

Managing the Joining Up Process

The change from student to employee is, in most instances, a great one. Many people, especially those with little or no full-time work experience, tend to underestimate the size and nature of this change. They enter the job with very unrealistic expectations, based mostly on their student experiences. This leads to inappropriate behavior, which sometimes alienates others or is just ineffective at accomplishing given tasks. The end result for the individual is frustration and disappointment.

The Differences between Student and Employee

Consider for a moment a few of the major ways in which the environment of a student and that of a full-time employee differ:

1. *Bosses.* A student at any one point in time will have four, five, or six “bosses” (teachers), who usually change every four months, and who are often selected by the student. An employee usually has one boss, sometimes for years, and has little if any influence over the choice of that superior. These different situations make for very different superior-subordinate dynamics. New workers sometimes continue to behave as if their bosses were professors whom they can ignore, or, at worst, get rid of in a few months. Such behavior causes obvious problems.

2. *Feedback from superiors.* A student learns to expect brief, quantitative performance evaluations (grades) on numerous specific occasions throughout the year. Such a person will often get written feedback on his or her work also. An employee, on the other

hand, may *never* get any concrete feedback from superiors outside of pay raises or promotions. It is not unusual for new workers to feel that they are working in a vacuum and that the organization is at fault for not giving them more feedback.

3. *Time span.* A student learns to think in terms of time cycles of one or two hours (a class), one week (after which a sequence of classes repeats itself), and four months (a semester, when classes change). The time span of an employee can be as short as a few hours (in some production/operating jobs) or as long as many years (in some planning jobs). More important, the time cycle can change on the job, often leaving the new employee confused and disoriented.

4. *Magnitude of decisions.* A business student often gets used to making a number of major decisions (hypothetically) every day. At least at first, the new employee will rarely make any major decisions in his or her job. This often leads to feelings of being underused or ignored.

5. *Speed of change.* Because of the pace of academic life and the number of major innovations and changes students are encouraged to consider, they often develop highly unrealistic expectations concerning the ease and quickness of making changes in the real world. Discovery of the realities is often quite frustrating and depressing.

6. *Promotion.* A student with a master's degree and no full-time work experience has lived in an environment where promotion occurred once every twelve months—nineteen promotions in nineteen years. It is no wonder that when a student takes a job five levels below the president, others often complain that “the young hotshot seems to want to be president in just a few years.”

7. *The nature of problems.* Schools often carefully select problems that can be solved in a short period of time using some method or theory that is being taught. Such a process is “efficient” by many educational standards. New workers often find it incredibly frustrating when the problems they are given are not as neat and solvable and the information needed for a decision is not available.

We could go on, but the point should be clear by now.

Unrealistic Expectations

Individuals also create a slightly different kind of unrealistic expectation through a poor assessment of themselves and the job while job hunting. The benefits of the assessment processes described in this book go far beyond the job decision. The very process of systematically assessing yourself, your future organization, and your job helps create more realistic expectations about what your initial experiences will be like in that job. More realistic expectations lead to fewer disappointing surprises and to more intelligent, adaptive, problem-solving decisions on your part.

Phil Hammer, for example, learned through his self-assessment how much he tended to overlook detail. He learned through his job assessment that his new job would require some (not a lot of) attention to certain types of detail. When he started work, he took specific actions to avoid a potential problem. First, he managed to rearrange his secretarial assignment so that he was assigned a person who was very detail-oriented. Second, he explained his “problem” to his secretary, and requested that a major aspect of her responsibility would be to keep track of details for him. Finally, he made it a habit to carry a note pad with him at all times and forced himself to make himself notes so that he wouldn’t overlook things. After twelve months on the job, Phil had not created one single significant problem because of his personal “weakness.”

Regardless of the source, inaccurate expectations cause problems for recent graduates. They cause poor performance, disappointment, frustration, and low morale. In some cases, the organization concludes that the inappropriate behavior reflects a poor employee selection on its part, and the person is let go. In some cases, feeling “had” by the organization for not being warned about what was to come, the employee quits. In still other cases the problems are overcome, but seldom without leaving some bad feelings all around.

Managing One’s Own Joining Up

Perhaps one of the most lethal expectations of recent graduates is that, in effect, “It is the organization’s responsibility to make sure that the new employee gets the orientation and training needed to be able to do his or her job.” Some organizations do try systematically and quickly to help all new employees get “up to speed.” They have “orientation programs,” “training programs,” and “special first assignments.” But very few companies do even a fair job of making sure that all new people get the specific orientation, training, and help they need to get “up to speed” quickly and efficiently.

