



Adjusting to Work: Getting Along with Others

Already nervous about your first week on the job, you spill coffee on the report you had worked all morning. Your co-workers look at you but don't help. The phone is ringing and you are not sure if it is your turn to answer it. How will you get used to it all?

Be ready to learn a new "culture" at work.

- Each workplace has a different way of doing things (its own "culture"). You may need to learn new ways of talking and acting in order to get along in this new situation.
- You might experience strong feelings, such as fear, confusion, or frustration, as you try to learn how to act in this new place. Those feelings are completely normal. Just be patient. Every day, you will learn more about the workplace and feel more comfortable there.
- Watch your co-workers and supervisor carefully to find out how they do things. Be sure you know what is expected of you. You can also ask them questions if you are not sure.
- The people you work with will have different personalities. Some will be easier to work with than others are, and some will be very different from you. Remember that if a co-worker says something that upsets

you, he or she may not have meant to hurt your feelings. It might just be part of his or her personality! Take some time to get to know people's different personalities, and then you will be better able to understand things they say and do.

Be assertive, active, and positive when talking to others.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions! You were chosen for the job because you have something to offer, and you need to know how best to use your skills. You have the right to find out exactly what is expected of you.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as "Can you tell me about how you want me to file these papers?" instead of "yes or no" questions, such as "Do I put this paper in this folder?" People will give you a lot more information if you ask open-ended questions.
- Don't hide your feelings and needs from others. Express them in a clear, direct, honest, and positive way.

For example: "That's an interesting idea, but it might not work well because..." or "I understand why you moved your desk, but this new arrangement is not good for me because

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I have less space to work.”

Ask your questions in a clear, direct, and positive way.

For example: “Thanks for showing me how to fill out that form. Could you explain these other forms to me, too?”

- Listen very carefully when others are talking to you. Give them your full attention. Think about their needs and feelings.

Learn to deal with criticism and conflict.

- Don’t take criticism about your work performance personally. Co-workers and supervisors will need to help you learn your new job by telling you how to do things better.

When someone criticizes your performance, they are not saying something bad about you as a person. They are saying something about a certain behavior of yours, which you can try to change.

- Sometimes people criticize your performance without giving you any advice about how to do it better. If that happens, ask for more information.

For example, if someone says, “You’re not supposed to answer the telephone that way,” you could say, “I haven’t learned about this yet. Could you tell me how the telephone should be answered?”

- If a co-worker says or does something that really bothers you, *tell him or her* how you feel in a clear, positive way.

For example: “I get upset when you interrupt me while I’m talking, because it makes me feel like what I’m saying isn’t important.”

- Learn how to give criticism in a positive way. Instead of saying something about the *person*, such as “You are so messy!” try to focus on their *behavior*, why it needs to be changed, and how it can be improved.

For example, you could say: “When you leave

things on the floor in here, it’s hard for me to work. Maybe if you put a trash can by your desk, it would be easier for you to throw things away.”

Be a team player.

- Remember that you are working as part of a group, not by yourself! Try to be an active and helpful part of the “team” of co-workers.
- Give your ideas and suggestions to others. They will appreciate your interest and help.
- Tell your co-workers when you like their work or their work style.

For example: “You did a great job putting that poster together!”

- Take good care of your own space and equipment so that it doesn’t bother the people working with you. Clean up your space after the end of your work shift.
- If someone can’t come in to work or gets sick, offer to help out to make sure all the work gets done.

Improve your self-esteem.

- If you feel good about yourself, you will have an easier time getting along with others and doing well at work.
- Listen to the things you say to yourself. Are they positive (“I know I can do this job well.”) or negative (“I’ll never be able to learn this!”)? Whatever you say over and over to yourself usually comes true. So, try to say more positive things to yourself! This will give you more confidence, make you feel better about yourself, help you get along with others, and make it easier to handle your new job.

Getting along with others is very important in your success on the job.

Take time to be patient and understand what is expected. Listen carefully, ask questions and soon you will be used to the routine!

References

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Easing Transitions: Balancing Work and Family, FCS-479-1

Parenting for the Busy Parent of a Preschooler, FCS-479-2

Adjusting to Work: Getting Along with Others, FCS-479-3

Decision Making: It's a Skill, FCS-479-4

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