

PART 2

***The things they don't
teach you at school***



Reputation - Looking After Your Most Important Asset at Work

"It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, and only one bad one to lose it" - Benjamin Franklin

Your reputation speaks to a whole range of things about you and ultimately it defines you and your relationships with others.

Whether it's your friends, your neighbours, your schoolmates or your teacher, they will all have a view on what kind of person you are, and that will define your relationship with them. So whether you know it or not, during your time at school you have developed a good or a bad reputation.

A good reputation is a mix of attitude, motivation, ethics, optimism, and a whole bunch of other stuff that tells the world – "Hey, this is me, and this is how I behave".

But you are a new starter in a work situation. Nobody knows you at work, so how does this reputation thing work for you?

Most of your co-workers will have little or no knowledge of you, apart from what the boss may have told them about the impression you made at interview.

Some co-workers will already have a pre-conceived (not personal) view on new starters based on their experience with school leavers or university graduates.

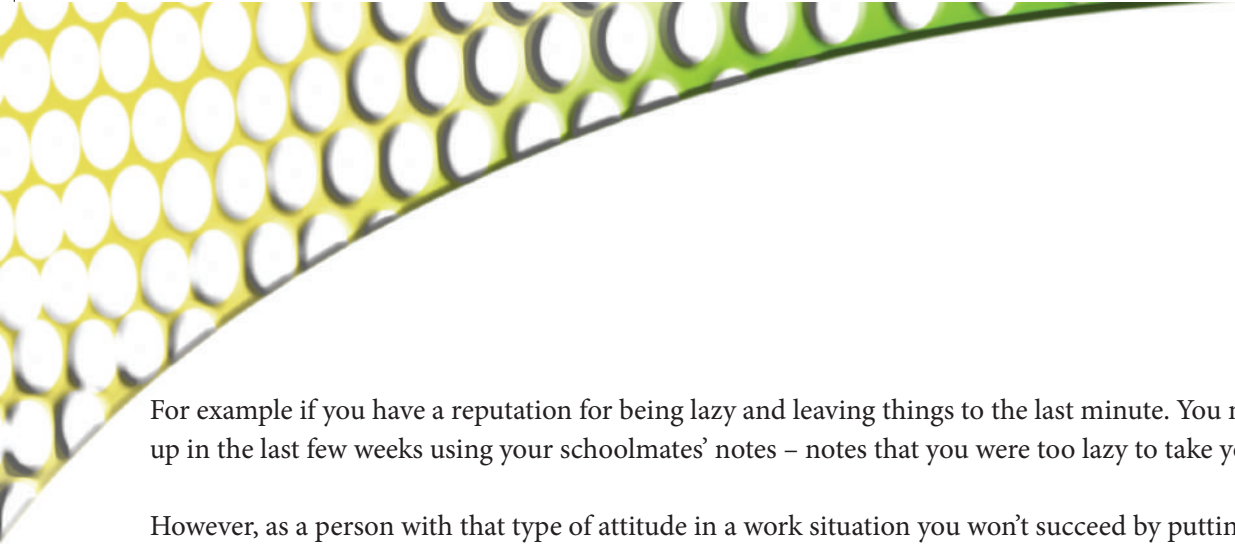
For example, your future co-worker may consider all new graduates as useless know-it-alls and just another lazy sod that thinks the world owes them a living. Maybe you'll get lucky and your future co-worker will think that a new junior is just what they need, someone with energy and enthusiasm who is going to be just so helpful around the office!

Generally, most co-workers, even those with preconceived ideas, are willing to give new starters the benefit of the doubt and judge you on how they find you.

In a work situation your reputation is everything. It tells people who have never met you what sort of person you are, whether you have the "right attitude", whether you can be trusted to do a job, whether you are a quick learner, motivated, a lazy person, a gossip, reliable, enthusiastic, angry, optimistic, sullen, cheery, funny, achiever, team player, loner, studies, hands on: all these things go to make your reputation.

This is important, because when you start work, you will be judged, and as you probably don't have a network of relationships or contacts, the word about you (positive and negative) can be circulating without your knowledge.

This is different to a school or university setting, where you can still achieve high grades if you have some weaknesses in your reputation. Your high school grades say nothing about your reputation.



For example if you have a reputation for being lazy and leaving things to the last minute. You might swot up in the last few weeks using your schoolmates' notes – notes that you were too lazy to take yourself

However, as a person with that type of attitude in a work situation you won't succeed by putting the effort on only now and then when it suits you. You will find that your boss and co-workers will be **CONTINUALLY** assessing you and if you are seen as a lazy person you will soon be out on your ear. Worse still, you now have a reputation as a lazy sod, and that will follow you to your next job.

As your reputation is building in your new job, you need to be careful to protect it.

People will talk, and you will not get the right of reply. If your boss mentions to another boss that you are a bit lazy, and only apply yourself when you feel like it, you may find yourself being overlooked for promotion or pay rises, without knowing it.

Protecting your reputation is a full -time job.

Say you have worked up a reputation of being a good guy to work with, calm, helpful, polite etc. Then one day you are feeling a bit down and have a full scale row with one of your co-workers over a trivial matter. The whole office witnesses this row, and everybody will remember the day you really lost it.

Your reputation that you have built up over months or years has suddenly gone out the window and you are seen as a cranky worker and "difficult". You may never recover your previous good reputation. Workers will be watching and waiting on you losing your cool again.

Similarly if you have a reputation of being the exceptional worker who goes the extra mile, then the word will get around. Let's say you are a waitress and you make a point of adding a smile and a small biscuit to every coffee order and making the customer feel special in some way. Perhaps you are a carpenter who makes a special effort to clean his workplace and tools thoroughly at the end of every shift.

These things will improve your reputation. They will show people that you are a good worker, and increase your worth to the boss. But remember, you can't have an "off day" and lower your standards. That would undermine your reputation.





People are watching

When you start work people will be watching you.

Sometimes new starters are assigned to a mentor, to show you the ropes. Induction processes are covered in Part 4. This will tell you about the basics of the company, things like the work hours, where your desk is, where the toilets are, where you go for lunch, and safety policies and procedures.

It's important as you go through this induction that you impress your mentor. Because as well as showing you what to do, the mentor will also be assessing you. You can be sure that co-workers will ask the mentor "What's the new person like?"

His answer to that question will have an effect on how people you have never met will relate to you. If the mentor's answer is negative, people may be wary of you, and you will find that people are perhaps not as helpful as they could be.

If the mentor gave you a glowing reference and said you would be a great help to the team, you will find that people adopt a positive attitude to you.

Your co-workers will have been assessing you as you settle into the company.

They will do this consciously through job appraisals etc., and through day-to-day contact.

- Do they see you as a person who is a valuable member of the team?
- Are you a helpful person?
- Or are you someone who only occasionally lends a hand?
- Will you go the extra mile to help?
- Do you appear sullen and moody?

All of these assessments go towards building your reputation in the company. This has a huge effect in your work and career. If you can build up a positive reputation within the organisation your contribution will be recognised, and other opportunities will emerge.

Further, you will increase your employability prospects, so that when times get tough your reputation may save your job. Even if a good reputation does not save your job when a downturn happens, it will help you find another job quickly. When it becomes time to move on, you are in a stronger position to negotiate with your new employer if you have a good reputation behind you.

Reputations and working in a team

Reputations take a while to build up and an instant to lose.

For example, I have known a few people who were seen as the best team players at work for years, but then they bully a co-worker and then they are forever seen as a bully.

Of course not all co-workers will want to see you succeeding. They may see you as a good worker but others as “brownosing” or “sucking up to the boss”.

It can be hard for a new starter to hear these criticisms from co-workers. The temptation is always there to conform to the normal behaviour of the group.

So you have a decision to make:

- Are you going to be seen as the “average” worker in order to seek favour with your co-workers?
- Or are you going to focus on your job and do it to the best of your ability?

It’s not an easy decision. A lot of people decide to lower their standards and settle in as part of the group.

Of course the boss then sees this. You become an “average” worker in the boss’s eyes. This has the consequence of you losing opportunities. Opportunities that you may not even be aware of!

It takes a lot of courage to build up a good reputation as a worker when you are a new starter.

You must seek out opportunities to show that you value this job, and are prepared to do that little bit extra to improve customer service, or increase the value of the service in some way.

The difference between “sucking up to the boss” and “doing a good job” is the difference between playing the person and doing the task.

Sucking up to the boss is self-promotion. It’s about telling the boss how you are doing work better than anyone else. You are putting down other co-workers by suggesting to the boss that they are not doing a good a job as you. This may fool some bosses. (They aren’t perfect.) But it usually ends in tears, because at the end of the day the boss is interested in results, and good results only come from workers who work together. No one likes to work with a “brownnose” who runs off to say “look at me, look at me” at every opportunity.

A new starter builds up a good reputation, not by looking for praise, or self-promotion, but by letting the work speak for itself.

As a new starter you may find that others are happy to take credit for some of your work (it happens). Don’t let this disturb you. You are just starting your working life and bosses will notice that when you are part of the team good work follows. It takes a while to build a reputation. Take it slowly but deliberately, and never lower your standards to gain favour with others.

A word of warning to new starters. As you grow in your career, do not expect your work to “speak for itself”. Being shy about your achievements will not help you build your reputation.

As you gain experience, make sure in a quiet but firm way your boss knows the good work you are doing. A friendly reminder at an appropriate time is usually enough.

Online reputation

Reputation defines who will talk to you, what they will do for you, what they will do with you.

It determines whether a bank will lend you money to buy a car or a house, whether you will have a roof over your head as a tenant, whether you can get a job. It affects your insurance coverage for health or car. A modern phenomenon is the online reputation and its entry into the workplace. Online reputation tools are getting more powerful. Background checks are everywhere, and you may not even know that a background check has come back negative, and is excluding you from an opportunity.