Most people who have an effective, relatively trouble-free year after leaving school explicitly or implicitly take responsibility for their own “joining up.” Regardless of whether or not their organization has programs for new people, these people systematically take actions to help themselves get “on board.” They recognize that if they don’t take the initiative and something goes wrong, they will probably have to suffer the consequences.

In assuming responsibility for their own joining

Exhibit 34-1

Actions That Can Help a Person Get Up to Speed in a New Job

BEFORE STARTING WORK

1. Get on the organization’s mailing list.
2. Get your new boss’s secretary to send you copies of memos, etc., that you would receive if you had already started work.
3. Request an organization chart and a book of pictures of employees (if one exists) and start learning names and faces.
4. Subscribe to the local paper in the town or city where you will be working.
5. Write to the Chamber of Commerce and real estate agents for information on housing, schools, etc.
6. Open a local bank account.

AFTER STARTING WORK

1. Invite people to lunch to get to know them.
2. Get to know the secretaries (great sources of information).
3. If athletically inclined, join some of the organization’s teams (a good way to form relationships informally).
4. Sit down and have a long talk with your boss regarding what he or she expects of you.

up, people typically take a variety of actions both before they start work and immediately afterward (see Exhibit 34-1). While most students do virtually nothing between the day they accept a job offer and the day they show up for work to help their period of adjustment from school to work, others do a number of useful and practical things. By requesting an organization chart and a book of employee pictures (if available), for example, you can start to learn the names and faces of people you will be working with. Knowing who's who, of course, can be enormously helpful to a new employee. It's much easier to do this in a leisurely way over a two- or three-month period instead of trying to learn names and faces in the first few weeks of work, when you are trying to learn so many other things too. As a general rule, the more that you can do before starting work to relieve the burden of your first few weeks on the job, the fewer problems you will face in your first year out.

A variety of actions that people sometimes take once they start work are designed primarily to assist

their joining up. By sitting down and having a fairly long and detailed talk with one's boss regarding what he or she expects, for example, you can help minimize the probability that you will inadvertently violate those expectations. Disappointing, surprising, or annoying your new boss during your first few months on the job can prove to be a major impediment, since your boss is usually the key person who can help you during that period or block your way.

Different people will no doubt prefer different specific tactics to help them manage the joining up process. We encourage you to prepare as much as you can for work *before* you walk through the front door on your first day on the job.

Assignment

Read "Cyrus Walker: Making the Transition". Develop from it a list of the things you think you will have to deal with in making the transition from school to work. How will you deal with them?

CYRUS WALKER: MAKING THE TRANSITION

In the spring of 1982, Cyrus Walker graduated from the Darden Graduate School of Business at the University of Virginia. A year later, Cyrus reflected on what it was like for him to move from school to work.

Being in School after Accepting a Job Offer

This is just to give you a feel of some of the things that occur after making a decision, some more practical things that may appear very basic to some people, but which become very relevant.

For instance, the man I was negotiating with called me up one Friday and said he'd get back to me on Monday. I got a call from my alumnus contact on Sunday telling me that my negotiating

contact had been fired and that now he, the alumnus, would be doing the negotiating. I found that very uncomfortable. So my contact within the firm was down to an alumnus from the school, who said a senior manager would call me on Monday. He didn't. More anxious moments. He finally called me late Tuesday, explained what had happened with the other guy, and that the offer that he had made would stand and stand alone without any further negotiation. Any ambiguous things like benefits, vacation, moving expenses, starting date, etc., would be handled by the Personnel Department. My response was, I would prove to him that I was worth what I had been asking for, and that I was happy to be joining such a fine firm. The Personnel Department sent down an information package later explaining what was going to happen and that helped.

I made my decision by mid-April, and a ton of

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bricks came off my shoulders. I felt good. I had done all I could to make the right decision, and I got real determined that I was going to implement it. And it's a good thing I did because not all things were going to go my way. Some may have a difficult transition from school to work, but even if you have an easy transition, there are going to be adjustments along the way. Without a mental attitude that you are going to make this thing work, you know, it will be hard.

The basic question was, "Okay, I've made the decision and I'm going to do it. Now what?" The first thing that came to my mind was to enjoy the rest of the year at school. All my friends were there. I had been around these people for two years, and we only had four to six weeks remaining. It was a unique period to just take time to go out, to have the parties, to go to the mountains, whatever. I realized it was going to be very difficult to get these people back together again.

Finals were approaching; I had a few group projects to finish, but I had finished my term project early. I remember being very busy during that time. There were a lot of things to do. At the same time, I was comfortable. I think you reach the point that the pressure has been resolved, and you really have a chance to enjoy. It was a real golden time for us to do all of the things we hadn't been doing for the past two years. After this year, after this season, you realize that you won't be able to see Monticello, or the Blue Ridge, or Ralph Sampson dunk for UVA. Believe me, it takes a lot more time and energy to do those things and keep up, but that's what I did, and I really looked at it as a big plus.

