

# START YOUR NEW JOB ON THE RIGHT FOOT

by Bonnie Johnson, AgCareers.com Marketing Associate

**Y**ou've landed a job and set your start date; what do you need to know to make sure you start on the right foot?

Your first days and weeks on the job can set the tone for your success or failure with the organization.

AgCareers.com asked for feedback from employers and discussed this topic with human resource professionals in the agricultural industry. We thought it would be helpful for you to understand some of employers' pet peeves so you can avoid them and put your best foot forward.

## EMPLOYERS' PET PEEVES & HOW TO AVOID THEM

### DISORGANIZATION

Starting a new job can be overwhelming. You are learning a new company, new role and meeting many new people.

Employers don't think you will memorize every new face and task assigned, but they do expect you to take notes and keep track of deadlines. Whether it is a large group or a simple face-to-face meeting with your manager, it is essential to come prepared with a paper and pen for note taking.

Taking notes helps you recall details, reminds you of your responsibilities and sends a positive message to your supervisor. An employee that follows directions is better able to work independently and builds trust with their manager.

Go over your notes and set reminders for yourself when projects are due. Your supervisor won't be sending reminders for deadlines looming.

"Be accountable and meet your deadlines without your managers having to constantly check-up on you," said **Judy Stulken**, VP, Human Resources and Organizational Development, **South Dakota Wheat Growers**. Follow-up with your manager on action items and let them know how projects are

progressing.

Discuss options with your supervisor if you do not think you'll be able to meet a deadline and suggest alternatives. Providing updates gives your manager a sense of comfort knowing where projects are at without having to micromanage.

### CLINGING TO MOBILE DEVICES

Limit personal interruptions — avoid frequent or prolonged distractions from personal phone calls, text messages, emails, websites and social media usage.

"Employees that are constantly on the phone and texting are a major frustration," shared Stulken.

"Although many younger employees have grown up in the digital age of texting and checking social media 24/7, most of their managers and co-workers have not," said **Bill Smith**, Strategic Marketing Manager, **Helena Chemical Company**.

"Managers may assume you are mentally checked out from the job if you are using your cell phone at work," added Smith.

"Although we recognize the importance and need for these technologies, we expect you to focus when on the job," added Stulken.

Overusing smart phones at work may have a negative impact on your work; it is best to just put down the device and concentrate on learning your job.

In addition, don't post derogatory comments about the organization on social media sites. Even something as simple as posting "bored at orientation" as a **Facebook** status update will be taken negatively.

### THE ME ATTITUDE

Employers often are discouraged when employees are worried more about "What's in it for me?" rather



than thinking about what they can provide for the organization. "Show us what you are worth first and the rest will come after," shared an employer.

Don't push too hard and too quickly. Enthusiasm is necessary, but rewards and promotions may take time. Developing competency in a role may take longer than you expect and you need to have patience.

"At the front end of their careers, some new employees don't take time to get to know ALL of the people in their work environment," said Smith.

"Many times young employees are so focused on working with their manager and looking for a promotion that they often take for granted the wealth of knowledge from the staff that surrounds them. Oftentimes, it is the secretary or the shop employee with years of experience that will greatly benefit a young person that is just getting started in their career," added Smith.

### EXPECTING IMMEDIATE FLEXIBILITY

Don't expect nor request flexible work hours in your first months on the job. Unless it was clearly defined in your job offer, flexibility is usually

an earned perk and shouldn't be anticipated by a new employee.

First you need to learn about the company and gain insight by spending time in the office or field with coworkers and managers during regular work hours.

Employees are given autonomy once they've had time to understand the organization, can be a good representative of the company, and function independently. Don't assume that you will receive the same privileges as more tenured employees.

### **WASTING TIME**

"Take initiative and don't wait to be assigned a task," shared Stulken. "If you've finished all of your projects, ask for more to do," added Stulken.

Managers are irritated when employees finish their assignments and then just sit around wasting time, waiting to be given something else to do.

Managers often comment that it is nice to see a new employee willing to come to work early (without being asked) and stay a little later to finish a job or assist a colleague with a project. "This simple but effective behavior will help 'brand' you as a new employee willing to work hard and be a team player," shared Smith.

Excessive visiting is also a major time waster that gets noticed. Of course you want to be friendly and get to know your coworkers, but limit conversations during the workday. Take advantage of breaks, lunchtime and after work socials to talk with your fellow employees.

### **TALKING ABOUT TABOOS**

Everyone should remember the good old saying "don't talk religion or politics." Also steer clear from discussing family troubles in your first weeks on the job. Over time you may develop friendships with colleagues where these conversations take place away from work. Don't gossip about managers or coworkers and try to avoid pessimists. Never discuss pay or salary at work.

### **WAITING TO COMMUNICATE**

Don't wait until day one to tell your employer that you've planned a week-long summer vacation. Inform

them up-front about any vacations you've planned or extended leave you may require.

Things won't begin well if you spring events on them when you've just started. Your employer has probably established an on-boarding plan which will be a calendar of training and orientation for your first weeks on the job. It's a good idea to avoid asking for time off in the first month if possible.

Likewise, ask other pertinent questions before you start, such as the dress code for the organization.

It's not comfortable for you or your fellow employees if you wear a suit while everyone else is in jeans.

is imperative. Promptly seek assistance from your manager or the appropriate person if you need help, but come prepared with research and suggestions.

Expect some criticism; your manager's job is to help you become a better employee by giving you constructive feedback. Take their criticism in stride and address any issues that are brought forward rather than being confrontational or challenging their suggestions.

### **NOT COMING TO WORK ON TIME**

"Showing up late and coming unprepared will get new employees



Inquire about the typical work hours and when they would like you to arrive on your first day.

### **BEING A KNOW-IT-ALL**

Don't assume you know everything about the company and tell your colleagues "you should do this ..." in your first few weeks on the job.

No matter how much you do know, you need to take time to learn the organization and culture.

Don't immediately start judging and offering solutions before you understand the company insight behind the product or service.

As employers have said, you "simply don't know what it is that you don't know," and "don't try to be a hero out of the gate."

Everyone faces challenges that they are unable to handle on their own. Knowing when to ask for help

started on the wrong foot," shared Stulken. Don't forget any necessary paperwork or documentation requested by the employer.

Don't be late! This may seem obvious, but it is a big enough pet peeve mentioned by many employers that it warrants reiterating. Enough said.

### **PUT YOUR RIGHT FOOT FORWARD**

Avoiding these pet peeves will help you begin your career with a company on a positive note.

Be engaged — commit yourself to learning all you can about the organization and your position in order to take a big step towards your future success.