Michael Firtsek is an expert on online reputation and he says, “Reputation is permanent, cheap and ubiquitous.”

It is permanent because unlike years ago personal “transactions” are being kept forever. Not so long ago people were allowed to forget about others misdeeds because their memories (and old newspapers) fade away over time.

Nowadays, Facebook and other online sources store every bit of information recorded. Every day Facebook adds 50 times the amount of data in the United States Library of Congress’s print collection!

Twitter is another source of online reputation. Did you know that the US Library of Congress is storing every single public tweet, regardless of content?

Some experts believe that Facebook does not actually delete photos from its servers, even if the owner hits the “Delete Photo” button.

It is safest to assume that every bit of online data that you have created is stored in at least one location. Every review, every ATM, every email, tweet, blog etc.

Obviously any blemish on your online reputation will live longer than you!

As Firtsek has noted, any positive and negative information about your “online life” is permanent, cheap to store, and is everywhere that can be reached by the Internet.

So beware!! Here are some tips.



How to keep your personal life personal

Firtek says that you need to make your personal and Facebook feeds hard to find.

He suggests that you lock your personal thoughts away from public view and create a separate public persona. This sounds a bit weird, but he is emphasising the need to be protective about your reputation. Let's face it, not everyone online is your best friend and there are some seriously bad people out there who seem to get their kicks from messing up other people's lives. So what can you do?

Some Facebook users are renaming their personal profile to a variant of their name that friends will recognise but computers will not. MCHL FRTEK for example, instead of Michael Firtek, and locking this profile to friends only. This is a great idea for email accounts also, because you significantly reduce the amount of spam and other malware if your email does not have a recognisable (to a computer) name.

Others create duplicate accounts, one public, and one private. I know of one IT guru who does this, and he happily gives out his email address to those who he knows will send him junk emails. People like Coles, Woolworths etc. By keeping these emails away from the important stuff he avoids the probability of his personal emails being hacked, and saves himself a lot of time trawling through the junk of the Internet. These precautions are really important, because once your personal email is hacked you have little choice but to change it. This is a drama you have probably not considered; maybe you have assumed your email address is for life.

Likewise don't assume those apps like **SNAPCHAT** who profess to automatically delete entries after the recipient sees online life is forever; so best to assume that whatever you do online stays there.

It's not hard to see a situation where your online reputation is permanently damaged by something stupid you did years before.

There are many examples of this. You will probably know a few. You may remember Justine Sacco, a PR executive who tweeted "Going to Africa, I hope I don't get AIDS - just kidding." just as she was getting on a long haul flight. By the time she arrived at her destination and turned her phone back on, she was a worldwide celebrity for all the wrong reasons and her life was destroyed.

Other apps like Tigertext can be set to automatically and permanently delete texts. But treat them all with caution.





Attitude

"Always look on the bright side of life" Life of Brian

Your attitude at work should be optimistic and professional. Don't damage your reputation by making complaints, saying things that are untrue, being over - critical, or negative. Instead build and improve on your reputation by seeing the best in people, thanking them for their assistance, be a fun person to be around, be someone who will brighten other team member's day.

These are very difficult things to learn and do, especially when you are a new work starter and perhaps worried and concerned about what lies ahead for you at work. Try to be confident and not take yourself too seriously while doing your job to the best of your ability. You will find that if you can keep an optimistic and happy attitude, people will be more likely to help you with any work difficulties.

Criticising co-workers

"Never throw your colleagues under the bus or talk about them behind their back" says career coach Roy Cohen, author of *The Wall Street Professional Survivors Guide*.

"Colleagues who trust and admire you will be your best support system to promote your reputation as desirable and valuable. When they don't feel that you are transparent in your intentions, your disruptive actions will raise doubts about your ability to be a both a team player and a team motivator. Both are essential assets for effective leadership."

As a new starter you are probably not thinking about being a leader, but remember that bad mouthing anyone, co-worker or customer, says more about you than about them.

The results from the survey in Part 1 should convince you that the idea that "most graduates and school leavers think they know everything" is clearly not true.

As a new work starter it's almost certain that in your first work team you will be working with people with lesser abilities. You are starting at the bottom of the ladder, and there will be people who may have been there a while. This does not mean that you should look on this as an opportunity to put them down in order to advance yourself.

If you are seen as a critic of others, the rest of the team will wonder what you think of them.

Instead, you will improve your reputation if you are seen as someone who is supportive of the other team members, and keeps any gossip about poor performance to themselves.

You may also be working with people who have greater abilities than you but who you personally dislike because of their attitude. That's fine and only natural, but what's not fine is to criticise your co-workers. You need to adopt a professional attitude to these people. That means treating them with respect in all your dealings with them.

Accept that you are going to come across people at work who you are never going to be friendly with. When dealing with these people, you will have to learn to focus on the work and establish a relationship with them, where you both acknowledge that you are there to do a job of work and you are both doing it to the best of your abilities.

It demonstrates a bad attitude and will damage your reputation if you say things like "Jill is an idiot."

Well, maybe Jill is an idiot but there are several reasons why you should keep your opinion to yourself. You may regret saying this later. Jill may be having a bad day, or she may have information that you don't have about why she is behaving the way she is. In any event Jill is almost bound to hear what you have said about her. Even if she doesn't those people who have heard what you have said about Jill will wonder what are you saying about them.

Overworked?

Also avoid talking about how busy you are and how you are overworked.

It may be true that you are feeling a bit overwhelmed, especially as a new starter. But complaining is never a good idea and it never improves your reputation.

It's also true that in most jobs there is more work than time available, so your co-workers are probably in the same boat.

You are a professional now, and professionals don't create drama, they work on solutions. So if you are feeling overworked talk to your boss about it in a positive way. How?

Well you could explain how you are prioritising your work and seek advice about whether this is acceptable to the boss. That way you are saying, yes I can do all this work, and this is the way I think is the best way of doing it, and this is my timing.

This would be more positive and professional than complaining about your work load and suggesting that one of your co-workers (who you may mention to your boss is not pulling their weight) should take on some of your jobs. That approach sends out all the wrong messages.





NOT FAIR

That's not fair!

Your positive attitude will be tested when you see things at the workplace that seem unfair.

It is very annoying when you see inequality in the workplace. Perhaps someone seems to be the boss's pet and gets all the good jobs. Nothing upsets a team quicker than if someone has special treatment. A team can accept really poor treatment for a long time, provided that the team perceives that everyone is being treated equally.

However, you should never say to the boss, "That's not fair." For the simple reason that work isn't fair. It's not fair up and down the organisation, and it's not fair across co-workers.

The best approach is to be professional, do your job to the best of your ability and don't get distracted by lack of equality or fairness issues.

Likewise there is little point in complaining to your co-workers about perceived unfairness in the workplace. In most cases they will be able to point to worse cases of unfairness.

Complaining about fairness in the workplace is worse than a waste of time, because it will undermine your enthusiasm and optimism - two essential things to protect when you are building your reputation.

Unfairness - it's a fact of life in any workplace - get used to it.

Promises, promises

One danger of an optimistic attitude is in the area of making promises.

As a professional you need to be careful with making promises, especially those that you know you cannot deliver on. True professionals always under promise and over deliver. So if a job can possibly be done by 3pm, but definitely by 4pm, a professional will promise to have the job done (and self-checked) by 4.30pm and try to achieve a 3pm target.

A big mistake a new starter will often make is to promise what the customer or boss wants to hear. That may get them out of your hair for a while. But what you are really doing is damaging to your own reputation and the company's reputation. It makes you appear dishonest and incompetent. These are things you do not want to be known for.

So only make promises that you know you can keep. If you are under pressure it is better to say that you will try your best but **"I am NOT promising"**. Say it at least twice because chances are that the person asking you will not hear the second part of your reply the first time.

Promises are important, and especially if you make a promise to a customer. It has been known for a while that if you deliver to a customer as promised, or better, then 2 or 3 other people may hear about it. Maybe that doesn't sound that great to you. But the other side of the coin is that if you break a promise to a customer, a customer will tell, on average, 22 others about their experience.

So be very careful about making promises at work; they carry extremely powerful impacts on your and the company's reputation.

Never promise something you know you cannot achieve. If you can, deliver a little bit more than you have promised.

I'm so bored!

You may be tempted, but never say that you are bored.

Clearly new starters can't be kept busy all the time. There are periods where you will just have to go out and find something to do. Offer to help out in other areas, or find some job that no one ever gets round to and make it your own. There is always something that can be done.

Being pro-active in finding work has several benefits for you.

It stops the boss wondering why he is paying you. (Which he will ask himself if you are looking bored.) Also it starts to make you indispensable to the company, because more jobs are seen as "your" jobs.

But most importantly, it builds your reputation as a positive, enthusiastic worker always ready and looking out for ways to help the team.

Motivation

How to recognise motivation?

Most businesses want to hire motivated employees. We recognise motivated employees very quickly. How? Measuring motivation is very simple. Just watch what the employee does when the boss is not there.

- **Do they work conscientiously?**
- **Do they slack off?**

A motivated employee will work conscientiously whether there is a boss watching them or not. They will also look for better ways of working; they will look for work when their task is over. They'll help out others without being asked.

All these behaviours demonstrate motivation and increase the reputation of the individual.

As a new starter your motivation levels should be high. You will want to do a good job, and usually the only thing that holds you back is lacking the necessary training to do complex jobs and your (natural) shyness at being in a workplace that you are not familiar with.

This is where good communication skills come in.

Eight things that show you are motivated

The boss can't tell if you are motivated by your facial expression. So don't hide your motivation.

Use words and actions to show that you have motivation.

