Earning Respect As a New Hire

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Alison Green | The Daily Muse | 09.15.14

A few weeks into the new job, ask for feedback on what you’re doing well and what you should be doing differently. You’ll gain valuable insight and impress your boss.

It can be tough to start a new job. No one knows much about you, the reputation you spent time building at your old company might not have followed you and to most of your coworkers, you’re still an unknown quantity who might or might not turn out to be great. But with the right moves, you can quickly begin earning respect and establishing yourself as a valued member of your new team. Here’s how:

1. Look for an immediate win, even if it’s small.
It takes a while to truly master most jobs, so you’re not likely to get big results right away. But look around for spots where you might be able to quick get a win. Maybe there’s a process you can make easier, a needed role you can fill, a client you can please or work you can move forward that was languishing before you arrived. Even small ways of demonstrating skill and value can go a long way toward establishing credibility and respect in your new workplace.

2. Pay close attention to the culture. In addition to all the information you’re absorbing about how to do your new job, you’ll need to pay nearly as much attention to how the office operates. Fitting into office culture can matter enormously, and you risk coming across as tone-deaf if you don’t pay attention the load of signals that will be coming your way about everything from what hours people work, to how long they take for lunch to how they communicate during the day (and how often).

3. Pay attention to how your boss operates. It can be tough to adjust to a new boss when you’re used to your old manager’s ways of doing things. Be sure that you’re not simply falling into the patterns your old boss preferred for things like what she does and doesn’t want to have input on and was languishing before you arrived. But talking through these questions will give you valuable
information about what you need to achieve in order to be performing at the level your new boss expects. (And the answers can be a huge relief, if you’re feeling frazzled and discover that she’s assuming it will take you several months just to get oriented.) Speaking of questions ...

5. **Ask questions.** Don’t be shy about asking your boss directly about what will help you settle in and understand what’s expected of you and what you can expect of others. Useful questions to discuss include:
   - What can I read to get a better understanding of _____?
   - Are there samples of how this has been done in the past that I could look at?
   - What recent history of the department or upcoming plans should I be aware of?
   - Do you like to talk about things as they come up, or do you prefer that I set up weekly meetings?
   - Are there any pitfalls you’ve seen people fall into when they’re learning this job? Is there anything else I should be especially aware of?

6. **Don’t bring in cookies or other treats on your first day.** New hires sometimes think that bringing in candy or baked goods will make a good impression and win over their new colleagues. But in many offices, it will come across as over-eager – and after all, you don’t yet know the food-sharing norms of your new workplace. You don’t want to show up with a tray of chocolate nut brownies and discover there’s a ban on nuts, because there’s an employee with a life-threatening allergy. Or maybe most of the office is dieting, or half of them are vegan. Learn a little about your new co-workers before bringing in food for the group.

7. **Don’t get involved in office drama.** Even if you think you’re forming clear opinions about workplace disagreements or cliques, resist the urge to take sides or otherwise insert yourself. You don’t yet have the perspective to truly know the issues or the players. And even if you’re right, people will generally respect you more for hanging back until you gain more familiarity.

8. **After your first two weeks, ask for feedback.** Ideally, your manager would be checking in with you regularly and letting you know where you’re doing well and where you should be focusing on improving. In practice, though, managers are often too busy to think to do this. You can often get incredibly useful information – and come across as both conscientious and easy to manage – by simply asking, “Now that I’ve been here two weeks, what’s your sense of how things are going? Is there anything you’d like me to be focusing more on or doing differently?”
Three Questions to Ask a New Boss

When you start working with a new manager, asking how she likes to operate can help you build a productive relationship. Your boss may not think to articulate her management style, so asking thoughtful questions will demonstrate your attentiveness and interest in efficiency.

• “Do you prefer that information be delivered formally or informally?”
  o If she prefers the former, prepare documents in advance of meetings and send frequent updates on assigned projects. If the latter, don’t clog her inbox; update her at crucial junctures or when you need guidance.

• “How do you like to process information?”
  o She may like to hear it and respond in person, or to see it in writing before a conversation.

• “How would you describe your management style?”
  o If she likes to have a hand in day-to-day operations and decision-making, touch base often. If she’d rather delegate, keep her posted on major developments, but handle most details on your own.