

What You Need to Succeed in the Workplace

by Jean Gatz

If you tend to show up early for class, keep up with your assignments, and put forth extra effort when less would do, you're not just a model student. Chances are, you'll also make a great employee. Most top-level executives look for qualities like initiative and efficiency in the people they hire and promote.

Of course, their expectations of employees don't end there. Here are the key strategies for making a successful transition from campus to the workplace.

Keep your personal life in order.

Employers are usually sensitive to situations where employees are coping with difficult personal issues, such as relationship or marital problems or the illness or loss of a loved one. But, if you find yourself in such a situation, deal with the issues as best you can or ask for help in addressing them. If you ignore your problems, they're likely to spill over into your work and detract from your job performance.

Work smarter, harder, faster.

Accountability is one of the traits that employers value most in employees. What it means, in the words of one executive, is that "you know what needs to be done, and can be counted on to do it right and on time, without constant reminders or supervision."

In the process, think of yourself as a consultant, and continually look for ways that you can function more effectively.

Another practical strategy is to let people in management know that you're interested in doing more to benefit your organization, and ask if they would mentor you. Learn the ropes from others who have already climbed them.

Demonstrate and document value-added.

Always remember that the #1 goal of an organization is to stay in business. With that in mind, find ways to reduce costs or generate revenue for your employer. At the same time, proceed cautiously with any time- or money-saving suggestions. You don't want your colleagues to think of you as a know-it-all who is intent on changing everything.

It also is important to document the work you do and, when asked or whenever appropriate, to let your bosses know of your achievements.

You don't have to get in anyone's face, but the people you report to should know how well you do your job. This strategy for maintaining a positive, visible presence goes hand in hand with cultivating allies and advocates in the workplace.

Welcome change.

You cannot do a job well without adapting to change, whether it takes the form of new technology or added job responsibilities.

While anger and fear are typical responses to change, optimism is the most appropriate one. Ironically, when people are worried about keeping their jobs, they are the most resistant to change. They adopt the exact opposite behavior of what companies are looking for in employees.

Commit to lifelong learning.

One of the consequences of change is having to learn new skills to replace less effective work methods. But it also benefits you to continually expand and refine your abilities. Employers are more likely to retain employees who upgrade their skills over those who do not. Only knowledge—and the ability to apply it—provides this kind of leverage.

Look for leadership opportunities.

Every employee, regardless of job title, should be willing and able to assume a leadership role, whenever the need arises. It's an ideal opportunity to demonstrate your ability and value to an organization.

Communicate openly and directly.

Written, verbal, and electronic skills are essential in every work environment. Knowing how to listen is equally important. The way you communicate is a reflection of how you perceive and perform your job.

As you prepare to enter the work force, think long and hard about how you can get—and do—a great job. Wherever you work, you will need to have exceptional qualities and skills to launch and advance your career.

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