Eight things that **motivated** new starters do:

1. Always on time. That doesn't mean if a task is scheduled for 9am they are there at 9am. It means that they are there before 9am – and ready to start work. They have whatever is required for the job. Pen, pencil, hammer, overalls, boots, laptop, clipboard, calculator. What does this show? It shows that they are keen, but more than that they have thought about what is going to be done, and prepared themselves to start work at the set time, not be arriving and then starting to think about starting work.

2. Ask for clarification. Even if they think they know what the boss has said, they always make sure that what they understood he said, is correct. They listen carefully and try and pick up what are the important aspects of the job. If they are being asked to stack boxes for example, they ask if it is only these boxes that require stacking, or does the boss want the whole area cleaned up? If so, they then ask if you should tidy up the wider area when you are finished, or just report back to the boss.

A simple "yes sir" and "no sir" to job instructions should always be AVOIDED by the motivated employee.

Active listening. Feed back to the boss what you have heard by way of instructions, so there can be no confusion about what you are being asked to do. By feeding back his instructions, you are getting a better understanding about the critical parts of the job.

Is it important to stack the boxes in a particular order? How will the boxes be used? Maybe you should place them in a particular pattern? Even the simplest of jobs will require some clarification and by seeking clarification you will learn more about the job and find ways to apply your motivated actions.

3. Motivated people always look for something to do. They are always busy. They ask their co-workers and bosses if there is something that they can do to help. They become known as the person who can be relied on. This comes with responsibility, so that if a motivated person finds that they have too much on, and can't help then what do they say? "Sorry I'm busy?" No. They would say, "I can't do that right now, can I come back to you in an hour?"

4. Make suggestions. They are not just about doing things faster or longer. They are motivated to do things smarter.

When you are a new starter no one seriously thinks you have the answers. That's OK, because that usually means it's OK for you to make a few dumb suggestions. It doesn't really matter whether your co-workers take up your suggestions, what is important is that your co-workers hear your voice saying "Would it make sense to do it this way?" That's building your reputation as a motivated worker.

5. Learn by doing the jobs that no one else wants. In any work situation there are always jobs that people tend to avoid. A motivated person sees this as an opportunity. I remember when I worked on shift at a power station and at the end of every month our shift always seemed to be left with the jobs to test the protection equipment that the other shifts "never got around to". Partly this was because any mistake on the protection equipment, and you would probably black out a major city. So leaving these jobs used to annoy some of the team, but the boss pulled us aside and said, "Look guys, this is a real opportunity for us to do these jobs well. We'll become better at plant operations because we'll understand the equipment better." Sure enough in a few years my co-workers were all getting promotions because they were recognised as motivated - and they understood the equipment better than other shifts.

6. Are usually optimistic. They don't dwell on negative things. If they reach a stumbling block, they get over it, or move around it. So as a new starter if you find for example that your special work uniform is not ready on your first day, you ask if you can wear something else that will allow you to work. You don't see problems as an opportunity to slack off.

7. Are motivated for themselves. As a new starter you have a lot to take in. But don't forget about looking after yourself. See the section on self-improvement for some ideas on how to make yourself more valuable.

8. Set goals. Experts suggest that for every 10 short-term goal have one long term.

As a motivated new starter your short-term goals will mostly be about learning the ropes, getting the accreditation to do more tasks, increasing your rewards, adding to your reputation etc. Your long-term goal may be a promotion in a year. Whatever.



Always try and make your goals SMART.
(Simple, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time dependant)



Warning to motivated new starters

There is a trap for motivated new employees. Every day new starters are injured, sometimes seriously at work. Sometimes the cause of the injury can be traced to them trying to do too much, or working in an unsafe way in order to get the job done.

Good bosses will always tell you that safety comes before production – and they will mean it. If someone is injured at work it affects the reputation of that company and can have serious repercussions. There are regularly stories in the news of new starters who injure themselves by attempting jobs they are not trained for.

Workplace Health and Safety is covered in Part 4. Always make sure that the work you are doing is safe. Don't take risks with your health and safety because of your motivation.

Ethics

"The truth of the matter is that you are always going to know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it" Norman Schwarzkopf

The good news is that most of us have a conscience that tells us right from wrong. The bad news is that we choose not to listen to it sometimes. When you are at work always listen to your conscience. Even when others are not listening to theirs.

Why?

Because honesty is a critical part of your reputation, and as we have said, reputation is a very fragile thing. It only takes **one** dishonest action to destroy a lifetime of good works. Ethics is relentless, it never takes a break. It tells the world if you can be trusted, what values you have, the kind of person you are, whether you can be relied on, the way you think.

Let's talk about positive ethical behaviour before we get into the traps for the new starters.

Here are some honest and ethical things you can do to improve your reputation.



10 things that develop your reputation

- Be known as the person others can rely on. The person who gets things done.
- Be trustworthy. Keep your word. Keep confidences, and secrets.
- Don't be a gossip. Never badmouth anyone.
- Be on time. Don't brag. Let your work do the talking.
- Never complain.
- Be professional with co-workers/friendship is optional.
- The behaviour you walk past is the behaviour you condone. If you see something unethical report it.
- Never tolerate abuse.
- Always accept that your boss has the right to say what you do, when you do it and how you do it.
- Be honest. If/when you mess up then own up to it straightaway. Don't leave it for others to find.

Ethics is black and white. No grey. It's a hard area for new starters because everyone wants to "fit in" and if there is any unethical behaviour in your workplace, the tendency is to accept it because it's always easier to go with the crowd, even if you know it's wrong.

This is particularly difficult as the new starter you have no network of contacts within the business, and are not sure where to turn when you find something wrong happening. Also you don't want to be known as a "dobber". So what to do?

Because you are a new starter you have some advantages. You are a "cleanskin" and have no history with the workplace, so you can and must say that you are not comfortable in doing the wrong thing. That will get you credit with some co-workers who may also be feeling the same way.

If other co-workers try to push you into doing something wrong then walk away, it's not worth it. These co-workers who do not have your interests at heart are only going to get you into trouble.

Let's talk about some typical ethical problems a new starter might face on beginning work.

Things like:

- Is it OK to call in sick when you aren't?
- Is it OK to take pens home from the office?
- Is it OK to make a personal phone call from work?
- Is it OK to take extra 10 minutes off for lunch?
- Is it OK to use the office computer for personal Internet use?

If you answered YES to any of the above, you are not alone. Over 60% of people in a survey thought that this behaviour was OK.

However, it doesn't change the fact that it is unethical. Actually, it's stealing from someone who has given you a job.

While "everybody else does it" might cut it as an excuse with your best friend, it's not right and it's damaging something more important: your reputation.

I say that anytime you are faced with a decision at work that involves doing something that wasn't in the employment deal you should ask yourself "Will doing this improve or destroy my reputation" and then you'll know if it's right or wrong.

The problem remains though. If you are the new guy on the block and everybody else is using company resources for their benefit what should you do?

The first thing is to try and not get into that position. Avoid the temptation to start using company resources because they are convenient.

Take personal emails and communications for example. Switch your mobile off while at work. If you want, make a point of turning on your phone only at lunch and responding to any urgent matters on your phone at that time.

If you find that there is no choice but to use the office photocopier for personal use, then ask for permission to use it – but out of hours. Offer to pay for the copies. Even if the supervisor refuses, you will find that your supervisor will think more of you because of your honesty. Your reputation will be intact.

It is unlikely a new employee will be involved with cash or commercial transactions. But be aware that every day in Australia employees are dismissed and legal action taken against them for fraud. This can be from a few dollars, to thousands of dollars. And of course, if you are dismissed for fraudulent activity, you will not only lose any of your entitlements, but also kiss goodbye to getting another job.



Ten everyday non-ethical behaviours you should avoid

Other types of unethical behaviour that you will see, but should avoid:

- Not returning phone calls
- Making promises that you won't or can't keep
- Committing the business to an expense you cannot authorise
- Telling lies
- Saying a product will do something it doesn't
- Being a gossip
- Speaking badly of co-workers (including bosses!!)
- Being late for work appointments
- Treating co-workers/customers with disrespect

Work - it's a team game

"Light is the task where many share the toil" Homer

The last part of this book is called "The rules of the game", and it talks about those things that make up the framework of work.

Susan Packard in her book *New rules of the game* says that the workplace is just a great big playing field, with winners and losers, different teams, goals, and certain rules that you need to learn if you want to win. Specifically Susan talks about women in the workplace and why they don't get ahead or are badly treated. A lot of what she says is easily transferred to new starters.

For example, you need to know the rules (and they are different to education) and you need to know the language (it's still English – but not as you know it).

Susan talks about work (business) as a team sport, and there are nine things she says you have to do or learn if you want to have a fair go in this sport of work.

1. Conditioning
2. Composure
3. Playing offense
4. Celebrate success
5. Practice, practice, practice
6. Uniform requirements
7. Good sportsmanship
8. Grit
9. Team play

We'll talk about these things in the next section on teamwork.



Teamwork

At work you are probably going to be a member of at least one team. So let's talk about teamwork. I'm guessing that you think you are a pretty good team player, based on your experience at school/university class exercises?

Well we know from Part 1 that you are wrong. Why, because the team exercise you went through was artificial. It wasn't carried out in the real world, with real world personalities and difficulties.

So let's go through what makes a good sports team player and what that means for work.

Conditioning

You have to be in shape. You're not going to contribute or get much team support unless you show that you can deliver the goods. Now although you are a new starter, you can be the best new starter by applying the principles of this book. Be excellent at what you do, take your job training seriously and you'll get yourself in the best possible condition for the game.

Composure

Don't get emotional. Be cool. Be professional. Things will go wrong on the game, don't cry about it, pick yourself up, learn from your mistakes and move on. Be optimistic, be energetic.

Playing offense

This is probably not so relevant for a new starter. You will not be expected to score goals for the team, but you will be expected to watch others' backs, be supportive, look for tasks that the team needs doing (that are within your capabilities).

