

## First Job? Here's How to Thrive

by Bill Repp

**Q.** *I've just started my first job. Any tips on what I can do well to get my career off to a good start? I like this company and want to make a good name for myself.* —Robert F.

**A.** Absolutely. There are simple, practical things you can do to make yourself stand out. If you show you've got the personal attributes that employers want, they'll learn to count on you and you'll quickly move ahead in responsibility. Career consultant and trainer Marcia Hall ([marcia@reputationcounts.com](mailto:marcia@reputationcounts.com)) has just published a book that tells new employees what to do: *Navigating Newbie-ism: 12 Simple Ways to Thrive in Your First Job and Career, The College Student's Guide* (Parker Stanton Publishing). Here they are:

**#1 Big Smile.** Show people you like them. Shake hands firmly as you look people in the eye with a genuine smile. Show a positive, “can-do” attitude and leave personal problems at home. Practice smiling at everyone: customers, bosses, co-workers.

**#2 “Business Casual.”** Dress for the job you want—and want to hold. Look around and see what others are wearing and conform if you're dressing differently. Your clothes determine how professional you appear. You don't have to “break the bank” when you shop for clothes, but make sure you buy quality clothing. Don't forget to shower, use deodorant and keep your breath fresh.

**#3 On My Honor.** Do what you say you'll do by the agreed-upon deadline. Keep your word, so that people know they can count on you. Under-promise and over-deliver. Show that you can take responsibility, and have integrity and a good work ethic.

**#4 Never Be Late.** Always be on time—or early—for everything. Never be late. This

shows reliability and responsibility, and that you take your job seriously.

**#5 “We Try Harder” Isn’t Good Enough.** Effort isn’t the same as excellence and execution. Do what it takes as well as the time you need to get the job done. Do the job well. Anticipate what might be needed next, or determine how to solve problems before they occur. Exceed people’s expectations: deliver more than they expect. When bosses and co-workers know that your work doesn’t have to be examined in detail for possible errors, everyone’s stress will be lower.

**#6 Return phone calls and e-mails promptly.** Treat each caller as if he/she were the president of the company calling. It really doesn’t matter who the person is. The call must have the same sense of urgency. This shows you’re competent, professional and responsible. And customers and co-workers love promptly returned phone calls and e-mails.

**#7 Admit Your Mistakes.** Employees who admit mistakes—while offering solutions—are viewed in a much more positive light than those who don’t. People who don’t blame others but accept responsibility exhibit the integrity that an employer values. Make sure you tell your boss about mistakes before he/she hears about them from someone else. Never let him or her be surprised.

**#8 Show Your Appreciation.** Say thank-you often. Buy some thank-you note cards and have them on hand. Think about the people who have helped you in the past month. Each week, write at least one thank-you letter to a co-worker, friend or mentor. This builds your reputation as being thoughtful. People like to help others who are appreciative.

**#9 Be a Team Player.** Everyone is responsible for the bottom line. Being a team player and pitching in when needed demonstrates to others that you care about the organization’s health and co-workers. Offer to help...before you’re asked.

**#10 Don't Be a Complainer.** People—especially bosses—get tired of complainers.

If you complain about work assignments or tasks that aren't in your job description, your boss won't be pleased. If you gripe about your boss to co-workers or go over the head of your immediate supervisor to those higher up the company ladder, your reputation will greatly suffer, because you'll be branded as disloyal.

**#11 Be Teachable, and Embrace Learning.** Develop the ability to jump on

opportunities. Trying something new and out of your comfort zone is a great exercise.

It also shows your ability to acquire new skills that may be needed to move in a new direction. Continuing to expand your mind and skill set is something that employers value highly. They'll expect this quality throughout your career. It also gets you the mindset that, in order to stay competitive, lifelong learning is the only option that makes sense. Don't be afraid to ask questions. To get in the habit of learning things new to you, take a course to learn something outside your comfort zone.

**#12 Listen First.** Hear what the other person is saying before you talk. Don't interrupt.

This shows you are patient and thoughtful. It shows you won't waste time asking for information to be repeated, and shows respect for your boss and coworkers.

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