Garrett: Hello, this is Garrett Hess, and I’m joined by Anne-Marie Moore, and Randy Roeser. Our topic today is the critical first year on the job.

Every year, students are hard at work planning their careers out, practicing their interviews, beefing up their resumes, and preparing to find that critically important job. Most of these students will find good jobs and start work with high energy and enthusiasm. But the truth is, many will get to this point only to be disappointed in the results. These students have overlooked a critical step and just haven’t learned how to go to work.

Does that sound a little strange? Well, the truth is that many managers and executives feel this way. The new hires don’t fully understand what it takes to succeed during their first years in a new organization.

What most of these students have to realize is that the first year is different. Starting a new job is a unique and critically important time that requires special strategies to be successful. You’re not a college student anymore, but you’re not a professional yet, either. Few college grads realize that the first year of a career is a “transition” stage. You have to realize that you don’t have full responsibilities or privileges yet. Those come later on in the years of your career. It takes time to understand and earn these responsibilities and privileges. Because you are looked at as the “new kid on the block” when you first enter a job, people will respond to you differently, work with you differently, and even judge you differently. You, in response, have to approach them differently.

A strong start in a career is essential in having a successful career. So, how do you have a successful career? Well, you need to know how to establish yourself. This means learning and figuring out the ways of the company. Also, learning what you need to do to gain that critically important credibility and respect.

Many people will ask, does it really matter? Of course it matter! Much of your early career opportunities and success will depend upon the impressions that you make on your fellow co-workers and bosses. According to research, how you approach your first year will have a major impact on your future salary, advancement, job satisfaction, and your ability to move up within the organization. Not to mention it will also affect your own feelings about success and commitment to the job! The goal within the first months is to establish yourself and reputation. You need to prove that you belong there and can provide a real contribution to the company.

Messing up during your introductory months can have people giving you lesser assignments and labeling you as “immature”, while your colleagues, and essentially your competition, are given the bigger assignments and more opportunities. Remembering that it can take years to recover from a poor start, it is necessary to start off any job/career on the right foot. This being said, there are many success strategies on how to do this. Let’s talk about some of these right now.

Anne-Marie: There are six critical success strategies that you should use to help make your first year working a success.

The first strategy is to slow down. Remember that you are just coming out of college and you don’t know everything that there is to know about your new job. College has only given you part of your learning experience and your boss and manager will understand that you still have a lot of learning left to do. Because of this, don’t expect to come in on your first day and make a huge contribution before you earn respect and acceptance from your colleagues and truly understand the workings of your company. Also, accept the fact that there still is a lot that you don’t know but you are willing to learn. In order to do this you need to keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth closed. This shows that you are mature and leaves a good impression.

The second success strategy is to learn the culture. This means that you need to understand and embrace your new work culture. Learn the norms and values of your company by watching how your colleagues work together. Become familiar with your company’s mission statement and
philosophy and understand what your boss and colleagues expect out of you. Remember, you cannot change the culture of the company until you have been accepted into it.

The third success strategy is to manage a good impression. A good saying to remember is that the first impression is the last impression. Everything that you do early on will be magnified until you have built up your own professional reputation. Another tip is to be able to read your colleagues. This will help you build relationships with them. Be ready to learn and change and respect your older colleagues and people above you. Most importantly, have the attitude that says you are realistic about your goals and that you are willing to do whatever it takes to fit into the company.

The forth success strategy is to learn the art of being new. This stage can be a little awkward but understand the importance of this transition period from being a new hire to becoming a member of your company. During this time, accept the roles of a new member and take time to learn about your organization.

Randy: The fifth important aspect to focus on during your first year on the job is how you manage your expectations. Most recent graduates have optimistic, larger than life views of what they want to do and how they plan to do it in their new career. When they realize that their expectations were not met, frustration sets in. Yet, one cannot let this frustration consume their attitude and affect their job performance. If you work at keeping your expectations reasonable during your first year, you won’t be disappointed and your entire experience will be much better. Also expect to be surprised because many things that you expected will probably be drastically different than what actually happens on the job.

The next success strategy is to keep things in perspective. When entering your job, remember that the recruiter most likely made the job seem a lot more attractive than it actually is. Also expect a lot less attention and a significant loss of individualism as you enter a team oriented environment. The focus will shift from individuals to the entire team, its skills, and the efficiency of both. The way things will work will also probably be less logical and more political than you anticipated.

Despite all of these setbacks, it is important to adapt to your new environment and check your naïve views at the door because most employers have little patience for this type of stuff.

Becoming a savvy subordinate is very important. Going into your career it is good to know that the most important person in your first year is your boss. Not yourself! You should make it a priority to get to know your boss, their personality, and their way of doing things. This will benefit you both instantly and in the future if you are looking for advancement. Most feel like this is not very important yet you can’t become a good leader until you have learned to be a good follower.

Despite all of the scary things we just warned you about, once you accept that things will be much different than you expect, the transition from college to work will be much smoother. You will be able to succeed and become an important part of your company’s success thus giving you the personal satisfaction of accomplishing something good. Remembering, it is ultimately your responsibility to do these things, not your boss’s. Thanks for tuning in. Hope this helps in your vital first year on the job.