Celebrate success

As a new starter you are not expected to have a fan base, but build contacts and networks outside the team so that the team is supported. Celebrate success so that team builds a history, creates stories that others can relate to. Lots of work teams have myths around their success.

Whether it's a team of hairdressers staying late one night to socialise and share success stories, or a group of real estate agents taking out an ad in the paper to let others know of their success, it's all important in making the team a winning team.

Practice, practice, practice

This is really important when you are a new starter in a team. Don't let your first kick of the ball in the grand final be the first time you have tried.

Practice those kicks, practice those tasks, practice those conversations you are going to have with the boss, or the co-worker or the customer, maybe do it by watching how the rest of the team manages their tasks, and copy them. Practice with the rest of the team so that you get better and better.

Uniform requirements

Teams have uniforms for a reason. It socialises them and gives a perception that they are all on the same page and are cohesive. So make sure that the impressions you give, whether it's visual (clothes, appearance) or behaviour (doing, physical movement) or communications (talking, listening) these all send out a message that you are part of this team.

Good sportsmanship

No one likes a bad loser. So make sure you don't let the team down by complaining and whingeing. Be professional. Sometimes work isn't fair. Get over it; you are on a professional team now.

Perseverance

See things through. Always deliver on your promises. Be optimistic. Never give up. So maybe it didn't work out first time, keep plugging away and ask for team help.

Team play

Being a team player means you have to put yourself out there at times. Overcome your natural shyness to help the team out.

If you have a win, be sure to acknowledge the efforts of all the team.

As we have said before, it's important to have a professional relationship in any team, and if friendship comes along in a work situation, it's a bonus, but should not be expected.

It's all about results. The amazing thing is, the more the team gets feedback on good results, generally the better the team functions.



Issues you may find in teamwork

Amazon has 46,000 books that contain “teamwork” in the title. Why so many? Surely it’s common sense that a good team always is better than a group of individuals?

Yes, it is common sense but unfortunately it’s not easy – and in this section we talk about the difficulties of teamwork you will find at work.

Whenever a business is in trouble the solution that is often promoted by consultants is to have “teamwork exercises”.

I have been involved in a huge number of “teamwork exercises” recommended by consultants, and my view is that I doubt whether it really makes a difference.

I believe that there are people who are never going to be team players, they are basically too selfish, and look at a team activity as another opportunity to promote themselves.

They want individual recognition, and are not suited to any team.

Then there are other people who will try and try against all odds, to make a team work effectively.

Even when it’s clear the team is not working, they will persevere, often to the detriment of their own health, to try and get the team to work and succeed at the task.

Then there are the majority of people. They are the ones who are happy to go along to get along. They will put in some effort, especially if the team task is one they support, but otherwise do enough to keep the peace.

I like football. It’s a team game, but after following the game for many years you soon realise that teamwork takes many forms. For example, the Italian football team was known for many years as a collection of prima donnas. But they were very successful prima donnas – becoming champions of the world several times.

Then there are teams that become world champions where each individual is not a great player, but when they play as a team something happens and as a team they become unbeatable. Leicester City is a recent example from the English Premier League. They were a 5,000 to 1 chance to win their league. But they did.

What does this mean for the new starter at work?

Be flexible, recognise that teams are complicated and you may have to adapt to different roles in the team that you are in at that time. Respect the fact that every individual brings something to the team and under the right direction and circumstances a great team can be formed.

Your role in a team

As a new starter you will generally have limited opportunity to contribute to any team until you have learnt the language and the ropes of the business. But as you are doing that, be alert to the team members. Who are the innovators in the team – the ones who have all the good ideas – and may rarely follow through with them. Who are the optimists in the team – the ones who have strong beliefs that the team will be successful. Who are the pessimists? Who are the ones who complete the tasks, who keep a steady eye on the final goal and work towards it, no matter what other things are going on.

All of these observations will help you fit into the team and build up your reputation once you have been handed some tasks to do in the team environment.

Also recognise that teams sometimes fail. There are all sorts of reasons for this, and the best you can do is to take the positives away and learn from them. Leave the negative experiences behind.

My advice therefore is to support any team that you are involved with to the best of your ability. Be known as the willing worker, even if working in a team is difficult and perhaps frustrating for you. Use the team role to extend your reputation through the business.

Behaviour at work

"Oh the people you will meet" Dr Seuss

Professional and personal – differences

Probably the hardest thing about starting work for the first time is the relationship task.

It's a very rare person who can just "be themselves" at work.

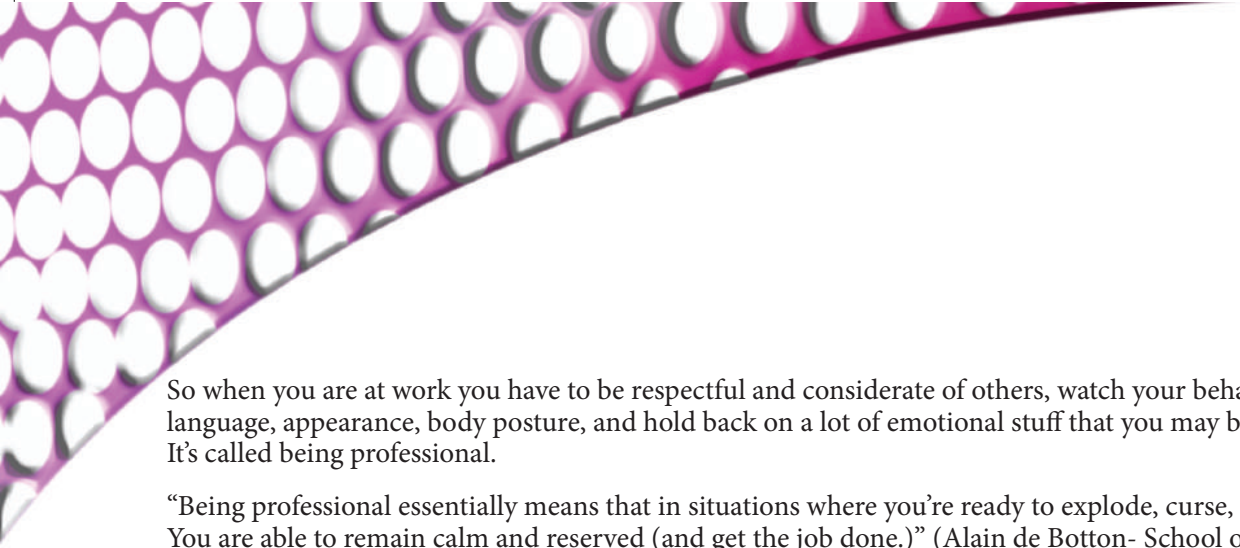
You need to be professional at work, and for most of us that basically means you can't be yourself.

If everyone behaved "naturally" at work then there would be a whole lot of unhappy workplaces. Why?

Because everybody (including the boss) has good and bad days.

Let's say the boss is having a bad day, things are not going well, and he has issues at home. So his natural tendency is to be grumpy and rude to everyone in the office. Of course not everyone knows the boss's problems – so he gets a reputation of being rude and not appreciating his workers. Employees become unhappy, start squabbling with each other, work suffers and things go from bad to worse.

Let's say you (and everyone else) only did your best work when you were happy, and told everyone what you really think when things were not going your way. My guess is that pretty soon everyone would be at each other's throats.



So when you are at work you have to be respectful and considerate of others, watch your behaviour, language, appearance, body posture, and hold back on a lot of emotional stuff that you may be feeling. It's called being professional.

“Being professional essentially means that in situations where you’re ready to explode, curse, and weep. You are able to remain calm and reserved (and get the job done.)” (Alain de Botton- School of Life).

But what sort of people will you have to deal with at work? Work experts AMACON suggest that of 100 people you meet at work;

- 50 will be polite and pleasant to work with
- 20 will be neutral and forgettable
- 15 will be amazing and brighten your day
- 10 will be irritated and a bit rude
- 4 will be angry and unpleasant
- 1 will be crazy and just a bit scary

