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# Seven Success Tips for College Graduates Entering the Professional World

by Andy Masters

Euphoria from cap-and-gown celebrations will quickly turn to real world culture shock for many college graduates this year. Certainly, landing a job is concern number one, but how will these young professionals fare once they begin their career? Are they actually prepared for what lies ahead? Below are seven success tips all graduates should follow to ensure a transition which is smooth, not disastrous.

## 1) **Build a Relationship With Your Boss**

Like it or not, no single individual has a greater impact on your career future than your direct supervisor. So, how do you get on their good side from the start? Managers want to feel that you truly care, and that you are “in it with them” as a team. Bring your boss solutions, not problems. Most managers have enough problems already. When a problem arises, take initiative to consider what alternatives are available. Don’t just throw the problem on their desk and have them figure it out. At some point, they will expect for you to figure out what the best plan of action is first, so they don’t have to.

Try to build a relationship with your boss. Ask them about their career path, and always ask your boss for advice on what you or the company could do better. Understand what is particularly important to them, and how you can assist in those areas. Offer to stay late for projects, even if they might not be your responsibility. While these things may sound obvious, many Americans rush out the door at 4:59 without even saying “Goodnight.”

## 2) **Display Professionalism and Maturity**

Unfortunately, the immature stereotype of young professionals does present a common barrier to advancement. Often, how you respond to adversity in a situation defines your professional maturity. A young professional views a mistake as a catastrophe, while a mature professional considers it a bump in the road. A young professional is quick blame to others, while a mature professional takes responsibility, and asks how a team can work better together in the future.

Many will be subjected to various forms of negativity, personality conflicts, and arguing in the workplace. However, that shouldn’t be the norm. There will always be differences of opinion on how best to do things in an organization, but they shouldn’t escalate to confrontation. Try to maintain your composure at all times, and don’t allow your emotions to get the best of you. Remember that professionalism is also judged in written communication, such as memos, reports, and especially e-mails. Ultimately tact, common sense, and rational adult conversation *should* reign.

## 3) **Find a Mentor Within the Company/Industry**

Take advice from someone who has succeeded, and they will help you succeed. Makes sense, doesn’t it? Mentors can offer priceless advice you just can’t gain from reading books. They can also help introduce you to upper management, allowing you to get on the fast-track radar screen.

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Some companies sponsor structured mentor programs, as do many professional organizations. Be sure to investigate these options first.

Otherwise, you must rely on a more informal method of finding a mentor. You might believe these people are too busy, or too important to talk to you. However, most people want to share their secrets to success with someone who really wants to listen. Deep down, almost everyone relishes having someone look up to them. They also understand mentoring helps contribute to the future success of the company by helping develop other young leaders. Besides, they probably had a mentor, too.

#### **4) Master Interpersonal Relations and Teamwork**

Possessing social, professional, and teamwork skills are more important than ever before. A recent Harvard University study found that for every firing due to failure to perform, there were two firings due to personality conflicts and communication issues. However, working in a team environment with a diverse atmosphere will be a major adjustment for recent graduates. Most collegians study, take tests, and complete assignments in a predominantly individual setting throughout their academic career.

Further, the professional environment requires communication and teamwork with those of vastly different ages, cultures, and backgrounds. Working newcomers will also have to co-exist with different personality types, such as egomaniacs, rule-breakers, brownnosers, and the “bare-minimum-to-get-by” guy. This can be challenging, and is another area where professionalism and maturity can be tested. At the end of the day, everyone is still supposed to be on the same team. If you continue to possess the attitude that someone else’s problem is also your problem, you will ultimately gain the respect of co-workers, no matter what personality type they are.

#### **5) Understand the Power of Networking**

Everyone has heard the phrase, “it’s not just what you know, it’s who you know.” This is statistically proven, as the latest studies show that 65% of jobs in this country are either directly or indirectly gained through networking and personal contacts. Beyond that, often such jobs are better opportunities with higher pay. Places to network can include, well, everywhere. There are professional/trade organizations, alumni groups, community groups, and online communities available for young professionals to pursue immediately.

Perhaps the most important concept to understand is that networking isn’t just about what other people can do for you. If you initiate how you can assist another person first, you will gain a following of people who will go out of their way to help you whenever the opportunity arises. Keep making new contacts, build relationships with those contacts, and have a system for organizing and keeping in touch with your contacts. Lastly, it is a small world, so try to keep your enemies to a bare minimum and NEVER burn bridges.

#### **6) Undertake a Strategic Development Plan**

It is never too early to start thinking about where your current job will take you. What options are available for your next jump? It’s important to understand typical advancement paths from your position, and what training and development is needed for advancement. Ideally, your company should realize the importance of investing in and developing future

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leaders. Otherwise, you will have to take initiative to seek out such development plans on your own.

Many college graduates are tired of learning, and they're relieved they never have to study anymore. However, the most successful leaders don't stop learning at age 22, and neither should you. Invest in yourself, and continually gain knowledge from colleagues, books, seminars, and professional organizations. Try to identify your niche or area of specialization within a company or industry that will be in demand in the future. You must then create your own strategic development plan, and hold yourself accountable to it.

### **7) Avoid Dangerous Pitfalls**

You may think that employee binder you receive your first day is just a pile of boring policies no one reads, but take heed. Thousands of young professionals are reprimanded each year for violations such as Internet and e-mail abuse. Unfortunately, honesty and ethical judgment pose a common challenge for young professionals, as well, often brought on by the pressure to rise through the ranks. There could be temptations to mislead a customer to get one more sale, or hide a mistake from management. However, losing the *trust* of management could be the most damaging consequence to your career.

Further, there are over 15,000 sexual harassment cases filed every year in this country. Often, the intent of the offender may not necessarily be malicious, but rather they may not comprehend what is appropriate in the workplace vs. a "night out at the clubs." It is imperative to understand the rules of the game, and abide by those rules, to avoid irreparable damage to your career from the start.

**About the Author: Andy Masters is an international speaker, and author of the book *Life After College: What to Expect and How to Succeed in Your Career*. Andy earned an M.A.-Human Resources Development and an M.A.-Marketing from Webster University. Visit [www.andy-masters.com](http://www.andy-masters.com) for more information on the book and speaking availability.**

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