

JOBSEEKER TIPS:

TRANSITIONING FROM STUDENT TO PROFESSIONAL: WHAT THEY DON'T TEACH YOU IN SCHOOL

Takeaway Points

- Shift your focus from you to your would-be employer: What can *you* do for *them*?
- If you're not a natural people person, work on your people skills. Employers place a high value on them.
- In your first few years after graduation, learning from more experienced co-workers is important.
- Never stop updating your resume.

By: Team Pongo

The move from school to the workplace is one of the most profound transitions life throws at you. All your life you've been asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Well now you *are* grown up. But if you're like many recent grads, you still don't have a clear answer to the question.

And that's OK. Most people entering the workforce today will start with a two- or three-year series of less-than-ideal jobs. This is the "real-world" education that will teach you the survival skills you'll need to excel in the professional world and help you clarify where you want your career to go.

Here are five tips for making the transition from student to professional go as smoothly as possible.

1) Adjust Your Focus

In school, the focus was on meeting your needs and preferences. You chose your classes, your instructors, your schedule, and the people you spent time with.

At work, you no longer have that level of control. But on the upside, you get a paycheck. And to get a job and succeed in the workplace, you'll need to turn your focus toward the people who sign those paychecks.

Think like an employer, and figure out how you can contribute to the organization's business needs. After years of thinking about your own needs, your focus must shift – at least at work – to putting the organization's needs above yours.

2) Work on Your People Skills

"Drama" is often part of the fabric of school life. Tempers flare, competitions arise, and people take sides. That stuff doesn't cut it at work.

Personality clashes among employees are a huge drain on a business because any time spent resolving conflicts cuts into productivity and detracts from the bottom line. Regardless of who's right or wrong, drama in the office reflects poorly on all parties involved.

Any hiring manager will tell you that a person who is likable and pleasant to work with is a more valuable employee than an equally skilled – or even more skilled – individual with a bad attitude.

If you're not a natural people person, you'll need to build up those skills. A quick web search for "improving your people skills" is a good place to start.

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The Pongo ResumeBUILDER (www.PongoResume.com) provides you with all the tools you need to enhance your job search. You can build as many resumes as you like!

www.pongoresume.com

3) Watch and Learn

Learning is what school is all about. But learning is really what your first couple of jobs should be about as well. Since you're a newcomer to the working world, it's always wise to observe and learn from the more experienced workers. In any workplace, it will soon become apparent who the most respected players are. Model your behavior on those people. Seek their advice. Maybe ask one of them to act as your mentor, one who can help you do your job better and navigate the sometimes treacherous waters of workplace or office politics.

4) Network, Network, Network

As a student, your networking may have been limited to social networking on sites such as MySpace or Facebook. It's time to expand your thinking.

A strong network will help you at every step of your career, but especially at the entry level. A good word from someone who can vouch for your character and work ethic is a lot stronger than a resume that says you excelled in English Literature and were the leading scorer on the lacrosse team.

When you're looking for a job, talk to anyone and everyone: family, friends, neighbors, the gas station attendant, your old boss at the pizza shop. You never know who knows someone, who knows someone, who has a job opening. Tell them what kind of job you're seeking and make sure they know how to get in touch with you.

5) Keep Updating Your Resume

Even if you're quite comfortable with your job, it's always good practice to keep your resume up to date. When you land a job, add it to your resume. Then, each time a significant accomplishment or promotion comes your way, you can update it.

A new opportunity can come along at any time and being prepared with an updated resume could put you a step ahead of other qualified candidates. So be sure to keep a record of all the contributions you make and the compliments you earn, saving copies of those that were e-mailed or handwritten. As your accomplishments and accolades build, they can help vault you to your next career challenge.

Conclusion

With your fresh diploma or degree in hand and a head full of knowledge, you probably thought your education was complete. But a successful transition from school to work is a learning process all its own.

You're learning what you're good at, where you must improve, and how the real pros operate. And you're starting to build a professional network that could serve you throughout your career. Experience in the real world is what helps you decide "what you want to be," whether that means staying on the path you chose in school, or taking another route.

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