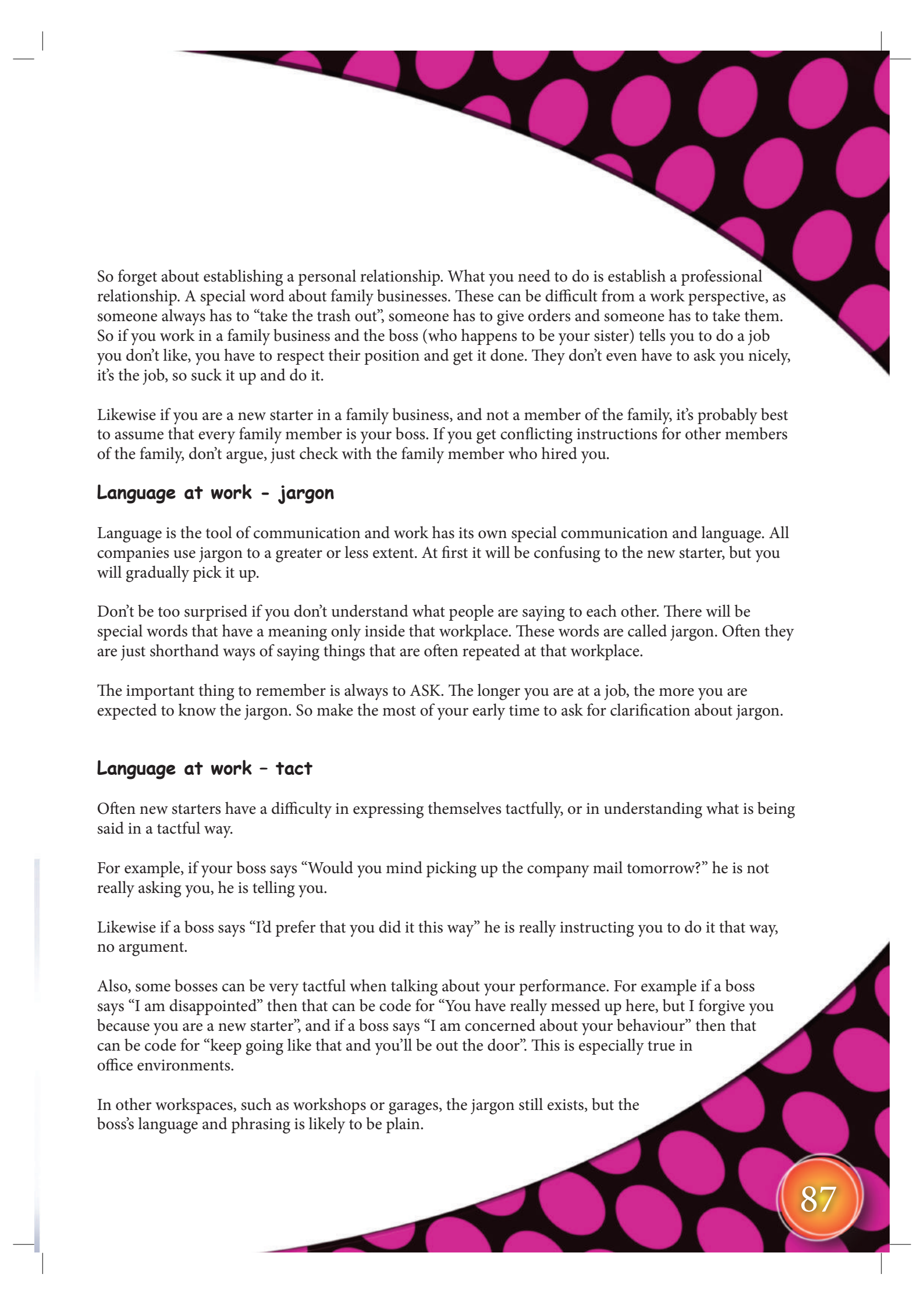
A problem that new starters often have is separating personal and professional relationships.

You’ve spent the last 10 years at school, and the only professional relationship you have had is with the teaching staff, and it’s been their job to educate you. All your other relationships have been personal. If you don’t like someone at school, so what? There are plenty of other people in the school.

Now you are moving to a work environment where you’re there to do a job of work, and you will probably be working (relying) on people. Some of these people will never make it in your best friends list. You will have a boss. You may like or dislike your boss. That doesn’t matter; you’re there to get the job done.

Relationships at work are important. But remember you are not there to be friends with people you meet. It’s professional. It’s a bonus if you are friends, but don’t expect it. And as a new starter, don’t make friends too easily. You should take your time to find out about your co-workers, as there will inevitably be those who want to be friends for all the wrong reasons.





So forget about establishing a personal relationship. What you need to do is establish a professional relationship. A special word about family businesses. These can be difficult from a work perspective, as someone always has to “take the trash out”, someone has to give orders and someone has to take them. So if you work in a family business and the boss (who happens to be your sister) tells you to do a job you don’t like, you have to respect their position and get it done. They don’t even have to ask you nicely, it’s the job, so suck it up and do it.

Likewise if you are a new starter in a family business, and not a member of the family, it’s probably best to assume that every family member is your boss. If you get conflicting instructions for other members of the family, don’t argue, just check with the family member who hired you.

Language at work - jargon

Language is the tool of communication and work has its own special communication and language. All companies use jargon to a greater or less extent. At first it will be confusing to the new starter, but you will gradually pick it up.

Don’t be too surprised if you don’t understand what people are saying to each other. There will be special words that have a meaning only inside that workplace. These words are called jargon. Often they are just shorthand ways of saying things that are often repeated at that workplace.

The important thing to remember is always to ASK. The longer you are at a job, the more you are expected to know the jargon. So make the most of your early time to ask for clarification about jargon.

Language at work - tact

Often new starters have a difficulty in expressing themselves tactfully, or in understanding what is being said in a tactful way.

For example, if your boss says “Would you mind picking up the company mail tomorrow?” he is not really asking you, he is telling you.

Likewise if a boss says “I’d prefer that you did it this way” he is really instructing you to do it that way, no argument.

Also, some bosses can be very tactful when talking about your performance. For example if a boss says “I am disappointed” then that can be code for “You have really messed up here, but I forgive you because you are a new starter”, and if a boss says “I am concerned about your behaviour” then that can be code for “keep going like that and you’ll be out the door”. This is especially true in office environments.

In other workspaces, such as workshops or garages, the jargon still exists, but the boss’s language and phrasing is likely to be plain.

The boss

Let's discuss the professional relationship that you are going to have with the boss. It's going to be based on 3 things:

- **Respect**
- **Expectations**
- **Ability**

As a new starter you are probably going to be in awe of the boss for a while. This is a good thing, as the boss is someone who you need to pay attention to.

Respect can come from 3 broad areas:

(1) Because the boss is wearing the jersey. The power comes with the title. If this is all that the relationship is based on, then it's going to fail. There are plenty of bosses in the work force who are a boss in name only, the title is all they have. They are generally people who have ended up in a supervisory position through good luck and not through ability. So they end up out of their depth, fearful of both their boss and their team.

(2) Because he is technically very good at his job, he knows what is required, what the company wants, how the company ticks, how to get things done, where things are and gets results.

He may or may not be good with people, which is the third area that a boss needs.

(3) Being good with people is probably the most important part of being a boss. This definitely does not mean being everybody's mate, or the most popular person in the office. Often the best boss is one who can get the best from the team, by leading and coaching a team to their best.

You will know a good boss, because doing your best for him will be important to you in your work. You will want to do your best for him, not through fear or for reward, but because of your relationship.

But having a professional relationship with your boss will mean that you know he is being fair with everyone, he is being consistent with work expectations and plans, and being firm when any of the team requires it. You need to know that your co-workers are being treated no better (and no worse) than you.



The helpful co-worker

The co-worker can be your best friend or your worst enemy.

Hopefully you will find that your co-workers are a friendly and welcoming group. It can make your starting work a whole lot easier if your co-workers take you under their wing and show you the ropes (to mix up a few metaphors).

As you are a new starter you will normally be expected to help out in areas that are probably not well defined in your job description. My advice is to not be so precious about only doing tasks within your job description in the first few weeks of your new job.

This is not to say that you should allow yourself to be taken advantage of, but be flexible and accommodating with your new co-workers if they are making an effort to help you and it's not affecting your ability to do the tasks you were employed to do.

Remember the boss comes first, and you can only have one boss. Running errands for your co-workers is not a job requirement, unless your boss says so.

The unhelpful co-worker

It would obviously be nicer if everyone is friendly, but often you find relationships at work which are quite openly unfriendly at a social level, but work reasonably effectively at a professional level. This is more common than you might think.

So be prepared for entering the workforce and being in a company, group, team, where you have very little in common.

This should make no difference to your work situation, provided that you remember that you are there to do work, and that you are professional in your work.

As a new starter you may find that you are the only young person in the company. You may feel isolated and alone. These feelings are normal for the first few weeks. Give yourself time to establish some contacts; don't expect it all to happen at once. Remember that your co-workers may have been doing the same thing for months, or years and it will take time for them to adapt to you, "the new person on the block".

Now that your co-workers are being treated no better (and no worse) than you.

The Human Resources (HR) person

I include the HR person in the people you will meet, because they are usually tasked with transitioning new starters to the workplace and making sure that they “settle in”.

The confusion about relationships with an HR person usually arises with a misunderstanding of the HR role.

In larger companies they will have someone or a department responsible for “Human Relations” or more recently “Human Resources”.

As a new starter you will have had contact with HR as they are responsible for recruiting and sometime orientating new employees. Usually they will maintain contact with a new starter for a few weeks to make sure that they are settling in to work properly. That’s the HR job. They are not doing it because they want to be friends or develop a relationship with you. Accept their help, but again don’t confuse their work role with a personal relationship.

It’s important to know that the HR person always sits outside the mainstream work. If for example, a company is making tins of beans, then it’s unlikely that the HR person will know the first thing about making tins of beans.

Rather HR will be interested in work relationships, making sure the boss is happy that the person they selected at interview is the person they now have at work. (People do change between interview and work.) So the HR role is NOT one of keeping everyone happy, but rather making sure that the work is being done productively.

So as a new starter, certainly keep good relationships with HR and let them know how you are settling in, but always keep in mind that HR is a company function, and not your new best friend.

Positive engagement and optimism

“Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you’ll start having positive results” Willie Nelson

Optimism

Unless you are very lucky, you are going to experience a lot of frustration as you go through your working career. How you react to these frustrations is really important.

If you happen to be by nature a positive, optimistic person, then you will have only a little difficulty in putting these frustrations behind you. However if you are like most of us and let things get you down then you may have more issues with the transition to work.

So let’s talk about being positive, and dealing with work issues.

As we mentioned before, work is more than ever defining who you are and becoming a large part of your identity. So when things go wrong at work, it may seem only natural to take it personally, and not professionally. The problem occurs when work impacts on you through ways you cannot control. The obvious example is if you are sacked or made redundant from your work.

Say the company that you work for has been bought out and the new owners have decided that your office/ store/ factory is going to close. Unless you are an incredibly optimistic person, you will see redundancy as a concern. If you are optimistic you will see it as an opportunity. Worse still, if you are not optimistic and your efforts to find alternative employment do not succeed, you are likely to give up, whereas an optimistic person will keep going in the belief that something will turn up.

Optimism supports an attitude where people see opportunities and do not give up hope easily, and persevere long after others would have given up.

So it's important to develop a positive and optimistic view of yourself and your work.

