
*GenderTraps*

**Quote**

## Choose Allies

Once you know your coworkers a bit, you can begin to make friends. The key to social and professional success is to “stick with the winners”—people who are successful, trustworthy and well-respected.

Don't join any group at work early on. People judge you by your associates, so spend time with different types of people until you know who's who.

Be especially wary of the first person who wants to be your friend. As Ronna Lichtenberg, author of *Work Would Be Great If It Weren't for the People*, explains, “The first person who gloms on to you your first day of work probably has an agenda.” In some cases, that person may not have other friends for a very good reason.

[Your new best buddy] may be a political pariah or next in line for a pink slip. So hang back and shut up.  
*Cosmopolitan magazine*



**Quote**

Once you identify the winners, develop a connection with one person in that group. Over time (and with patience) the friendship will grow. Eventually you will find yourself allied with people as interested in success as you are.

## Reach Out Slowly

Develop all of your work relationships slowly. Even if you like the people you meet, hold back a little. You don't know who to trust in the beginning so moving slowly demonstrates your good judgment, which encourages others to trust you.

"Women are more inclined [than men] to talk too much, be too open, and tell too much about themselves, their fears, and even their weaknesses too soon," says Judith Briles, author of *Confrontaphobia*, but men can be just as guilty. Keep it all business until you've established yourself as a worker.

from a Texan

When you first start, keep it all business. Don't spill your guts about your personal life.

Terence, drafter, Beaumont

Quote

- **Avoid personal questions.**  
Respond politely but vaguely or make a joke. You don't have to answer any question directly.
- **Focus attention on others.**  
Ask coworkers the questions they ask you or comment positively on their workspace. Encourage them to talk about themselves; most people appreciate your interest.
- **Take your cue from the "winners."**  
Observe how much information the successful people in the office reveal and follow their example. Learn how much you can reveal about yourself (and to whom) without losing others' respect.

## Be Sensitive to Differences

You may assume that most people are like you. It's an assumption most people make—and it's wrong. It can even get you into trouble.

Always operate as if those around you are vastly different from you. Assume that they don't share your:

- sexual orientation,
- religion,
- political beliefs,
- attitude toward social issues,
- nationality or state of birth.

When you do, you automatically become more careful about your jokes and comments.

When someone's expressed values or ideas conflict with yours, remember that you are the new person. You need to adapt yourself to fit in. Do so by respecting and being sensitive to others' feelings and beliefs.



## How to Treat People at Work

Here are some of the basic tenets for how to treat coworkers, supervisors, the public and others you may encounter at work.

### 1. Be helpful.

"What goes around, comes around" at work. If you treat others well, they likely will return the favor. Volunteer to help others. Cover shifts if possible. Show eagerness and willingness; don't act as though you're doing anyone a big favor.

### 2. Be tactful.

Always use "tact and diplomacy with the public, supervisors, and coworkers," advises Laurie Cox, a successful business owner in Austin. If you want to say something that is negative, hurtful or inappropriate—Don't!



### 3. Be respectful.

Even if you don't like someone, respect that person's position. Your supervisor may be a tyrant but she is in a position of authority, which you should honor. ALWAYS be polite.

### 4. Be positive.

A simple way to gain a good reputation at work is to be upbeat and positive. Don't complain or whine. Focus on solutions instead.

### 5. Be productive.

When you do your job well, you show your coworkers that you won't waste their time or cause them extra work. It's the most effective way to build positive relationships with them.

## A (New) Texan Story

Rachel moved from New York to Midland because of her husband's new job. She quickly found a position because of her computer skills. She liked her coworkers and enjoyed her work.

One day at a workshop, though, she experienced great discomfort (and bad customer service) when a coworker led the gathering in a prayer that ended with thanks to "Jesus Christ our Lord."

Rachel, who is Jewish, immediately felt excluded from the group. Her coworkers had assumed she was Christian like them and their thoughtlessness made her feel unwelcome. They apologized later but a little sensitivity on their part could have prevented the hurt.

# Succeed Your First Year

Depending on your position, it may take up to six months or a year for you to feel fully comfortable at your new job. Fortunately, you can help make that time pass as smoothly and productively as possible by being patient and doing your job well.

## Be Patient

The first way you can succeed your first year is to be patient with yourself. You are learning about a new job, new people—a new world. Don't expect to know it all today. If you do, you may actually make it more difficult for yourself to learn.

- **Remember that “this too shall pass.”**  
You will not always feel so awkward and uncertain.
- **Help someone else.**  
Instead of worrying about how well you are (or aren't) doing, focus on making life easier for the next “new kid on the block.” The box below may give you some ideas.

### Use Your Experience to Help Others

Someday you'll be the oldtimer, showing the new person the ropes. You can begin preparing for that day while you're still the “new hire” yourself.

- **Pay attention to your feelings.**  
It will help you remember what it's like to be nervous and overwhelmed and new.
- **Pass on the old wisdom.**  
Think about what people told you that really helped you.
- **Pass on the new wisdom.**  
Think about what you *wish* someone had told you when you started.
- **Share the tricks.**  
Identify little tricks or bits of information that you've found make things go easier, faster, better.
- **Make a “cheat sheet.”**  
List terms, acronyms and other jargon so that the next newcomer doesn't have to make one from scratch.
- **Devise a simple manual.**  
Write down the policies and procedures if your new employer doesn't have a manual already. Even if it's just a couple of pages long, it will help you and future new employees.

