

STARTING A NEW JOB—CONGRATULATIONS

You will soon enter a new business environment, one where the situation or—you should forgive the expression—“corporate culture” can dramatically differ from the one you just left.

Even in sophisticated companies, where new hires are run through “human resources” rather than a personnel department, few new employees or managers have an understanding of what lies ahead.

You’ve been told about benefit programs, bonus plans and stock options. If you have really done your homework, you’ve gone to the nearest business library to learn more about your new company via annual reports, Standard & Poor’s and Value Line reports.

These will give you the names and numbers of the senior players and the latest performances shown in terms of profit and loss statements, balance sheets and new product and services. But, none of that will get down to the basic question:



WHAT’S IT LIKE TO WORK AT XYZ COMPANY?

The only way you’ll find out is by having your antennae fully extended when you show up on the first day. According to Harry Levinson, management psychologist (Belmont, MA), there are a covey of observations you should make from Day One, if you want to succeed in your new corporate culture. **Here are some of them:**

- Do people in the organization or department gossip? About what? How well do they know their bosses? Do they swear? How do they dress? What kind of office furniture is provided? What perks?

After a few days on the job, you should make other observations, such as:

- What and who are considered humorous? Do people laugh during meetings? What is the rhythm of the work day, week and month?
- Are there regular breaks, parties, celebrations? Do they take place at work or after hours? Do people talk to each other in the halls? Are important decisions ever made at lunch, in bathrooms, or in the hall?
- What kind of language does the organization use in official communications: formal, bureaucratic, slang, macho, military or athletic?
- How are new people helped to fit in? Are some left to fend for themselves? What gets you in the most trouble? Do people hold grudges? Do others try to mediate conflict or are two people left to fight it out themselves?
- How do you know when you’re in higher management’s good graces? Who gets promoted—what do they have in common?

After you’ve been with the company a year, and have been promoted, you’ll be playing a new game. “When you move up, the culture around you changes,” Levinson warns. “You may be expected to behave in a more sophisticated way, to avoid certain expressions, to take certain subtle hints, to get to know certain people.” And you should never forget what goes on among the people you are leaving behind. “If you will be managing your former peers, that means a valuable perspective on the culture of our new subordinates,” says the psychologist.

So, as you start the new job, be aware there is more to it than settling in, shuffling papers, and finding your way to the water fountain and bathroom.

Again, congratulations on your new position. It’s the first day of the rest of your life. Best of luck to you, and keep in touch. —Dick Williams