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What College Grads Don't Know Might Hurt Them

by Andy Masters

Many college graduates will enter the working world with energy, optimism, and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, many may also be greeted with a reality illustrated by the expression “*Welcome to the Jungle.*” Earning a college degree proves that a student has completed assignments and passed tests for four years, but are they truly prepared for what lies ahead? This transition can often be a *major* culture shock.

Physically, most college graduates will begin working 40 hours per week, at a minimum, in the real world. This includes waking up early every day, fighting traffic both to and from work, and spending the majority of their waking hours with co-workers, not friends or family. They could be early candidates for “post-party depression.”

The pressures of starting a new job will be coupled with moving, bills, new responsibilities, family issues, and—yes—a social life as well. Of course, all of these areas will challenge their time management and organizational skills. Unfortunately, these are skills that many college students often lack. So, what will suffer? Graduates should be prepared to spend extra hours to get-up-to-speed right away with their priority, the responsibilities of their job.

However, there is much more to it than simply learning how to do your job. 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. Possessing social, professional, and teamwork skills are more important than ever before. Failure to display these skills can cause irreparable damage to careers.

Working in a team environment with a diverse atmosphere will be a major adjustment for graduates. Most collegians study, take tests, and complete assignments in a predominantly individual setting throughout their academic career. Further, the working environment requires communication and teamwork with those of vastly different ages, cultures, and backgrounds. This varies drastically from the “safe haven” environment of 18-23 year old friends and peers who attended the same university.

Working newcomers will have to fit in with egomaniacs, rule-breakers, brownnosers, and the “bare-minimum-to-get-by” guy. Many will be subjected to various forms of negativity, personality conflicts, cursing and arguing in the workplace. Common sense, tact, and diplomacy *should* reign. But, how will they respond?

There is pressure to get ahead, pressure to impress the boss, and pressure to “fit-in”, all of which threaten to compromise judgment. Issues such as ethics, honesty, integrity, are all areas where their character will be challenged in new ways, and there are dangerous consequences that loom.

There are many other potential pitfalls for young professionals entering the working world. Sometimes it's more important to know what *not* to do in their career to get ahead. College graduates need to be aware of these pitfalls, so they don't jeopardize their career before it even begins. What are some of the other dangers?

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- *E-mail, Internet guidelines*
- *Office Politics*
- *Maturity/Professionalism*
- *Dating in the workplace*
- *Sexual Harassment*

So, what are some of the things college graduates can do to assist in this transition?

- *Pay attention during training and orientations.*
- *Understand and follow job procedures, company regulations, and legal guidelines.*
- *Find a mentor they can trust to show them the ropes.*
- *Don't be lead astray by "know-it-alls" who bad-talk management, or encourage things that are clearly wrong.*

What can current college students do to better prepare themselves to enter the working world? Certainly, there are internships, co-ops, practicums, and part-time jobs related to their field of study. But, if that's not available, they should try "job-shadowing" a position for a day, or taking a professional in their field out to lunch. These ventures can be pursued through academic advising, the career center, or even with the help of professors or alumni within their field of study.

Certainly, many campus organizations offer outstanding experience to develop personally. This may include social skills, communication skills, and leadership skills. Further, many professional organizations offer memberships to collegians, such as the American Management Association, and the American Marketing Association (AMA and AMA, respectively). What better way to be come prepared than by meeting professional contacts, and following industry trends and issues, before you even enter the field.

Earning a college degree may have helped graduates land their first job, but it won't help them do their job. Each college graduate should have a goal to become as well-rounded as possible, and develop in areas they know they are lacking. They should also be acutely aware of what to *avoid*, allowing their positive energy and enthusiasm to propel them to a rewarding and successful career.

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 for more information on the book and speaking availability.

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