

College graduation and landing your first job are great achievements. However, there is a large transition from collegiate life to working professional. You are bound to encounter challenges in the transition to the working world that you did not anticipate while a college student. Here are ten final teaching points as you depart to help you make a smooth transition.

## 1. Prepare to Make the Proper Exit

- As your final year winds down, it's easy to lose focus and dream of the fun stuff associated with graduation and life beyond. As important as your final days on campus may be, it's just as important to take care of business before you receive that diploma.
- You should already be facing the demands of job-hunting and interviewing. Gather written references from professors, campus employers, career counselors, internship mentors, and any coaches or leaders of academic clubs. It's better to do this now while they still remember you. If you think you may need another letter of recommendation in a few months, talk to them now. Whatever they can say favorably about your character, communication skills, academic proficiency, or motivation can be a part of your developing resume. These are the positive attributes that employers look for when hiring employees.
- As you exit the college community, make sure you leave with a clean slate in terms of financial obligations or unpaid parking tickets. Debts left unpaid may prove to be embarrassing in the future.

## 2. College Has Not Prepared You for Everything

- Many recent college graduates are unprepared for the emphasis placed on teamwork skills in the professional world, the importance of dealing with all different types of people, balancing work demands with personal life, and personal finance issues. Be prepared to face these challenges.
- Some college graduates mistakenly believe that superior academic standing translates into automatic favor on the job. Having a college degree does not entitle you to a job and most employers will not be as impressed as you may be with your grades and education. In actuality, all new hires are basically on equal standing. Focus less on why employers should be so impressed with your credentials and more on how you can use your talent and skills to make a contribution to the employer's bottom line or the department's group effort. Be sure to state in the job interview how you will make a strong contribution. Once you're hired, your new employer will be assessing your ongoing progress. Annual evaluations in the workplace are common and are directly linked to promotion.

## 3. Finding Employment May Not be Easy

- The job market is cyclical and you may be entering the workplace at a time when it is very competitive. One job opening can get hundreds of resumes or applications. The harsh reality is that obtaining a job offer is a very time-consuming task—and it's even harder to obtain the ideal scenario of having multiple job offers. As most experienced job-seekers already know, you have to spend time every day looking for employment. It can be a “full-time job trying to find a job”.
- Don't rely too much on the Internet and passive job-hunting methods to find employment. The Internet is important, but do not forget about networking—with family and friends, other students, alumni, professors, mentors, and former co-workers and bosses. Stay connected with organizations that can benefit you in terms of future networking. Examples include alumni associations, academic clubs, sports teams, social groups, fraternities or sororities, and any similar professional organizations. Most industries or professions are tightly knit. By staying in the right communication loop, you can be aware of opportunities before your peers.

#### 4. College Graduates Get Entry-Level Jobs

- Another reality in the transition from collegiate life to working professional is that a large number of the jobs available for college graduates are entry-level. These jobs often require hard work, long hours, and low pay. Employers want to see all employees start at a certain level to better understand the business or profession. Recent college graduates should not reject a job offer because they sense that it is beneath them, but be realistic in your expectations.
- During the interview process, get as much information as you can about the company and key personnel: public relations material, company brochures, newsletters, etc. Learn all you can. What the organization says about itself in print provides a good indication of its management philosophy and style. Furthermore, any connections you can make with current or previous employees will provide insights into the inner workings of the company.

#### 5. Be Prepared for Job Offers and Salary Negotiations

- If you're one of the lucky college graduates, you'll get more than one job offer. Having more than one offer gives you the luxury of deciding if one—or any—of them is right for you. You should be prepared to negotiate the salary and any compensation or benefit package. Have a clear sense of what you want before the offer arrives or negotiations begin.
- If you do get more than one job offer, how would you decide? What's important to you? Your criteria could include salary, relocation, employee benefits, long-term career objectives, prestige, travel, company culture, vacation, company car, and family.

#### 6. About That First Job

- It's beneficial to have a vision of what you want your career path to be after graduation, but don't panic if your first job doesn't fit perfectly into your envisioned plan. Your first job may serve as a chance to gain experience, maturity, and confidence. Many recent college graduates change jobs after their first year out of school; sometimes it takes that long—or longer—to fully understand who you are and what you really want to do with your life. Your first job may be a stepping stone and not your true calling.
- The days of working a 30, 40, or 50-year career at one company are over. Now the trend is for college graduates to change careers—not just jobs—multiple times over the course of their working life. So don't worry if that first job is not the perfect fit for you, but do start planning so you can make the transition to something more suitable. Keep track of your accomplishments, publications, and developing skills so that you can obtain that job you desire.
- Your major may or may not dictate the type of job you can work. Many jobs simply require a college degree. However, science and engineering tend to be the exception because they are more specialized fields.