OK so you are only a new starter and don't know much about anything, but you need to talk positively to yourself and learn from bad situation without getting resentful. Let your inner voice be positive.

Get into the habit of saying to yourself (out loud if you wish)

"I've got a job, and I'm going to give it my best shot"

"One day I'll have my boss's job"

"I can do anything once I put my mind to it"

"Everybody has to start somewhere, and I'm starting at the bottom but I won't be here forever"

"My job is important, I am adding value to this business"

Optimism can also be infectious. If you are lucky enough to work with optimistic co-workers, chances are that you will take your lead from them, and become positive in your outlook on work.

Pessimism

Likewise pessimism can be a virus.

As a new starter you should avoid co-workers who are down on the world. Co-workers who continually complain about their job, the boss, the pay, the conditions, etc. etc. They are to be found in every workplace. Most people have worked out that these workers are negative in their outlook, whatever their situation. As you come across these co-workers, be polite and tactful with them, but do not let them influence your positive outlook.

It is more tiring being a pessimist than an optimist. Pessimism saps your energy. You blame yourself for everything. "I am just no good" or "Nobody wants me" are pessimistic phrases.

Pessimists believe the cause of their misfortune lies within THEM rather than being due to external or extenuating circumstances. Pessimists also believe that misfortune is forever ("Things will NEVER get better") or repetitive ("If I have failed once, it will happen again") It is also global or pervasive, "If misfortune befalls me in one part of my life, then it will happen to my whole life."

It's so much easier and less draining to be optimistic and positive. So keep talking to yourself, and hang out with optimistic co-workers!



Ruminating

Between pessimism and optimism is rumination. If you are optimistic in a mild way, you may often have feelings of fear and uncertainty about the future. This is quite normal, especially as you are a new starter and learning the ropes.

But in some cases this can lead to high levels of anxiety. This anxiety can lead to the debilitating activity of rumination – a term used to describe a negative internal dialogue that people have with themselves. (See above on having positive talks with yourself.)

Negative self-talk often creates a vicious cycle of worry and anxiety. The more you think about the terrible things that might happen, the more vivid they seem and the more cautious you become. This caution in the workplace can lead to poor performance, through indecision or just the general feeling of apathy that it can introduce into you and your co-workers.

Your very fear of the future event is magnified through rumination. So when the event actually takes place, you are more likely to be tentative and unsure of yourself. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and the imagined negative outcome becomes a reality.

Ultimately your worst fears, your preprogrammed outcomes of the event, will be played out in real life, if you ruminate, or over-think the situation. Sometimes negative self-talk becomes so bad that it occupies much of your waking time and may even prevent you from sleeping at night.

For many years researchers have continually shown the close connection between the mind and the body. Thus negative self-talk will cause the body to act in alignment and your actual behaviour will mirror your mind image. In other words, negative thoughts cause negative behaviour. So as a new starter be mindful of yourself, keep talking positively, if appropriate seek out positive feedback from your boss. Seek out those optimistic people at work and listen to them.

Positive imaging

Positive talking to yourself will help you create a positive visual image.

One of the most effective ways to prevent rumination is to replace it with positive self-talk, together with image thinking or “image-ination”.

In a practical way, think about a future situation you would like to experience and then run that “movie” several times over so that it is programmed into your mind. The “movie” you create should also have a sound track containing the words you would like to hear yourself saying. The trick is to become your own “Steven Spielberg” and create the blockbuster movie of all time, starring yourself!

The Brisbane Broncos used this type of process when they were a young team under Wayne Bennett. The story is that Wayne made Bronco players stick a poster of the team above their bed. The poster showed the Broncos as the league champions (which they were not – it was photoshopped). So as the players went to bed at night the last thing they saw before going to sleep was them lifting the trophy.

The idea was to develop a strong image that instilled a belief into the team, and it was incredibly successful.

As well as vision and sound, your internal movie must also create a feeling for you. You need to decide how you would like to be feeling during the future event you are creating. Do you want to feel relaxed, confident, powerful, happy, forceful etc.?

If you want to be confident and relaxed throughout the movie then you need to edit into your sound track a repetitive “feelings” track where your movie-self repeats over and over again, “I am relaxed. I am confident.”

Positive imagining has been recognised for many years under such names as mental practice, imaginary practice, covert rehearsal, symbolic rehearsal and introspective rehearsal.

Of course thinking does not produce success, you have to do the work, and practice, practice. But the effect of this type of imaging and talking to yourself is well known in the sports field, and it is just as effective in other areas such as your personal life.

Interestingly the tests on self-imaging show that it needs to be refreshed every 3 to 4 weeks as it starts to lose its effectiveness. Also a total duration of about 20-minutes positive imaging seems to be optimal. So short practice sessions are best.

Final word on optimism

“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time” Thomas A. Edison

Given optimism’s importance, it’s no surprise to find out that workers are measured for optimism. Yes, there are tests that will tell an experienced practitioner where you are on the optimism/rumination/pessimism scale.

These tests tell your employer (and future employers) how you are likely to behave in certain situations. These results suggest the amount of effort people are likely to put into either seeing the opportunities or seeing the obstacles.

Optimistic people are more likely to focus on the opportunities but too high a level of optimism can cause potential problems to be ignored, leading to major catastrophes.

Lower levels of optimism are more likely to cause people to focus on the obstacles lying in their path, but if they are too pessimistic then they may never seize the opportunities.

Improving yourself

"Formal education may make you a living, but self-improvement will make you a fortune"

Self-improvement

You will have got the message by now that businesses are generally not going to train you any further than they need to for you to do your job. You probably also understand that it is your responsibility to develop your path through your work life. It's self-evident therefore that you should always be looking for ways to improve yourself. But hang on, am I not improving myself by gaining work experience?

Yes you are, but remember that your work experience is only valuable as long as that job exists, and also a lot of work experience is particular to a specific company.

But most people don't make an effort to self-improve outside the workforce. Only about 10-20% of employees will do a course or something similar that improves their credentials.

Why? Because 80% of workers become comfortable in the day-to-day work activities, and think that their world will never change. A bit like the turkey fed every day, and comes to expect that he will be fed forever. Of course Christmas comes around and – well you know what happens then.

So for new starters the advice is quite clear. Yes, apply yourself fully to your first job, but always remember that ultimately your success depends on you. And don't confuse promotion through a company's ranks as self-improvement!

You may have become really good at XYZ activity using the ABC system, but what if your company is the only one doing XYZ? What if XYZ activity is replaced by technology? What if the ABC system is only used in your company? What if the ABC system is replaced by the DEF system? These things do happen, and you need to be prepared by improving yourself.



Types of self-improvement

The great thing about being a new starter is that self-improvement is limited only by your ambition and drive.

The most extreme example of this that I experienced was a young engineer who after qualifying, decided he wanted to be an optometrist. So after a few years in engineering he started doing optometry through evening classes, and did as much optometry study as possible while still working as an engineer before switching careers completely.

However, for most people self-improvement will not be as radical. It will generally be adding skills in the same general area you are currently in.

You may for example be an office secretary and go off to learn about accountancy through vocational training, or if you are a young storeman and want to learn about logistics, go off and do some study in your spare time.

30 Self-improvement ideas

Amazon has thousands of books on self-improvement, here are a few that are perhaps more relevant to the new work starter.

1. Commit to your personal growth

If you've no intention to commit to your personal growth, it doesn't matter what you read here. Nothing is going to get through.

You are responsible for your personal growth – no one else. Not your mum, your dad, your friend, your boss.

Make the decision to commit to your personal growth and embrace a life-long journey of growth and change.

Kick off your growth by picking a few of the steps below and working on them. The results may not be immediate, but I promise you that as long as you keep to it, you'll start seeing positive changes in yourself and your life.

2. Read a book every day

Two things will change you. People you meet and books you read. Books are concentrated sources of wisdom. The more books you read, the more wisdom you expose yourself to.

What are some books you can start reading to enrich yourself? Some books that people have found useful are Think and Grow Rich, Who Moved My Cheese?, 7 Habits, The Science of Getting Rich and Living the 80/20 Way, The Tipping Point, Outliers and The Difference Maker, so maybe check them out soon.

3. Pick up a new hobby

Beyond just your usual favourite hobbies, is there something new you can pick up? Any new sport you can learn? Examples are fencing, golf, rock climbing, football, canoeing, or ice-skating.

Your new hobby can also be a creative hobby, for example, pottery, Italian cooking, dancing, wine appreciation, web design, etc. Learning something new requires you to stretch yourself in different aspects, whether physically, mentally or emotionally.

4. Take up a new course

Is there any new course you can join? Courses are a great way to gain new knowledge and skills. It doesn't have to be a long-term course – seminars or workshops serve their purpose too. Maybe go to a few workshops and they might help you gain new insights, which you had not considered before.

5. Overcome your fears

All of us have fears. Fear of uncertainty, fear of public speaking, fear of risk, fear of spiders.

These fears keep us in the same position and prevent us from growing.

Recognise that your fears are areas where you can grow. Always think of fears as the compass for growth. If you have a fear about something, it represents something you have yet to address, and addressing it will help you grow.

6. Level up your skills

If you have played video games before especially RPGs, you'll know the concept of levelling up – gaining experience so you can be better and stronger.

Think about the skills and tools you would like to have after you have been in the workforce for a while. What things have you seen bosses or co-workers do that you would like to do. What skills can you level up? Maybe it's the way one co-worker is good at public speaking, or writing, or using the computer, whatever. Don't be envious of other people's skills, learn them yourself.

7. Wake up early

Waking up early (say, 5-6am) has been acknowledged by many (Anthony Robbins, Robin Sharma, among other self-help gurus) to improve your productivity and your quality of life.

It's because when you wake up early, your mindset is already geared to continue the momentum and proactively live out the day.

If you start the day with some energy it is surprising how your day develops. If you sleep in you have probably noticed how you seem to be sluggish all day, and playing "catch up".

