

# Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

## Career Center Tips: How to Survive & Thrive in a New Job



With a new president in the Oval Office, many people are focusing on the first 100 days of the new administration -- and those starting a new job are wise to take a cue. The initial months on a job can be exciting, but they also are critical to shaping your manager's and co-workers' opinions about your potential in the new role, as well as laying the groundwork for success within the organization.

Although most employers understand that new hires need time to adapt, they also take note of how you go about it. While there's a lot to learn -- from your colleagues' names to company policies -- the actions you don't take in the early stages of employment can be just as important as those you do take. In fact, failing to adapt to a park and recreation's corporate culture and not asking enough questions are two of the biggest mistakes made by new employees.

Following are some strategies for adjusting to a new position and making an immediate, positive impact on your department. (If you are a long-term employee, it might be good for a refresher.)

### **Respect the agency culture**

There's nothing more embarrassing for new employees than sticking out like a sore thumb, whether by dressing too casually or being the last to arrive at the office. Once you start at a new agency, observe how the successful people behave and interact with others. If you have the opportunity, consider pairing with a mentor -- someone who has been with the agency for a long time -- to learn about the organization's unwritten "rules of the road," including customary office attire and prevailing values and attitudes. Doing so will allow you to fit in more quickly.

### **Be willing to bend**

You likely will encounter internal processes and ways of doing business that are unfamiliar to you. During your first months on the job, resist the impulse to persuade teammates to "do things your way," even if you think it would be better. Talk to colleagues to understand the rationale behind current processes and procedures, and make an effort to learn them. If, after you've given them a shot, you still have suggestions for improvement, be sure to earn your team's trust and respect before sharing your proposal with the group.

### **Clarify your job duties**

It's important to be on the same page as your **manager** from the start, so within the first couple of days, meet with him or her to discuss your responsibilities and how your position fits into the grand scheme of things. You might ask the following questions:

- What are the immediate priorities and issues that need to be addressed?
- How often and in what form should I provide you with project updates?
- How will my performance be evaluated?

A clear understanding of what's expected will help you do your job more effectively.

### **Know when you need guidance**

Another factor in your success in a new role is your willingness to admit when you need assistance. If you are reluctant to seek help, you are more likely to make mistakes. As a general rule, it's always better to admit you lack expertise in a particular area than to submit work that fails to meet expectations.

### **Observe communication styles**

Pay attention to the manner in which your manager and teammates, as well as staff outside your department, exchange information. Most people have a preferred way to communicate, whether it's through e-mails, phone calls or face-to-face conversations. If your supervisor expects important information to be detailed in a formal memo, sending a casual e-mail can unintentionally create a poor impression or worse increase the chance that your message gets lost. So always clarify preference in advance.

### **Take time to socialize**

When starting a new position, many professionals concentrate so much on their work that they overlook opportunities for getting to know their colleagues. True, you want to send the message that you are a hard-working contributor, but you also want to form effective working relationships with your co-workers and manager as soon as possible. Your colleagues can be your strongest allies during your tenure with the organization and play a key role in your ability to accomplish your most important objectives.

Making time to attend **training** seminars, departmental lunches and other group activities can help you build rapport with your team. Informal conversations also provide a way to learn more about the corporate culture and what it takes to advance in the company.

### **Make an extra effort**

Become an invaluable resource to your new employer by going beyond the call of duty, when possible. Volunteer for new assignments, even if they fall outside your immediate job description. This will allow you to learn about new areas of operations while demonstrating your willingness to help others in your organization.

### **Solicit feedback**

While your park and recreation agency may not provide formal performance appraisals to new employees, it's a good idea to get feedback during your first few months. Consider asking your supervisor for a brief meeting to discuss your performance to date. This early feedback can indicate where you need to improve and what you're doing well so you can exceed expectations in the months and years ahead.

Don't worry if you aren't completely settled into your role right away. It can take anywhere from several weeks to several months to feel confident and secure in a new job. If you take proactive steps to adapt to your work environment and make a positive contribution, however, you'll be well on your way to becoming a valued team member.