



Transitioning from student to young professional

By Adam R. Smith

After completing the rigorous interview process to land your first career job, you now might be wondering what full-time professional life is really like. Recent graduates can experience a few “culture shocks” in the transition from student to full-time accounting professional.

The first culture shock from day one is that you just went from being an experienced student to an inexperienced young professional. The first days of starting work at your new firm are similar to the feelings you had starting college: excitement, anxiety, anticipation all rolled into one. Like with any new job, it can take a while to feel comfortable with your new firm, understand what procedures and policies are in place and become familiar with your co-workers’ personalities. A great way to overcome this shock is to get involved in company functions at work or outside of work.

One of the best things I did with my firm was run in an 8K charity run. I am not a long-distance runner, so it was something new for me. What I discovered was that I really enjoyed finding out something new about a few of my fellow co-workers outside of work.

Being a student for most of your life, another big difference is the work-life balance as a full-time accountant and the responsibilities accepted with the position. The days of sleeping in until noon, waking up for one or two classes, and then having the rest of the day free are gone, and now your career has become your life. This doesn’t mean you lose all your free time, but priorities have to be set and maintained. A simple way to help balance your personal life and work life is to set goals for both; it will assist you in prioritizing both lives and how they mesh together.

One of the first goals I had after graduating was passing the CPA Exam, so I knew it was going to interfere with some of my personal life. I wasn’t going to be able to go to as many sporting events or travel as much as I wanted to. However, passing the exam was my first priority; I was willing to sacrifice the personal time to get it done and benefit in the long run.

Another distinctive change from student life that you might find is the generation gaps that you have to work with, both in the office and with clients. Throughout your education you studied and learned with your peers, but at work you operate with a wide variety of generations. Technology has become more and more relevant in the workplace. We grew up with e-mail, Internet, and cell phones for most of our lives. We almost intuitively pick up with technology as it is released. However, older generations have functioned with other means for years. You will have to learn to adapt to your co-workers and clients and use the means of communication and technology that they prefer.

A few clients that I work with don’t have access to the Internet at the work place; I had to adapt to the client’s situation and environment. Also, I have had to adapt to the paperless approach that our firm is taking. It hasn’t been an easy adjustment for me, so it probably hasn’t been any easier for people accustomed to using paper copies of everything.

There are quite a few differences between full-time student life and life as young professional. How you integrate your talents and personality to your firm’s culture and balance life as a young professional will help you jump start your career.

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