



## **Get Set for Success: Twelve Thoughts When Starting a New Job**

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### **What Determines Success or Failure on the Job?**

Over the years I have thought about what determines success or failure on the job. I have concluded there are three main components:

First, you must have the experience and technical skill to land the position. The interviewing process usually ensures you are qualified for the position.

Second, you need strong one-on-one people skills. Your skill with interpersonal communications, such as listening and empathy, is vital. Many people underestimate this component. This is dangerous as people want to work with people they like and respect, who are decent human beings, and make the workplace pleasant.

Finally, your ability to navigate the organization structure and to identify people who can be influential in determining your success is a key component. Understand where the power resides and who has it (see my comments on power later in this paper).

During my career, each time I started out in a new position, I learned something as I reflected on my victories and screw-ups. My conclusion is that there isn't any one formula for that start-stage of a new position. But I know this: those first couple of months on the job can be critical to your success. Here are my thoughts on what you should be doing when you start a new position.

### **Twelve Thoughts for Success**

*Observe and study your new colleagues.* Ask yourself early in the game, "What and who am I dealing with?" Strive to understand what your colleagues are all about and where they are coming from. Trust your gut instincts.

*Be authentic.* Just be you; authenticity as a person is a vital trait. Conversely, your colleagues will quickly spot a phony and you don't want to be labeled as such early in your new job.

*Extend yourself to everyone regardless of position.* Share your knowledge. Show kindness to everyone and if you can help someone, do so. The Good Karma principle will come into play as your kindness will come back to you.

*Find that one person who really knows what is going on.* Usually, you will find one colleague who is plugged into what is going on in the company. This person may or may not have a fancy title; in fact, the closer he or she is to the operation of the business the better. If that person is reliable, stay close to him or her.

*Figure out the hidden agenda.* Face it, everyone has one and this is not a bad thing. Just be careful of hidden agendas that can harm you and your career.

*Avoid gossip.* Watch out for those who gossip and/or spread rumors because such things are probably driven by negative politics. Change the subject or just tell the person that you are not interested. Remain open-minded.

*Keep a scorecard.* Document in a secure location those first impressions of colleagues with whom you have frequent contact — figure out who are potential allies and who could be adversaries. After a month on the job, you will see patterns emerge as you review your scorecard.

*Keep networking.* Even though you have landed your “dream” job, it’s important to keep in touch with your network of colleagues and to expand your network. You never know what the future holds and it is smart to be connected to people. Besides, it’s highly likely that people from your existing network will prove valuable in your new role, particularly if you are staying in the same industry. (See the three papers on networking listed at the end of this paper.)

*Understand the new culture.* Years ago an IBM executive was giving a talk and I asked him, “Can you define culture?” He said, “Culture is the way we do things around here.” At best you will know when you are in a healthy, positive culture; at worst you will know when you are in a toxic culture. And, keep in mind that in a smaller company you can have a direct impact on creating the corporate culture you want to see.

*Be a politician.* Many folks have a negative impression of office politics, thinking it unethical. Politics is not a dirty word. Simply put, politics in organizations is a way of getting things done through working with people. For me it was about helping people without any need for reciprocity. Positive politics is about building relationships with those who can help you. Politics in business need not be divisive, but rather the practice of smart politics is an important tool in succeeding in your new position.

*Pay attention to the door-keepers.* Treat secretaries and executive assistants with respect and courtesy as those folks can be most important to your career. As noted above, often they’re the people who really have the pulse on the organization.

*Ask yourself this question.* Who outside of my boss will be influential in helping me to succeed in my career at this company? Include both peers and those in the executive hierarchy.

## **Power: What Is It?**

*Can you be powerful in your new job?* Most people can’t define power. Is it power of position, someone you outrank as a boss or is it something more elusive? It’s important

for you to think about your relationship to power as you start your new position as you, too, can be powerful regardless of where you are positioned in the corporate hierarchy.

My preferred definition of power is as follows:

In short, the most vital ingredients of power are often the intangibles. Information and knowledge are power. Visibility is power. Personal energy is power; so is self confidence. Showmanship is power. Access to the inner sanctum is power. Obstruction and delay are power. Winning is power. Sometimes, the illusion of power is power. (Hedrick Smith, *The Power Game*)

### **No Set Template for Success on Your New Job**

This list is based on my experience and not meant to be inclusive. You will think of other things that will help you succeed. . Maybe the one universal truth is to pay attention to people in your new company. Think deeply about your new colleagues and master the human dimension of the workplace. This is as important as technical competence. Good luck as you start that new position. It may be trite but it's true: "First impressions are lasting."

### **Also of Interest**

- N-1, *Networking Tips and Techniques*, 2017, 5 pages (Co-author Liz Novak, IAPD)
- N-2, *Networking Your Way to Success*, 2016, 3 pages (Co-author Liz Novak, IAPD)
- N-3, *Networking: Using Social Media and Technology*, 2018, 8 pages (Co-author Liz Novak, IAPD)

Available free at [http://johnbmchugh.com/free\\_pub\\_guides.htm](http://johnbmchugh.com/free_pub_guides.htm)

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### **About Pam Boiros**

Pam began her career in publishing working for Butterworth-Heinemann, a division of the global STM publisher Elsevier. She held various sales and marketing roles from 1993-2000, including Director of North American sales. In June 2000 she pivoted to digital publishing with ebook pioneer Books24x7. During the next 12 years focused on the Book24x7 product line, she handled product management and marketing as well as publisher relations. Books24x7 was acquired by Skillsoft, and Pam served as Vice President, Global Corporate Marketing at Skillsoft from 2012-2016. Pam is the principal and owner of Bridge Marketing Advisors, a firm specializing in strategic marketing planning, and is the Chief Marketing Officer at meQuilibrium. She holds an undergraduate degree from Northeastern University (Boston, MA) and an MBA from Babson College (Wellesley, MA).

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