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Strategies for Starting a Job While Remote

Ashley Brady shares tips for how to take the initiative and ask for what you need to succeed.

By [Ashley Brady](#) // February 1, 2021



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Starting a new job can be stressful and overwhelming in the best of times, but doing so in the midst of a global pandemic, when so much work occurs remotely, makes it all the more complicated. If you are starting a new job this year, congratulations on your accomplishment! If you are joining an organization where some portion of the workforce is normally remote, they are likely to have a well-oiled remote onboarding process. If your new employer has just recently transitioned to remote work, however, you may find things to be a bit bumpier, so it will be even more important for you to plan to take the initiative and ask for what you need.

your colleagues, set up your computer and install software, gain proper accesses and begin to learn the expectations and duties of your new position. Onboarding can start as soon as you accept the position, so don't be afraid to be proactive to help set yourself up for success in your new role.

Here I share a few tips gleaned from talking to several recent Ph.D. graduate students and postdocs who have already tackled and made the most of the transition into their first job, as well as a couple of seasoned hiring managers who have helped bring new team members on during this challenging time.

Have a conversation with your manager on, or even before, your start date. Take this opportunity to find out what projects you will be starting on, whom you will be working with and if you can take advantage of any resources to familiarize yourself with the project ahead of your first day. Often, your manager is busy and may not think of such things ahead of time or won't want to bother you, but if you reach out before your start date and ask for information, they will probably be more than willing to help.

Ask for slide decks to preview, reports to read or short courses and webinars to listen to in advance. That will give you a leg up and make those first weeks more productive for you and your new team. It is most important in a new job, especially when working remotely, to take initiative and be proactive.

Be clear about your immediate short-term and longer-term goals. For you to be successful, you need to understand what's expected of you in the first few months of your new role. Set goals for the first 30 days, 90 days and six months on the job. Breaking projects down into an actionable plan will give your early days and weeks structure and focus so you can meet those expectations. Plan to check in with your manager after 90 days to get feedback on how you are performing toward your goals.

Ask to meet with your manager on a regular and frequent basis. If your manager doesn't already plan to meet with you regularly one on one, be sure to ask for a weekly meeting -- at least for the first couple of months of your job. More frequent check-ins during this time can help keep you on track and ensure you are focused on the right things. In a virtual environment, it is even more important to keep your manager updated on the work you are doing and the progress you are making since they won't see you at your desk each day. You may find that when working virtually, you will need to share more details than usual about what you are doing so they have a good sense of your accomplishments and your workload. Tracking details about what you work on each day, at least for the first few weeks, may help you prepare for frequent check-ins with your manager.

Get to know your colleagues. It will certainly take more effort to get to know people on your team and at your institution than if you were bumping into them daily in the office. Start with your immediate team, and personally invite each person for a 30-minute one-on-one virtual meeting with you to learn more about them,

Try to set up a couple of these meetings each week and work your way through everyone. If the idea of this makes you nervous, you may want to come up with eight to 10 questions you ask each time to make the meeting more comfortable for you. You want to use this opportunity to learn more about roles and responsibilities of your new co-workers, but don't be afraid to also take the time to get to know people on a personal level if they seem receptive.

To get the most out of virtual meetings with your new colleagues, keep your video on while participating in both group and individual videoconferencing calls. As with any video interactions, be sure that you choose a professional background, optimize lighting and pay attention to the discussion. Getting to know your colleagues this way will help you identify whom you should seek advice from regarding certain aspects of your work. It will also make approaching them much easier if you have already met before you need their help.

Find out how your team and colleagues prefer to communicate. Communication is always vital, but never more so than when working remotely. As soon as you start, identify what tools your organization and immediate team use to communicate and how they prefer to receive and share information. Are they using a specific platform like Slack or a project management tool like Trello that you need to familiarize yourself with? Do they use Zoom, WebEx or Microsoft Teams? Do your colleagues prefer to be contacted through email, text or phone call?

Your new manager may appreciate getting a quick note via the company instant-messaging system letting her know to watch for an important email you sent. Some managers may want a weekly update documented in an email. Your team members may prefer all communication around a specific project to be limited to the project management platform. No matter what tools you are using, be mindful of your words until you get to know your colleagues, because it is easy to have your intentions misconstrued in the absence of face-to-face meetings and visual cues.

Know what resources are available to support you. Start off on the right foot by making sure to identify your resources. That includes both people and things. Ask yourself questions such as: Where can you access IT support? What trainings do you need to complete? Do you have access to all servers and platforms you may need to use? Are there subscription services you need passwords to join? Who is your go-to person for questions? Are you included on all necessary email groups?

Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions. Your manager will probably view that positively, because you will be taking initiative and thinking ahead -- and possibly thinking of things he forgot.

supplies, but consider asking for something specific if you think it will help you do your job better, especially when working virtually. Many organizations will have resources to provide extra items such as a high-quality headset or webcam, a ring light, an ergonomic chair, a sit-stand desk, or a second monitor. Make sure you aren't limited by your tools. Remember, it's in both your and your manager's best interest for you to succeed.

Be patient and forgiving. Keep in mind we are all learning how to do our best in a virtual environment. Be patient with yourself as well as your colleagues and manager. Hopefully they will be giving you the same benefit of the doubt.

For many of us, this is a temporary situation, and eventually we will be back in the office seeing one another face-to-face again. Nevertheless, this period of virtual work will likely significantly impact how we all approach and manage our professional activities moving forward. Many of these new skills and practices will become part of our new normal way of doing business. Putting such strategies into practice now will prepare you for your next job transition and guide you in onboarding a new team member to your own group when the time comes.

Bio

Ashley Brady is assistant dean of biomedical career engagement and strategic partnerships at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine and a member of the Graduate Career Consortium, an organization providing an international voice for graduate-level career and professional development leaders.



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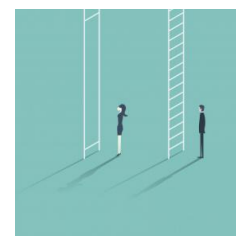
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