

# Starting a New Job Checklist 132



## Introduction

Starting a new job is an exciting but testing time when you will face many new challenges. While you may be justifiably proud of yourself for having completed the application process successfully and secured the position you wanted, this is not a time to rest on your laurels. Thinking about how you will approach the first few days and weeks in your new job and planning ahead for any potential issues you will face will help you to:

- reduce your stress levels
- become productive more quickly
- be accepted by new colleagues more quickly
- prepare for the cultural differences in your new organisation
- significantly reduce the potential for embarrassment which can arise in a new situation.

This checklist outlines practical steps which can be taken before you take up your new position and during the first few days in the job. Success depends not just on how you handle the first day with your new employer but on how you prepare in advance, even before you leave your current job. This checklist should also be helpful to organisations employing new starters.

## Definition

'Starting a new job' may imply that:

- an existing employee has been appointed to fill a vacancy in an existing or newly created job
- an individual has joined an organisation to fill a vacancy in an existing job or to assume the responsibilities of a newly created position.

This checklist focuses on the latter.

## Action checklist

### 1. Act positively before you leave your present job

Make sure that you sort out issues such as pension arrangements, private health insurance and your P45 with your HR or personnel department before you leave. Return any company property you have - badges and passes, computer equipment and mobile phones, for example. If you have received funding for qualifications or training, check whether you will be required to repay some or all of this. Does your contract of employment include any clauses restricting your movements or actions in the future?

### 2. Consider the implications of the new job for your work-life balance

Recognise that, whatever the level of the job; there will be a "settling in" period during which extra focus and concentration will be required. The balance between your private and working lives may change, if only for a certain length of time and your partners and family members will be affected. It is preferable to discuss this in advance to avoid or minimise any potential problems. Think too, about any additional commitments you have

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outside work - leisure activities or voluntary work, for example, and decide whether any adjustments or temporary changes will be needed.

### **3. Research the background of your new employer**

You will no doubt have carried out research into your new employer before your interview. Recognise that the more you know about the organisation you will be working for, the easier it will be for you to fit in during the initial period in your new job. Digest any documentation you have been given and find out what you can from company reports, corporate websites or industry publications.

Seek to identify:

- your new employer's competitors
- their relative degree of success or failure
- the basis on which they compete (such as price, quality, or service) or are protected from competition (because of location or access to raw materials for example).

If you are new to the industrial sector, consider how you can best familiarise yourself with it and acquire some knowledge of the terminology used in that sector. Remember that the people with whom you will be working may assume that you are familiar with their jargon. Try to get ahead of the game.

Find out anything you can about the culture of the organisation, the people with whom you will be working, the structure within which they work and the reputation of the unit which you will be joining. If you know anyone who is already employed by the organisation glean what you can by talking to them.

Consider what you have discovered and its implications for a newcomer. Identify what you still need to know and resolve to take a proactive approach to gathering this information once you have started your new job. This will give you the advantage that comes from being well informed and enable you to impress your colleagues with your willingness to learn and work.

### **4. Make a good first impression**

Check the joining instructions you have been given – where and when you are expected and who you should report to. Make sure that you have familiarised yourself with the route to work and know how long it will take you to get there, making allowance for rush hour traffic, if necessary. Dress appropriately, be friendly to everyone, take a lively interest in what you are told and show enthusiasm.

### **5. Take full advantage of induction programmes**

The induction programme organised by your new employer should provide you with the information you need to do your job, as well as an understanding of organisational aims, objectives and operating procedures. Be prepared to listen and learn and don't be afraid to ask lots of questions. Take notes and keep them for future reference. If information is not provided, you will need to find it yourself, or ask for it. One place to start would be the staff handbook or organisational intranet, if there is one.

Recognise that you need to be clear about:

- the purpose of the unit you have joined
- the purpose of your new job
- your responsibilities
- your authority
- the structure of the unit
- the unit's place in the structure of the organisation
- who you report to and your boss's requirements
- who, if anyone, reports to you
- as much as possible about the culture and values of the unit and of the organisation.

## **6. Make sure you are clear about practical matters**

These include day to day working practices as well as more long term matters and include::

- start and finish times
- coffee, tea and lunch arrangements
- the use of facilities such as telephone, email and Internet access for personal matters
- payment of wages and salaries
- holiday entitlements and procedures for booking leave
- pension arrangements
- performance appraisal or performance management programmes
- flexible working options
- additional employee benefits, such as private healthcare
- trade unions recognised by the organisation
- training and development opportunities.

What you need to know may range from the obviously important to the apparently trivial but if it helps you fit in, become accepted and begin to do your new job more quickly, it is worth knowing. This may be even more important if you have been appointed to a newly created position.

## **7. Investigate the background if your job is newly created**

Find out whether the job to which you have been appointed is a new one and if so, try to discover why it was created. Was it to solve a problem and if so what was the problem? Was it to cope with expansion in activity and if so, what caused that expansion? Find out what the context of the newly created job is – what future plans there are for it and, most of all, what expectations there will be of you as the newly appointed post holder. Is the job unique in the organisation or are there others like it? Try to identify which of your characteristics and skills led to you being selected for the post - these will almost certainly provide the criteria against which your performance will be judged.

