





A head start

Elaine Ford gives some tips on how to ensure you hit the ground running in your new role.

Let's face it, the first few days in a new job can be intimidating and far from enjoyable. The length of time it takes to adjust varies from person to person and job to job, although some people seem to fit in immediately wherever they go.

But it's not just about day one; there's a lot that can be done in advance. As a new starter, don't just hope information about the company and its products turns up before you start. Ask for information upfront and you'll feel more in control on the first day. Once you've started in your new role, you'll be expected to pick things up quickly, so anything you can do in advance to get a head start will be to your advantage.

And, once that's done, plan the journey you'll take to your workplace – as well as some alternative routes in case there are major hold-ups! You'll be glad you did this when you arrive on time at your new job despite the travel network conspiring against you. It's also a good idea to plan what you're going to wear during the first week so you don't have to think about it when you come home drained, because the first week of a new job can be physically and emotionally exhausting.

On your best behaviour

Once you've made it to your new workplace, take a deep breath. Walk in with a smile, make gentle eye contact, be upbeat, polite and friendly to everyone you meet. Introduce yourself and remember that it's okay to ask questions: the key to initial success is to become part of the team and there's no better way than to ask for help. People generally like to help and getting to know other people is important, if only so that you don't feel awkward going to the canteen at lunchtime and get embarrassed trying to understand how the water fountain works!

You'll spend most of your time out of the office and, when you do go in, you'll know the routes between the car park and your desk, your desk and the loo, and your desk and the coffee machine; it's guaranteed you'll get lost and find yourself in an unknown corridor during your first month – especially if your new job is with a big pharmaceutical company with office blocks the size of a football pitch. So, if you're not offered a tour, ask for one. You'll also need to learn quickly about office hours, phone-in checks when out of the office, procedures for flexitime, expenses, company credit cards, budget sign-off limits and travel arrangements etc. Get a handle on these quickly so you don't waste time that would be better spent on your customers.

Many pharmaceutical firms have blurb on the walls, as well as on their intranets, about the company culture



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and values. Pretty soon after starting a new job, someone will be able to tell for themselves if these are true or not, but it's important to learn how an organisation thinks and what its values are. If the staff don't 'walk the walk' or 'talk the talk' then no one will be empowered to live the corporate life the way they are expected to. As a new employee, you will pick up the vibe about your new employer during your first couple of weeks.

Three important tips:

- Pay attention to the grapevine but don't contribute to it as a gossip monger;
- Continue to arrive early and don't rush out the door at the end of the day; and
- Avoid the fateful words "that's not how we used to do it at my old company" or people may think you should have stayed there!

In common with many jobs, you'll earn promotion more quickly if you deliver on targets. Rome wasn't built in a day and it will take a while for you to get to grip with your territory. Look for early, quick wins so you can present results to your company, or try to identify problems others have left unresolved, take ownership and solve

them. OK, I know it's not earth-shattering, but it's a clever way to get noticed while accomplishing something important. Even if you can't build a relationship with an opinion leader, write the textbook protocol or avert the suspect adverse event, almost anything you do to positively influence existing problems will be seen as an improvement. As you solve problems, you'll learn more about the operations of the company and build your reputation with your managers, peers and customers. And, as the office newbie, try not to take rejection personally: many people work in a fast-paced, high-pressure environment and opinion leaders or investigators often have little time, so chances are you will catch them when they're not at their most receptive. Toughen up and try to see the situation from their point of view. Smile, be friendly, and say you understand: if you can't swallow your pride and be compliant when the situation calls for it, you're not going to last long.

And, at the end of the day, you still have to do paperwork. The pharmaceutical role is detail-orientated, so don't be surprised when you're asked to submit reports, analyses, spreadsheets, action plans and synopses, for example. The trick is to keep on top of it and not to leave it until the last minute when you

have to rush something through with needless errors. It is more than dotting the i's and crossing the t's, it's an essential part of being a successful pharmaceutical physician.

Expectations

Finally, life's not easy if you don't get on with your boss. But your manager has a job to do too and you are a key component. What you need to do is make sure you understand what his/her key tasks are, what the accountabilities are and what part you're expected to play. Proactively agree time to sit down with your manager(s) and agree your objectives, key result areas, milestones, relationship metrics and, above all, know your therapy area(s), your products and identify learning gaps and suggest how they can be filled. If your company, like many, is now moving towards a targeted product approach, get to know the stakeholders and start making yourself visible.

Whether 100% field-based, an occasional office visitor or office-bound for much of your time, sooner or later the spectre of office politics will loom large. We're only human. Situations, emotions and ambition conspire to produce ideal growing conditions for guerilla tactics. But that's a topic for another article.