

PREFACE

The colleges and universities of this country award bachelor's and master's degrees each year to hundreds of thousands of students, many of whom go on to make one of the biggest transitions of their adult life: going to work. Often this is an extremely difficult process for which they have little preparation and about which they have little information. It is a time of dramatic change in their personal life and the beginning of a whole new chapter, the development of a professional career. It is a time of great excitement, anxiety, challenge, and accomplishment. As with any major transition in life, it is important that a person negotiate this transition successfully to continue with a happy and growing life. Yet very little is done to prepare students for the transition.

Employers say that the success with which graduates negotiate the transition is critical to their success within the company, as well as their satisfaction with their new career. They also say that they wish students knew more about the "real world" before they came to work. Employers who recognize the importance of a good transition are devoting considerable effort to their employee orientation programs. Most significantly, they are devoting a lot of time to non-task-related training to help employees make a smooth transition to professional life and a strong start. Why? Because these employers know that the first year is when new employees must establish their credibility

as professionals. They know that the new employee's actions and performance can shape his or her entire career. They know that by teaching newly hired employees some basic breaking-in skills they can significantly improve career satisfaction, increase productivity, and, of course, reduce new employee turnover.

Yet there is little information available to help recent graduates, and what is available is restricted to bits and pieces. There are lots of books and materials to help students make a career choice and find a job. Similarly, there are lots of books and materials on climbing the professional ladder and managing a career. Many career books (including my own) have a chapter at the end with a few afterthoughts about going to work. Some of the "climbing the ladder" books begin with a little information on the employee's first year. Most, however, just seem to assume a successful transition and focus on those people who have already made a good start and are ready to climb. There is probably more treatment of the transition new employees go through from the employer's perspective, since it is an important and potentially costly organizational issue. However, this material is of little use to the individual experiencing the transition.

The impact of this problem on employers is significant, since the costs of turnover in the early years of an employee's career are very high due to the tremendous amount of time devoted

to training in those years. It is estimated that between 50 and 80 percent of new college graduates leave their first job within the first three years. While a significant part of this is due to poor career planning and/or a bad job choice on the graduate's part, indications are that an equally significant part is due to problems associated with making the transition from school to work. Any effort to reduce those problems will have a direct bottom-line impact, because the evidence indicates that helping new employees make a smooth transition significantly reduces turnover.

In addition, there is the "hidden" cost of low productivity and/or low morale among new employees. While not so easy to quantify as turnover is, there is little doubt that new employees who are unhappy, disappointed, and frustrated in their job will not be as productive as they could be. In addition, unhappy employees affect the morale of everyone in the organization. Both cost money.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

It is to everyone's benefit that new employees get a fast and productive start in their new career. Yet how can we expect them to do that if we don't teach them? That is what this book is for. It is written for people who are starting their first full-time professional job; most readers will be recent college graduates. It is a handbook to help new professionals develop the foundations for career success and personal well-being as they go from student to professional and from college to work. Any undergraduate-degree holder with any major going to work in any type of organization will find it enormously

helpful. Graduate students who are starting their first job or have limited work experience will find it equally helpful. Other people who are just entering the professional workforce, no matter what their age or background, will find it valuable, too.

There are several things I hope to accomplish with this book. First, I believe that if you at least know what challenges to expect when you go to work, you will be much better prepared to deal with them. What I hear repeatedly from new college graduates is the shock they experience in their first job because they don't anticipate the changes—certainly not the hard ones. Experience has shown that a significant part of the difficulty is attributable solely to the shock of the unexpected changes, not the scope of the adjustments such changes require. Shock leads to confusion, bewilderment, and sometimes panic. A sense of aloneness often follows during these first few months on the job, as people keep their problems to themselves, thinking they are the only ones experiencing them. They begin to doubt themselves and are unable to focus on learning how to be a professional and adapt to their new organization.

Unfortunately, I cannot prevent you from having to face all the challenges. You are just going to have to live through them as with so many other things in life. But from this book you will learn that the difficulties and challenges are a normal part of a very normal transition in life. So that you can fully appreciate this and understand that others have been in this boat before, I interviewed more than 100 new hires and their managers for this book. As you read the new hires' words, you will learn firsthand what to expect, how bewildering these first-year changes seem, and what difficulties

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and challenges await you. Knowing what to expect, you can skip the bewilderment stage and move directly to meeting the challenges of the first year. With preparation, you will know that nothing is wrong with you or your skills, and you can relax and focus on getting a fast and successful start in your career.

Second, I want to help you do more than just react to the difficulties that come along. I want to motivate you to be proactive and take advantage of the tremendous opportunity that the first year at work offers. With a little coaching, you will be in a position to take control of your own career and plan a successful entry into your new organization. You can make a great transition that will get you on the success track early.

Third, I want to empower you to help yourself as you move into your career. I can't begin to provide precise answers to all the many dilemmas and situations you will encounter. There are so many different types of companies, careers, cultures, people, etc., that no one book can address each specifically. What this book will do is identify all the critical issues to which you should pay attention to ensure a successful transition. And it will teach you the resources to look for and the techniques you can use to find the right solution for you. You should consider this book a sort of compass to point you in the right direction to help you help yourself.

Finally, this book will help you avoid making some major mistakes that can create more problems for you. You will have enough challenges to deal with at your new job, so you don't need to make more of your own!

My recommendation is that you read this book as soon as you've accepted a job or at least two months before you graduate. Then I suggest that you review it every three months, starting the week before you go to work. You don't have to reread it completely but just scan it to remind yourself of the key points. Much happens in the first week and month, and a timely review can change the way you approach that very hectic and critical period. You may also want to make a copy of the Ultimate Survival Tips at the end of each chapter to keep as a quick reference and daily reminder.

In sum, the odds are very good that *The Ultimate New Employee Survival Guide* can help you enter an organization in a manner that allows you to stay calm and cope with challenges as they arise, know what the most critical elements of the transition are, take charge of starting your career, and avoid making major mistakes. That is a formula that means a fast start to your career!

Ed Holton