## **8. Consider what behaviour is appropriate**

Remember that you are the newcomer and that your behaviour will be the focus of some attention, particularly if your new role requires you to manage or supervise others. Be yourself but leave yourself some room for manoeuvre in the light of what you may discover over the first two or three weeks in your new job.

Keep your eyes open. You will notice things in the first few weeks that you will soon come to take for granted. These may be things which you will wish to change later. Ask about them if you wish, but be careful not to start criticising practices in your new organisation too soon.

Reserve your position until you see how the land lies. Remember that it may not be easy to retract after speaking or acting too hastily. Be polite to everyone, offer help where appropriate but, even when offering help, don't allow yourself to act in an excessively assertive way.

## **9. Build relationships**

Your relationships with your immediate colleagues, your boss and your team will be critical for your success in your new role. More detail on this is given in a related checklist 'New joiner: handling workplace relationships' (See Additional Resources below.) Seek out those who are best placed to help you find your way around the organisation and ask for their assistance. Don't limit your contacts to your immediate department – interacting with others from across the organisation will help you to gain a better understanding of the organisation as a whole and how your own role fits within it. Take advantage of meetings and any social activities which are organised to establish contacts with colleagues from other departments, especially if their work has some bearing on your own role.

## **10. Be prepared for that bewildered feeling!**

You will meet a lot of people and have many new processes to learn in your first days and weeks in a new job. The challenges can range from getting to grips with your job role to finding out how to use a different kind of photocopier. Understand that it is natural to feel disorientated or even overwhelmed to start with. Most

people don't feel fully comfortable in their new job for at least six months, so don't worry too much if you still feel at sea after only a couple of days!

## **11. Don't panic if the new job doesn't immediately meet expectations**

The first weeks in a new job can vary tremendously. They may be very busy and pressured making you feel that you have been thrown in at the deep end, or progress may seem frustratingly slow, as you are provided with lots of orientation material but feel you are not yet being given the opportunity to show what you can do. You may feel that you immediately get on well with your colleagues, or you may find them unfriendly and unapproachable, leaving you feeling isolated and uncomfortable. You may be receiving appreciation and recognition for your efforts, or you may suspect that your performance is not meeting with approval.

Don't jump to the conclusion that the move has been a mistake or take a hasty decision to resign. Give yourself time to settle in and your colleagues time to get used to you. If things are so bad that you do consider resigning, bear in mind that it is normally easier to find a job when you are in employment. Work to build good working relationships with your colleagues. Take every opportunity to demonstrate your willingness to learn and to make a contribution.

If problems persist or the role is not measuring up to the expectations you had of it, discuss your concerns with your line manager or mentor and seek to iron out any misconceptions or misunderstandings. If you are subject to a probationary period, it is advisable to raise any issues or misgivings you have before this comes to an end.

## **12. Set your objectives and plan for the future**

It is important to consider what you want to get out of a new job and to set objectives for what you want to achieve. Set realistic and achievable goals, define what success will look like and start to develop plans for achieving them. Decide what your priorities are and start to gather the knowledge and develop the relationships which will help you to achieve them. Consider also what training or development you will need to help you develop the skills and competences you need in your new role.

## **Managers should avoid:**

- forming or being drawn into alliances too quickly
- taking up a stance from which they may wish to retract later on
- being over-assertive or over-familiar with new colleagues
- trying to take the lead in discussions, formal or informal
- taking on too much in an effort to curry favour with others or prove themselves
- being too quick to suggest a social outing with colleagues
- boasting about their previous achievements
- making comparisons between your former employer and your new one
- expressing opinions which you may regret later.

## **Additional resources**

### **Books**

**The new leader's action plan: how to take charge, build your team and get results**, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, George B Bradt, Jayme A Check and Jorge A Pedraza  
Hoboken NJ: John Wiley, 2009

**Sink or swim: new job new boss 12 weeks to get it right**, Milo Sindell and Thuy Sindell  
Avon Mass.: Adams Media, 2006

**Right from the start: taking charge in a new leadership role**, Dan Ciampa and Michael Watkins  
Boston Mass: Harvard Business School Press, 2005

**The first time manager: first steps to a brilliant management career**, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed M Morris  
London: Kogan Page, 2005

**The first 90 days: critical success strategies for new leaders at all levels**, Michael Watkins  
Boston Mass: Harvard Business School Press, 2003

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's library. More information at:  
[www.managers.org.uk/library](http://www.managers.org.uk/library)

## Related checklists

Succeeding as a new manager (133)  
New joiner, fitting in and getting on (202)  
New joiner, handling workplace relationships (205)  
New joiner, developing your network (209)  
New joiner, making an impact (210)

## Internet resources

**How to survive the first week in a new job**  
[www.i-resign.com/uk/workinglife/viewarticle\\_110.asp](http://www.i-resign.com/uk/workinglife/viewarticle_110.asp)

Article from i-resign.com containing useful tips and advice to surviving the first week in a new post.

**Monster: starting a new job**  
<http://career-advice.monster.co.uk/in-the-workplace/starting-a-new-job/jobs.aspx>  
Tips and advice from Monster's career advice section.

**This is one of many checklists available to all CMI members. For more information please contact**

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