I was gratified to be able to answer promptly, and I did. I said I didn't know.

Mark Twain

**Quote**

- **Be comfortable with not knowing.**  
No one has all the answers, even people who've worked at a company for twenty years. When someone asks a question and you don't know the answer:
  1. Admit it
  2. Find the answer yourself or ask someone for help.
  3. Follow-through. Tell the customer the answer or verify that your coworker answered the question satisfactorily.

Whatever you do, don't guess. And don't act as though “I don't know” answers the question. The customer won't think so!
- **Don't judge your feelings.**  
If you tell yourself you “shouldn't feel” nervous, incompetent or frustrated, you'll just feel guilty and defensive in addition to feeling nervous, incompetent or frustrated. Just accept the feelings and you'll move forward.
- **Share your feelings.**  
Talking with trusted friends and family. It helps your emotions pass more easily.

At last, the introductions and meetings are over and you're going to have to do some real work... It's like having an open-book test 40 hours every week.

Ron Fry  
Your First Job



**Quote**

- **Take pride in small steps.**  
It's easy to become impatient if you expect yourself to move mountains on your first day at work. Start small and congratulate yourself on each “victory,” such as remembering a procedure or a coworker's name. Seeing your progress helps you to be patient.
- **Remember your goals.**  
At times, your progress may seem too slow or the work too hard. You may feel tempted to give up. You can hang in a little longer when you remind yourself of all the reasons you chose this job in the first place.

### A Texan Story

Barbara had never worked outside the home before and she didn't really like it.

She especially didn't like taking orders. At home, she ran the show—caring for her kids, cooking and cleaning. She set her own schedule, made all the decisions and did things her way. At work, her boss told her what to do all day long.

Barbara didn't quit, though. Every day she reminded herself why she took the job: to make a better life for her kids. How could she give up on that?

Instead, she made it her goal to become a supervisor herself. If she could raise kids, she could do anything!

## Do Your Job Well

The most important way to succeed at your new job is to perform well. Positive relations with others help you do that, but in the end *you* have to be productive. Here's how:

- **Learn.**

Take the initiative to learn as much as you can about your job. Don't stop learning after your first few months. If you need training, request it. Ask questions and—most importantly—listen attentively to the answers. Take notes and study them later so you don't have to repeat your questions.

from a Texan

As a new hire, you have a lot to learn—much of which comes only through experience. Once you begin your new work assignments, it all starts to come into focus.

Surani, supervisor, Dallas

**Quote**

Ask to observe coworkers as they handle situations so that you can learn from them. Then ask them to observe you and give you feedback. The editors of *Communication Briefings* suggest that you ask "What can I do to improve?" rather than "How am I doing?"

Remember that learning takes time. Don't expect to do everything correctly just because someone once showed you how. It takes practice and repetition before you have it down.

from a Texan

Be on time. Ask questions; don't pretend you know. Ask people to show you, not just tell you, how to do things. Most of all, be respectful of the people around you.

Liz, project manager, Ft. Worth

**Quote**

- **Show appreciation.**

When people help you, thank them for their time and experience. It's not part of their job to be patient with you.

- **Follow directions.**

Do as you are told, as soon as you are told, in the way that you are told to do it.

- **Be teachable.**

Remember that you don't know it all. Don't try to "fix" and change everything the first day. You'll alienate others if you do—and you might worsen the problem you want to improve.

- **Take responsibility.**

No one expects you to be perfect and you will make mistakes. Don't try to hide them. Just learn your lessons and move on.

- **Believe in yourself.**

Keep the job in perspective by remembering that you're **Me, Inc.** You chose this job and your employer chose you. You are qualified.

- **Take the initiative.**

As Carol Carter and Gary June point out in *Graduating into the Nineties*, "... today's workers are expected to be more and more self-sufficient. There simply aren't as many managers to go around."

As a result, you may find that taking the initiative once you grow more confident and competent is a job requirement. Be sure, however, that you know the limits of your authority.

- **Do your best.**

Meet or exceed deadlines and expectations. Show your eagerness and willingness to work and learn. If you finish your tasks for the day, ask for more work or help others with theirs.

Whenever you are asked if you can do a job, tell 'em, Certainly I can!—and get busy and find out how to do it.

Theodore Roosevelt



**Quote**

- **Measure your progress.**

Periodically check your performance. Are you learning as much as expected? Is the quality of your work acceptable or better? To find out, you can:

- Compare yourself with someone in a similar (or same) position with similar experience.
- Ask your boss and coworkers informally.

The earlier you get feedback, the better, recommend Carter and June.

### Helpful Hint

Remember: Your boss and your coworkers are on your side. They want you to succeed.

### Clarify Your Role

To succeed at work, you need to constantly clarify your role. To do this:

- **Know your exact job duties.** They may change over time, so be sure you know what is and isn't your responsibility.
- **Talk about expectations and goals.** Consult your supervisor regularly because priorities may change over time.
- **See the "the big picture."** Identify how your job relates to the overall operations of the organization.
- **Know the company's mission and goals.** Make sure that everything you do advances them.