

New-Hire Hiccups

Five Common Mistakes New Employees Make

By Robert Half International

As many professionals have learned the hard way, first impressions often last. That's why it's critical to put your best foot forward during the first few weeks at a new job. Following are some common (but potentially career-limiting) mistakes that new hires make — along with tips on how to avoid them:

Failing to adapt quickly. One of the most critical duties for any new employee is to be an astute observer of corporate culture. In addition to what's highlighted in the company handbook, what are the unwritten rules? Do workers tend to communicate face to face or via e-mail? Is work taken home? Do people eat at their desks? Are personal photographs on display? Are meetings formal or relaxed? The longer it takes you to take notice and adjust, the longer you'll be viewed as “the new kid on the block.”

Not asking questions. Many new employees are hesitant to ask questions because they're afraid of being perceived as pesky or uninformed. It's far worse, however, to make incorrect assumptions about priorities, policies or procedures. Ask questions early and often. During your first week on the job, for instance, be sure to clarify expectations with your supervisor. What assignments should you tackle first? How will your performance be evaluated? When and how should you provide project status updates? How often can you expect feedback to ensure that you're on the right track?

Trying to do too much. While you want to contribute early on, pace yourself. You won't make a positive impact if you start stretching yourself too thin right out of the gate. Rather than

putting undue pressure on yourself to overachieve, focus on getting a firm handle on your primary responsibilities, building rapport with colleagues and identifying potential mentors.

Being a know-it-all. You were hired for a reason, so give your opinion when asked. After all, employers typically expect team members (especially new ones) to offer fresh ideas and solutions. But just as you don't want to be a shrinking violet, fearful of sharing your thoughts, you don't want to be labeled as disruptive either. Play it safe by being tactful and constructive with any feedback or criticism. Moreover, keep an open mind and steer clear of the always-annoying phrase "At my last job ..."

Failing to make friends. Everyone knows that it's wise to be friendly and personable when in the company of the boss. But it's not just the higher-ups you need to impress. Build relationships with all colleagues. After all, you may need to call on some of them for assistance in the future. Plus, there's no better way to ensure you'll receive a helping hand when faced with a challenge than by building bridges early on.

Starting a new job is as exciting as it is challenging. By being perceptive, engaged and willing to learn, you can make a great impression and sidestep these hard-to-recover-from *faux pas*.

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