

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION INTO THE WORKPLACE

by Justina Frost, former AgCareers.com Intern and Iowa State University graduate

It's finally here, graduation! You have spent the last four years at college living off Ramen Noodles and Red Bull, pulling way too many all nighters to even count.

In the a blink of an eye it's over — and your future starts NOW. You landed a job that you are extremely excited about, however this transition from college to the "real world" may be a lot harder than you think.

Let us help you. Here are some tips for a successful transition:

- **Pay attention to company culture.** Learn how things work within your company. Are relationships formal or friendly? Does everyone arrive early and stay late? Are lunch hours short or nonexistent? The sooner you know the culture of the office, the better off you will be.
- **Create an atmosphere.** If you are working in an office or a cubical, most likely you are going to spend a majority of your 40 hours there. Make the space yours (as much as the company will allow). Bring plants, pictures, sculptures or whatever makes your office inviting and welcoming to you. Rearrange your space, if you can, so that you are comfortable.
- **Create a budget.** Having a higher monthly income than what you may be used to can be very exciting. Learn how to manage your income. **Cindy Walter**, a recent **Iowa State University** graduate and Sales Associate at **PigChomp Knowledge Software**, says, "The real world is a great idea, but reality sinks in real fast when bills are due each month and then loan payments kick in. Create a budget that fits you." Knowing what rent, utilities, credit card bills, and loan payments are each month will help you know what your limits are.
- **Create a routine.** Staying organized and managing your

time remains crucial. Walter says to "create a schedule that best fits your job assignments and meetings." Stay true to your schedule and stay on top of it. If you are used to naps during the day, wean yourself off. If you were once a night owl, go to bed early. A home routine is just as important as an office routine.

- **"Be a sponge,"** but not Sponge Bob! "Take time to learn as much as possible about the organization you have decided to join," says **Eric Spell**, President of **AgCareers.com**. "Learn about the people, culture, history, leaders, current and future plans. You can do some of this via some of the scheduled orientation and training. However, invest time in lunch meetings, breaks, and casual chats at the gym. Be cautious of being a "Sponge Bob" — don't annoy people."
- **Invest in personal and professional development.** Seek out opportunities that will challenge you. Look to take part in professional organizations that offer professional development opportunities. Networking is also still important, and these organizations help you make a name for yourself in the industry. Get involved in the community you are employed in. Here are some ideas: become a **4-H** Leader, visit churches, volunteer to coach a youth sports team or join the local gym. You will be surprised that your co-workers will notice this effort!
- **Find a mentor.** This may or may not be your initial supervisor. Spell recommends someone that is more than seven years older than you and has a degree of confidence about their current and future career paths. Be sure to select someone that will tell you what you "need" to hear vs. what you "want" to hear. Try to locate a

mentor within your first three to six months of employment.

- **Have enthusiasm.** Come ready to learn and ready to work. Enthusiasm is contagious (to a point) and can make up for a lack of knowledge. "Showing that you are eager and willing to learn something new will help your new employer build confidence in you," says **Stacey Noe**, Program Coordinator for the **Agricultural Entrepreneurship Initiative** and Iowa State University **NAMA** advisor.
 - **Share your thoughts.** Once you have become familiar with all the above, don't be afraid to share your ideas. Spell says, "Even though you are young and new, that does not mean that you can't contribute. A fresh look on things is always needed, and you just may be able to bring that to the mix."
 - **Keep a support group.** The transition from college to working life can be challenging. A support group can provide a sympathetic ear to you during the frustrating times and enthusiasm when you become more comfortable with your new surroundings. Stay in contact with your college friends and initiate conversation with your new co-workers. These are the people that will be excited for you when you get a promotion, be encouraging when you accept a new job and motivate you when times get tough!
- Facing the unknown is always scary. But, with proper preparation and the right frame of mind, you can launch your professional career with confidence and a bright outlook on the future. Bring these tips with you when you take the big step from college to the workplace and you are sure to be a success.