#### 7. Time Management

- You may have thought it was difficult managing various classes, laboratories, tests, and other activities while in college, but it may be even more of a struggle to manage your time once you are in the professional environment. Most jobs require that employees be at work at a specific time, take lunch at a specific time, and leave work at a specific time. As a college student, your day was less structured. This can be frustrating for a new professional, and the new time structure will require an adjustment. Show up late too many times or miss too many meetings, and you'll soon find yourself unemployed. Your future with your new employer depends on how well you can manage your time.
- Another big adjustment will be the harsh reality of vacation time. In college, you get long winter and summer breaks. Unfortunately, most employers are not that generous with time off. You will probably get two weeks of vacation in your first job, and you can expect it to take years before you accrue vacation time at a higher rate. Furthermore, because you are one of the newest employees, you may not have much choice as to when you can take your vacation.

## 8. Professionalism in the Workplace

- In the workplace, acting unprofessionally can get you fired. Your employers and co-workers will judge evaluate you on your speech, attire, behavior, and motivation. It is up to you to show them that you are intelligent, articulate, and professional.
- To succeed, you must be seen as a member of a team that can be relied on. Deadlines are critical, much more so than in college. Identify a supportive mentor who can show you the ropes and steer you in a direction that will enhance your long-term career goals. Professionalism also encompasses dependability, motivation, initiative, and being a self-starter. Staying organized and managing your time will be critical.

## 9. Starting Your New Job in a Positive Direction

- Employers are looking for entry-level workers who not only have aptitude, but who also display enthusiasm, excitement, and drive. A new employee may be looked upon to bring fresh perspectives and new ideas to the team. Establish a reputation for being a good worker who is willing to learn. Most companies view the first three to six months as a honeymoon period for new employees. That's the time to get adjusted to the organization and to prove one's worth as a valuable worker. Doing the minimum required might enable you to keep your job, but base-line performance won't lead to promotion. Your supervisor will judge you on your work ethic, teamwork, ability to focus, ability to learn from your mistakes, and contributions to the organization or department.

## 10. Taking Care of Other Business

- Making a smooth transition from college to the workforce also involve getting established in a new community. With the job offer accepted, find out if the company provides a moving or relocation allowance. For entry-level employees, it will probably be minimal. If the company has a relocation specialist, work closely with him or her to handle the appropriate details of the move and save valuable time. As much as possible, plan ahead, allow time to make the actual move, and get acclimated before starting work. A successful career is usually balanced by a fulfilling life outside the office. As you plant your roots in the community, find out about opportunities for entertainment, recreation, hobbies, and religious and social involvement. Being involved in the community can sometimes benefit you in terms of career growth.
- Finally, getting established in the community involves participating in worthwhile projects and causes. Consider volunteer or charitable work. This is personally rewarding and demonstrates that you are a concerned citizen who is willing to make a positive contribution in giving back to the community. After all, you've earned your degree and now it is time to take your rightful place in society and make a difference.

-Donald M. Hooper

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## College

vs.

## The World of Work

<b>Frequent, quick, and concrete feedback (grades)</b>	<b>Infrequent and less precise feedback</b>
Highly structured curriculum and programs with lots of direction	Highly unstructured environment and tasks with few directions
<b>Few significant changes</b>	<b>Frequent and unexpected changes</b>
Flexible schedule	Structured schedule
<b>Frequent breaks and time off</b>	<b>Limited time off</b>
Personal control over time, classes, interests	Directions and interests dictated by others
<b>Intellectual challenge</b>	<b>Organizational and people challenges</b>
Choose your performance level, e.g., A, B, C.	A-level work required all the time
<b>Focus on your development and growth</b>	<b>Focus on getting results for the organization</b>
Create and explore knowledge	Get results with your knowledge
<b>Individual effort</b>	<b>Team effort</b>
“Right” answers	Few “right” answers
<b>Independence of ideas and thinking</b>	<b>Do it the company’s way</b>
Professors	Bosses
<b>Less initiative required</b>	<b>Lots of initiative required</b>