

Jump Start Your New Job: Preparing for Day One

Stepping into a new job can be a daunting task. The first ninety days are critical to developing your credibility, building trust, setting standards, and openly communicating with your new boss. These first three months set the stage for your tenure at a company, and ultimately contribute to your overall reputation.

The following actions should be taken (or planned) prior to the first day on the job, so that when you walk in on Day One, you are prepared to take immediate and effective action.

1. Build Credibility

Begin by getting a clear on the lay of the land. Talk with current and former employees whom you may know through your own network. Thoroughly research the company by reading as much as possible about what 'outside influencers' have to say, exactly what products or services they offer, and understand how your position fits with the company's overall strategic objectives.

In this way, you'll come into the job prepared, and everyone around you will know it (and be at least mildly impressed). The objective here is to solidify the mission of the position you're coming into, so that your role, tasks and mission are absolutely clear. This will change over time, but at least you'll have a good 'starting position'.

2. Organize and Plan

The next thing you want to do is to be as organized as possible. Set your own agenda (with timelines) and don't be afraid to make mistakes. Based on what you know about the organization, plan what you'd like to accomplish in the first 90 days. Even if this plan changes while you're in those first three months, you will accomplish some of your goals and prove you have the vision to make an immediate impact.

3. Take responsibility for creating constructive relationships with the boss and key constituents

Be sure to meet with your new boss before you take the job, ask him or her to lunch, or simply for an appointment (or two) during which you can fact find. Let them know you are trying to get a feel for the environment you'll be entering, and that you are hoping to jump start you new job by being organized prior to Day One.

Line up a mentor outside of the organization who can help you out when times get difficult. This mentor should be a person who possesses strengths that you do not possess; that has competencies and experience to provide you with a perspective on how you can impact your new company. Don't be afraid to make a new acquaintance for this role; have a contact introduce you or find the person directly, contact them, and ask them for their thoughts (coffee once or twice a month and email/phone contact is probably more than enough). If you know the person well whom you choose as a mentor, then you'll be able to have more contact, but be sure to clearly state that being a mentor will not mean a major time commitment for that individual.

Identify a political ally before getting on board. Check out the 'lay of the land' by talking to current employees in your department, take a few to lunch on separate occasions and simply 'fact find'. It will be worth your while to at least identify your best political ally prior to day one. You may have to work on the relationship, but at least you've gotten the process started. The ally should also be someone who can act as a sounding board on key issues

Aside from your mentor, continue to build a network of 'tactical advisors' to fill in the gaps in your knowledge of the company's strategy, market and customers. Look to your acquaintances and build a group that you can rely on for moral and intellectual support.

4. Plan your legacy -- this drives your focus while at the company.

Believe it or not, even though you're not coming in as the President or CEO, the mark you plan to leave on a company will drive the initiatives you take while you're in your job, so do as the CEO does and plan your legacy. Consider what imprint you want to leave on the company. Back into those plans, and be sure that you are working toward your agenda from Day One. It will leave a lasting impression not only when you finally do leave this company, but will follow you wherever you go next.