8. Have a weekly exercise routine

A better you starts with being in better physical shape.

The current thinking is finding at least 30 minutes each day for your exercise. You may want to mix it up with jogging, gym lessons and swimming for variation. Whatever you do, the secret is to put in a bit more effort (not time) every day so that your body gets stronger as it is expecting to be stretched.

9. Write a letter to your future self

What do you see yourself as 5 years from now? Will you be the same? Different? What kind of person will you be? Write a letter to your future self – 1 year from now will be a good start – and seal it.

Make a date in your calendar to open it 1 year from now. Then start working to become the person you want to open that letter.

10. Get out of your comfort zone

Real growth comes with hard work and sweat.

Being too comfortable doesn't help us grow – it makes us stagnate and weakens us.

What is your comfort zone? Do you stay in most of the time? Do you keep to your own space when out with other people? Shake your routine up. Do something different. By exposing yourself to a new context, you're literally growing as you learn to act in new circumstances.

11. Put someone up to a challenge

Competition is one of the best ways to grow.

Set a challenge (weight loss, exercise, financial challenge) and compete with an interested friend to see who achieves the target first. Through the process, both of you will gain more than if you were to set off on the target alone.

12. Ask for feedback

As much as we try to improve, we will always have blind spots.

Asking for feedback gives us an additional perspective. Some people to approach might be friends, family, colleagues, boss, or even acquaintances, check out those that have no bias and can give their feedback objectively.

13. Stay focused with to-do lists

Start your day with a list of tasks you want to complete. This helps you stay focused.

If you don't you will finish the day being extremely unproductive.

Some people use "e sticky notes" to manage their to-do lists. It's really simple to use and it's a freeware, so maybe you should check it out.



14. Acknowledge your flaws

Everyone has flaws. What's most important is to understand them, acknowledge them, and address them.

What do you think are your flaws? What are the flaws you can work on now? How do you want to address them?

15. Get into action

The best way to learn and improve is to take action.

What is something you have been meaning to do? How can you take action on it immediately?

Waiting doesn't get anything done. Taking action gives you immediate results to learn from.

16. Learn from people who inspire you

Think about people you admire. Who are the people who inspire you? Who are the people you envy? What do they do, or what have they got that you want?

These people reflect certain qualities you want to have for yourself too. What are the qualities in them you want to have for yourself? How can you acquire these qualities?

17. Quit a bad habit and cultivate a new habit

Are there any bad habits you can lose? Oversleeping? Not exercising? Being late? Slouching? Nail biting? Smoking?

Stopping a bad habit is as good as developing a new one.

Some good new habits to cultivate include reading books, waking up early, exercising, reading a new personal development article a day and meditating.

18. Avoid negative people

As Jim Rohn says, "You are the average of the 5 people you spend the most time with"

Wherever we go, there are bound to be negative people. Don't spend too much of your time around them if you feel they drag you down.

19. Learn to deal with difficult people

There are times when there are difficult people you can't avoid, such as at your workplace, or when the person is in your inner circle of contacts. Learn how to deal with them.

Good people management skills will go a long way in working with people in the future.

20. Learn from your friends

Everyone has amazing qualities in them. It's up to us how we want to tap into them. Of all the friends who surround you, some are going to have things you can learn from. Try thinking of a good friend right now. Think about just one quality they have which you want to adopt. How can you learn from them and adopt this skill for yourself? Speak to them if you need to – for sure, they will be more than happy to help!

21. Start a blog about personal development

To be a great team player you need to help others grow, so first you need to be walking the talk. There are expectations of you, both from yourself and from others, which you have to uphold.

The writer of these 30 self-improvement tips, runs The Personal Excellence Blog, where he shares his personal journey and insights on how to live a better life.

Readers look toward articles to improve themselves, which enforces to him that he needs to keep improving, for himself and for the people he is reaching out to.

22. Get a mentor or coach

There's no faster way to improve than to have someone work with you on your goals.

As a new starter at work you may have a mentor allocated, or have to find a coach to help you with your goals. By having a supporter you will achieve significantly better results than if you had worked alone.

23. Reduce the time you spend on chat programs

Having chat programs open at default on your computer or iPad results in a lot of wasted time.

This time can be much better spent on other activities.

You will get a lot more done by switching them off. Reduce the distractions. Nothing is that urgent that you need to drop what you are doing. Multitasking is exhausting and usually results in doing several things poorly instead of one thing well.

Disable the auto start-up option in the chat programs and launch them when you want to chat and really have the time for it.

24. Learn chess (or any strategy game)

Chess is a terrific game to learn strategy and hone your brainpower. Not only do you have fun, you also get to exercise your analytical skills.

You can also learn strategy from other board games or computer games, such as Othello, Chinese Chess, WarCraft, and so on.

25. Stop watching TV

Most of the programs and advertisements on mainstream TV are of a lower consciousness and not very empowering.

The time you free up from not watching TV can be used constructively for other purposes, such as connecting with close friends, doing work you enjoy, exercising, etc.

26. Start a 30-day challenge

Set a goal and give yourself 30 days to achieve this.

Your goal can be to stick with a new habit or something you've always wanted to do but have not. 30 days is just enough time to strategize, plan, get into action, review and nail the goal.

27. Meditate

Meditation helps to calm you and be more conscious. Some people find that the nights when they meditate (before they sleep), they need less sleep.

The clutter-clearing process is very liberating.

28. Join Toastmasters (learn public speaking)

Interestingly, public speaking is the #1 fear in the world, with #2 being death.

After you learn about how to communicate better, present yourself and engage people you will become an excellent public speaker.

Toastmasters is an international organisation that trains people in public speaking. Check out the Toastmaster clubs nearest to you.

29. Let go of the past

Is there any grievance or unhappiness from the past that you have been holding on to?

If so, it's time to let it go. Holding on to it prevents you from moving on and becoming a better person. We've spoken about new starters recognising that school grades are only the start, not the finish. But there will be other mental baggage that young people will carry for a long time.

Try to break away from that part of your past, forgive yourself, and move on.



30. Show kindness to people around you

You can never be too kind to someone.

In fact, most of us don't show enough kindness to people around us. Being kind helps you to cultivate other qualities such as compassion, patience, and love.

As you get back to your day, practice random acts of kindness to the people around you, and see how they react. Not only that, notice how you feel as you behave kindly to others. Chances are, you will feel even better about yourself.

Politics at work

Get real

When you are starting out at work you are innocent about the workplace, and probably have little sense of the politics at work. But politics are important.

I'm going to use Brandon & Seldman's definition of politics at work as "the informal, unofficial, and sometimes behind-the-scenes efforts to sell ideas, influence organisations, increase power or achieve other objectives"

Politics is always an issue in any organisation. If there are just two people in an organisation, things usually sort themselves out on a pecking order basis.

As organisations get bigger, they get more complicated, and power bases are not so clear-cut.

Inevitably in the organisation you have just started working for there is a political aspect to the business that you don't know about (yet).

Because you are a new starter that doesn't mean that you can ignore the politics at work. Because one way or another you will be drawn into issues that are not about work, but about power.

Let's do a quick check on your understanding of politics at work.

How many of the following statements are false?

1. Politics won't affect me - I'm a new starter.
2. Politics is just gossiping, it's harmless.
3. If I work hard and keep my head down and out of politics I'll be OK.
4. Companies always try to keep their best workers.
5. People who play politics to get ahead always come to a sticky end.
6. Politics is just "brown nosing".
7. Some people are just naturally good at networking and getting ahead.
8. Good workers will always rise to the top.
9. I don't need to toot my own horn - my work speaks for itself.
10. My reputation doesn't depend on work politics.

In fact ALL of them are false, and we'll explain why, and why this is important to you as a new starter.



Will politics affect me?

You will be affected. When you start your new job, you'll probably find that the workplace has its various cliques, friendships, and informal and formal ways of working. You'll find that all the bosses are not equal – and that the pecking order may not be the same as the organisation chart. So what are you to make of all this, and more importantly, how is this going to impact on your reputation?

Let's look at the other questions, so we're clear what work politics is all about.

Politics is just gossiping, it doesn't do any harm

Politics is all about using words, mostly talking but it would be a big mistake to think that it does not do any harm. Most people think of politics in a negative way. You shouldn't do that. Instead accept that people work in a political way, and Baddeley and James (1987) describe 4 types of workers in any workplace as far as politics is concerned.

1. The sheep 2. The owl 3. The donkey 4. The fox

The sheep is the person who is a good worker, keeps their head down, acts always with integrity, and is innocent to the possibilities, positive and negative of the political aspect of work.

The owl is the solid worker, who understands the office organisation and how to get things done. The owl always acts with integrity, only dealing with truths and always with fairness.

The donkey is the person who is not such a good worker, but they play the game. They gossip, putting down their co-workers to try and get promotion for themselves. They play politics in the sense of promoting themselves at every opportunity, often for work they have not done.

The fox is focused on himself. He sees every issue as an opportunity to improve his position. He does not act with integrity. If it's a choice between what's good for him, and what's right for the company, then he will do what's good for him, but presented as good for the company. The fox is well connected in the organisation and only acts when he has done his homework, made many checks, and planned the outcome.

Which one do you think you are? Which one would you like to be?

If I work hard and keep my head down and out of politics I'll be OK

'Fraid not. By doing this, you're putting yourself forward for being one of the first to be sacked when a downturn happens. Why? Because your boss won't have much of an idea of how good a worker you are. But more importantly, you have not built up any alliances in the organisation to protect you. More about this later. But be aware that it is in your interest to have supporters (I'll not call them friends, because these supporters are based on your professional attitude).

As a new starter, you have probably never had to promote yourself. You may be embarrassed at the idea of standing up in front of your team and saying, "This is the problem that I saw with the job, and this is what I did to fix it." It's a skill you will have to learn. Let's face it, if you don't stick up for yourself, no one else will.

