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3 Things to Count on the First Weeks in a New Job (and What to Do Around Them)

By Susan Dunn

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Here are three things typical of your first weeks on a new job.

1. You will get sick.
2. You will find out you were lied to.
3. You will have a mini-crisis at home.

There. Now that you have the proper expectations, it will be easier.

If these don't happen to you, be pleasantly surprised. If they do, here are some tips.

RULE NO. 1: YOU WILL GET SICK

Why do so many people get sick the first weeks on a job? Probably two things are at work here: stress and a lowered immune system meeting a new germ pool ready to invade.

The stress of a major change (such as a new job) can lower your immune system. It depends upon you, the level of the stressor, and what it means to you. The new germ pool, however, is waiting for you. You're moving into a new environment of viruses and bacteria your body hasn't built resistance to. After a matter of weeks, you've generally adjusted and will quit getting sick.

Allergies and personal sensitivities may also play a part. Your new surroundings will have the usual collections of chemicals, odors and bad air. New carpeting, musty file rooms, someone who has a scented candle in their office, lots of live plants (that harbor molds) . It's all there. You may react strongly at first; other times, we "develop" the allergy as time goes by.

EXAMPLE:

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The lawyer Julie worked for had just returned from a hunting safari in Africa. During her first month on the job, the head of a water buffalo (whatever) arrived in his office, crated and heavily packed in naphtha. (The raw ingredient in moth balls is naphtha.) It was delivered while she was at lunch and when she returned, the odor was overwhelming, and had, of course, already invaded the HVAC system. As with ammonia, some people are immediately and strongly affected by the odors, while others hardly notice it. In the case of naphtha, however, Julie's doctor confirmed it could have caused real damage (when she went to check on her sore throat).

Could you anticipate something like that? No way. You can only expect the unexpected, work on your EQ, and be prepared to cope.

RULE NO. 2: YOU WILL FIND OUT YOU WERE LIED TO

It happens to the best of us, from the best of us, in the best of places, at the best of times. In other words, don't over-react. Keep your cool, your Emotional Intelligence, but understand that all communication represents MIScommunication, and when someone wants something (like wanting you to come and work for them), they will do what it takes, emotionally. "Motivation," as we say, "is not a thinking word."

Few hirers will outright lie to you, or misrepresent the truth, but many will fail to mention certain things (like you're expected to take a turn babysitting the boss' pre-teen when she comes to the office) or they exaggerate ("we get the usual vacations off" – only it doesn't mean the federal holidays!).

Yes, you can listen carefully at interview time, and ask questions for clarification, but nobody's perfect.

Clients tell me about sins of commission and omission both.

Hang in there and test it out during the early weeks. If it's something you really can't live with, you'll have to do something about it. Otherwise, live with it, and adjust your attitude accordingly.

EXAMPLES:

1. Benjamin, an English major, was hired to teach Russian in an inner city high school. When he got there, he found out he'd also been assigned 3 Spanish classes, when he had never taken Spanish and had no knowledge of the language whatsoever. When he found out they were indeed serious, he decided to find another job.
2. Marianna took a job in a firm assuming she'd be given overtime. The first pay check, she found out she'd been "salaried" and there would be no overtime, but there would be bonuses. The benefits were excellent. She liked the people. She decided she could live with that.
3. Gianni took a job as a fundraiser. He found out within the first month he was expected to travel over a 400 mile radius regularly (which hadn't been mentioned previously), and work most weekends as well as 40 hours at his desk. Gianni apologized to his wife, prepared his resume, and found a new job as soon as he could.

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RULE NO. 3: YOU WILL HAVE A MINI-CRISIS AT HOME

Appliances know when you've taken a new job. j.k. But I hear an awful lot of stories about things falling apart at home when someone takes a new job. Why? Murphy's Law, I guess. And while I teach optimism, as part of Emotional Intelligence, I think it's just best to optimistically anticipate riding through some bumps at home during your first few weeks on a new job.

Be optimistic about YOUR ABILITY TO COPE, not about LIVING IN A PERFECT WORLD.

It's like when you're having houseguests for Thanksgiving, and the whole extended family to your home for the big dinner. Yes, your dishwasher, garbage disposal, washing machine or dryer, or heating system, or some or all of these things will break. It's happened to me so many times, I just laugh. It takes less energy than crying. In fact it bolsters your immune system to laugh. See Rule No. One.

THE KEY: MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL PREPARATION

Mental and emotional preparation are the key to surviving the adjustment. Understand that if you're feeling stressed, your immune system will be under duress. Do what you can to bolster it – eat right, exercise, stay healthy, get enough sleep. And most of all, don't over-react to it.

Understand that the reality of any situation rarely lives up to what was reported, or what your expectations were. Expect some things to be better than advertised, some worse, some the same. Ride it out. Give it time before you form your final opinions. If it turns out to be a "draw" that's okay.

At home, get the troops supporting you and the new situation, and cut yourself some slack on the home front. Enter the job if you can, well-prepared as to home and car repairs and wardrobe. Then relax about these things for some weeks, while you cope with the new job. Nothing short of real "emergencies" need the immediate attention you may be used to giving them. Even a lawn can go 2–3 weeks without the neighbors calling the Lawn Patrol. You can buy your "groceries" at the convenience store on the corner a few times without busting the budget. The spare bedroom will always be there to clean when you can get around to it.

Don't over-react, and even worse, don't clamp down.

When in a new situation, it's our "default" mode (if we're not mindful), to get rigid and want to apply order to the chaos. Many new situations in life, such as a new job or a new baby, simply don't lend themselves to that. Don't waste energy and stress your immune system further by getting rigid. Be willing to let some things go for a while, and to take a second, longer look at some of the things that surprise you you weren't counting on.

The bottom line: Lose some battles in order to win the war. It's all about life balance.

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Do People Really Take Jobs for Money?

By Marilyn J. Tellez, M.A.

Money motives in American culture appear to be what drives a job seeker to accept a job. Why work if it is not for money?

The intangibles count more than money! What are these intangibles? Pleasant co-workers, interesting tasks to do, fair management, health benefits, retirement plans, etc. Money seems almost an extra perk that goes with the other things that can't really be measured.

And money paid to someone who is unhappy in their job is like paying someone to commit suicide while still being alive. The worker wishes the pain would end, but it doesn't, so he or she trudges along pretending and suffering. The effort needed to make a change, just isn't there. For that person, it is a badge of honor. Honorable suffering!

The idea of looking and finding something better doesn't exist. This job keeper is a prisoner of their own thoughts and efforts.

The job holder who is happy, successful and feels good, is with an employer and knows that the money is there to satisfy his/her needs. The struggling and striving for position, power and more money is not there as the job they are in is what they want. It's like feeling satisfied after a good meal.

This situation is a yes answer about money. The unhappy worker needs to break the mold and find more of the positive answers to a life. The jobs are there that do give workers money, good co-workers, positive managers and pleasant tasks to do. It's up to the unhappy "not in a good place or job" to be honest and stop the nose to the grindstone mentality. It does take some "gumption" to find the next, good job!

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