So when you are working in your first job think about:

- **What am I known for?**

What does the boss think of me? Am I seen as a "shy loner", or as the "site larrikin" or the office "party girl", or a "friendly hard worker", what perception do my boss and co-workers have of me?

- **What have I achieved?**

Perhaps start to keep a diary, a record of what you have learnt and questions that you may have about your first job. Start to think about how to communicate this to the boss. Look for opportunities to let the boss know that you are working hard at being a new starter.

- **Who am I associated with - the "good guys" or the "bad guys"**

Do I regularly have lunch with the same group? Is this group the factory "stars" or "donkeys." What about conversations? Who do I regularly talk to? Is it the boss, or do I communicate to the boss through a co-worker? If so, how can I be sure that the boss is getting the right picture of what I am doing at work?

Businesses always try to keep their best workers

Companies say this, but it doesn't happen in practice, for several reasons. Remember earlier I mentioned that it's just as important how you do the job, as the result itself. Let's take the case of someone who always gets the job done, but upsets everyone by their manner. What do you think happens to people who isolate themselves by ignoring their co-workers' feelings while they get the job done?

If you isolate yourself, you'll soon find that your co-workers are keeping you out of the loop and your reputation as a good worker is lost: your reputation becomes "someone who is difficult to work with" or even worse, no one wants to work with you and you may consider leaving.

People who “play” politics to get ahead always come to a sticky end

People who play politics are “foxes” and while it might appeal to your sense of justice that they will get found out eventually, I’m afraid that doesn’t happen very often. You see foxes are bright. They are well connected. They know what is going on in the business, where the opportunities and threats are, and they keep ahead of the game. Although they are always out for themselves, they are wise enough to appear to be helping the team and the business.

Politics is just “brown nosing”

Politics has become a nasty word, and people do confuse it with sucking up to the boss. But politics is an important part of the way work is done in the business. As the definition says, sometimes it’s the behind – the-scenes exchange of thoughts and ideas that shape the company.

Some people are just naturally good at networking and getting ahead

Most new starters are not confident in their first job. It’s quite normal to be a bit stunned by the new work environment and it generally takes weeks, months before you will have the confidence to reach out to others to form a work network.

Unless you are naturally an extrovert, you will find it hard to engage with people in the work environment. At school or university it is easier to create a network of contacts for many reasons; in education the people you are engaging with are of same age group and interests, same goals, etc. But at work there is a whole community to deal with. So how to establish a network of contacts?

- Be open and friendly. Always say hello, or good morning to your co-workers first thing. It’s a small thing, but very difficult to do when you are young, and your feelings may get hurt when others don’t respond. Alternatively you may be having a bad day yourself, and the last thing you want to do is smile to strangers at work. But persevere, don’t give up, be known as the person who has always a smile to start the day.
- Have an opening conversation ready. As a new starter you are almost bound to be asked, “What do you do here?” The obvious reply is **“I work here.”**

But that reply would mark you down as a bit of a donkey. So have something ready that shows you are keen. Something like:

“I just started last week working for Charlie Brown, and I’m in the marketing group. It’s great I’m helping Charlie get a few posters together to try and kick start a new idea that he has. It’s very exciting. I love it.”

- Words and communications like that don’t come easy to a new starter. So again, “Practice, Practice, Practice.”

Good workers will always rise to the top

Not so. If you think about any large business, the person in the top office is rarely the best worker. In Ford motor company for example, do you really think that the CEO is the best person to construct a car? No of course not, because the CEO needs different skills. Well, let's stay with this imaginary best car assembly worker. Do you think that he would become the head of the factory making cars? Probably not, again because we know different skills are required at that level too.

OK what about this imaginary worker who is really good at putting cars together – do you think he would be the best team leader of the car assemblers?

Maybe, but maybe not, because again you need to be a leader, and a leader always requires “political” skills.

I don't need to toot my own horn - my work speaks for itself

As we said above. keeping your abilities out of the limelight is not going to cut it. If you are lucky your co-workers might talk well of you, but rarely will co-workers suggest that you should advance ahead of them.

If you are really lucky your boss may show an interest and acknowledge your achievement and take you under his wing.

More likely your co-workers will have a sense of the pecking order and you, as a new starter, don't get to change that.

More likely your boss will be busy, and have several people reporting to him, so your issues are not likely to be high on his attention list.

So either accept that your abilities remain unrecognised, or take an effort to promote yourself.

My reputation doesn't depend on work politics

Your most important asset will depend on what people say (and write) about you. Some of your reputation will be built up from first-hand experience where your immediate boss and co-workers will be making judgements and statements about you based on their dealings with you. Things like “Jill is ready for a pay rise, she does good work” or “Jack is doing great things in the workshop, and we should be sending him off to TAFE for more qualifications.”

All of these statements about Jack and Jill will come to nothing unless there is a network of people to act on them.

Office politics and perceptions

Visual

“Perception is reality” someone once said. What they mean is that it doesn’t really matter whether Joe is a really nice bloke or not, if people perceive Joe to be a really scary individual, then that is what Joe is.

For example, let’s say Joe is a really big burly chap, always dresses in dirty black clothes, big long beard, long hair, metal rings in nose, tattoos everywhere, a permanent threatening scowl on his face, and never talks to anyone at work. Now Joe may be the nicest guy on the planet, but he is going to have his work cut out to change people’s perception of him.

Let’s also say that Joe is a teenager, and is going through that rebellious stage that all teenagers do, then Joe has a problem. He has either to accept that he will be judged (wrongly) for his appearance, which causes people to perceive him as something he is not, or Joe can accept the world for what it is and change his appearance, and therefore people’s perception.

Of course, if he feels strongly that his appearance is part of his identity, then he will continue to be misjudged.

But don’t expect that the world will change. We all have perceptions based on appearances.

Even teenagers make assumptions based on appearances, so don’t blame the grown-ups if they do it too!

Oral

The way you talk affects your work prospects. I’m not talking about accents. That aspect of speech has changed enormously over the years. It used to be the case that to work on TV or radio, you had to have a BBC voice: basically an accent from the home counties in England. Not true anymore and we hear many different accents in the media.

I’m referring to how your talk reflects your thinking.

- Do you speak clearly or do you “um” and “ah”?
- Do you speak up when talking to your boss, or do you mumble to your chin?
- Do you ramble on in your conversations?
- Have you a reasonable vocabulary – do you struggle to find the right words?
- Are you able to express yourself clearly?
- Have you a confident voice when speaking to a group?

Written

Work will always involve writing; even in this electronic age, writing is important for several reasons.

- You can waffle on when you are talking: it's a lot more difficult when you have to commit something to paper/ email
- Writing should make your thoughts clearer
- Writing gives you a chance to frame your thoughts, in a way that talking doesn't
- "Did I really say that" is something you'll often hear at work. If the boss has put his instructions in writing there's no argument - it's there in black and white. However if he spoke the words, then the message is more complicated, because speaking the words is one thing, the next thing is you hearing them, and then converting them into thoughts in your brain. So there is plenty of opportunity for the message to get garbled. Not so easy with the written word.

So speaking and writing are important tools in work politics. In your work life you will meet inspirational bosses who have a great way with words and can talk to an ordinary team and make them a great team. Likewise you will meet the not so good. Learn from both and improve your skills.

Work stories

Brownnosing or self-promotion?

It's worthwhile spending a bit more time on this issue. New starters can have a great deal of difficulty with this. I've found that the problem begins where the new starter has an (incorrect) picture in their head on what work recognition should be.

It usually concerns fairness and justice.

As a new starter, your experience of the world has been limited to a system that is well regulated. You do your work, hand it in, the teacher grades your result, and explains where you lost marks.

That doesn't happen at work.

Let's look at a number of regularly seen work situations.

Case 1

You do your work diligently. You work at the office for 12 months. You never get any feedback, and you are too shy to ask for any, so you assume that everyone is happy with what you are doing.

There is a performance review at the end of 12 months. The boss tells you at the review that your work is not up to scratch and you are being let go. You are devastated.

Case 2

You do your work diligently, you have been working at the workshop for 12 months and you are told that you are doing OK.

At the annual performance review you are told while your work is OK you don't "fit in" and you are being let go.

Case 3

You do your work diligently, you have been working at the factory for 12 months and you have made a few employee suggestions that have been taken up. You've been told that you are doing OK. At the performance review, you are told that next year is not looking good, and they are letting people go. The company is keeping Bill (who has taken the credit for your ideas) and letting you go.

What do all these cases have in common?

You are to blame for these outcomes. That may sound a bit harsh, but it's true because:

- You didn't build up your network in the organisation to find out what was going on
- You didn't promote yourself
- You allowed Bill to take the credit for your work



Key Messages from Part 2

- ☐ Your reputation will follow you through your work life. Build a good one
- ☐ When you are at work, whether it's in person, or online, people will be judging you
- ☐ Relationships change as you transition from education to work. Try to manage personal and professional relationships
- ☐ Your attitude can be worth a lot more than your educational qualifications
- ☐ New starters need to learn the work language
- ☐ Never criticise or complain at work
- ☐ Look for things to keep you motivated
- ☐ Be optimistic and do things that develop a positive self-image
- ☐ Support your reputation by being ethical in all your dealing with people
- ☐ Team playing at work is a skill – look for ways to improve it
- ☐ There will be jargon at work. Be patient. Don't let it overwhelm you
- ☐ You are going to meet all sorts of people at work. Be friendly, but be professional. It's all about the job.
- ☐ Be cautious about building friendships at work. They can backfire badly
- ☐ There are heaps of ways to self-improve. Adopt the ones that suit you
- ☐ Politics at work is real. Don't meddle in them as a new starter. Focus on the job