We had a lot of parties. We had the softball game with the sales class. We got together as a group and went out to the lake and just had a lot of cook-outs. There are moments you get depressed. You are trying to enjoy the groups of people that you have gone through this experience with and all of a sudden the realization is that you won't be seeing them anymore.

The B-Bar Ball

I got engaged the night of the "B-Bar Ball" two weeks before graduation. My girlfriend had been in on the job search and choice process all along, so that my job selection was not a surprise to her. Anyway, we had to wait until October to set a date for the wedding because of my training program and the fact that my permanent assignment wasn't going to be made until then.

So, that led to something else. With a significant other involved, as soon as the decision is made, if they're going to work, things should start

rolling right then and there. They should make their contacts in that city. I had one employer offer to help out in any way they could to find a job offer for my fiancée. Your significant other needs to contact friends in the area, firms to work for, maybe even use some of the resources in the school to get the job search rolling. It is a virtual time bomb sitting there waiting to go off if nothing is done. You come home from being all hepped up about your job, and they are still struggling to find a job. That is a difficult transition to handle, and it can really try your personal relationships.

As an example, I had a friend whose wife was a teacher. If she hadn't gotten her applications in early, right after he had made his decision, she would not have been considered for employment. These are the deadlines that can pass that you never think about. You've made your decision, but now there are other deadlines that people have to look at. This is a very individualized process. You can't rely on your classmates' timetables or you can run out of time.

So we were at the "B-Bar Ball." Someone had been up in New York the week before and was telling about the apartment crunch: "Hey, it's going to take a lot longer than you think, there is a very tough real-estate market up there." I'm sitting there and all of a sudden I realized, Hey, you better get on the stick! I was having a good time with school over, but I realized I had to go to New York.

We had plans to go to the beach for the week between the B-Bar Ball and graduation. There were three or four people who were getting a house, and we were going to go and relax. We canceled our plans, although without this jolt we probably would've gone. That was what REALY started the transition period for me. It was like, BOOM, you better get a roof over your head.

So, I got REAL determined to make the transition work. It had been a long process, putting a lot of work into the job search, and I'd made my decision. Then it was time to move on and DO it. I had to get myself psyched up while I was still at school that I was going to MAKE this thing work. It's getting the attitude built up that you've made a decision, and you're going to MAKE it work so that when times get tough, you'll know you've thought about it and you'll know why you're there. Without that attitude, and I've talked to a lot of people who graduated the same time I did, it becomes very difficult and you have a lot of second thoughts.

For me, the first test came in my search for an apartment in New York. I spent the week between the B-Bar Ball and graduation in New York, and that was a tremendous eye-opening experience. I realized that it wasn't as easy in New

York as it was in Charlottesville, where you came for the day and looked at three or four vacant apartments, picked one based on what you liked and what you could afford, and decided. In New York, there is a very tight real estate market. And there are all different kinds of neighborhoods and all different kinds of price ranges and all kinds of conveniences and things to be weighed. And, it is very difficult. At the end of the first week, nothing was resolved and I came back to Virginia for graduation.

Right after graduation, I went back to New York. I tried to settle this thing, and finally it got to be the end of the second week and on the last day I decided I had to find SOMETHING, so I took a furnished summer sublet. Even then it wasn't resolved because it wasn't permanent. But it was a good way to look at the situation, actually. Especially in a city like New York where there are a lot of different neighborhoods, and they offer different things, different commutes, different stores, different people. If you don't know the city, you learn quickly, but it also is good to just live up there on a three-month sublet deal and get a feel for where you want to live.

After School Before Joining

The funny thing is that there was a great contrast within the school. Some people were going to take off the whole summer, going to go to Europe; they don't worry about moving. Others might start the day after graduation, and boom, they have to be up in the City. If you are in that circle of friends who are going to Europe, moving out and starting in late August, then there you are, watching them pack to go off. . . .

I returned to Charlottesville after lining up the New York sublet on a Tuesday. On a Wednesday, one of my friends said that the air fares to the West Coast were the cheapest they were ever going to be. Thursday, we were on a plane to the West Coast planning a twelve-day vacation.

It was the first time we had been to the West Coast. It was a fantastic trip; it met and exceeded all expectations that I ever had. I had never been to the West Coast, but knew two or three other couples from Darden who were going cross country, all doing the same routine. The people who did that seemed to have a much healthier attitude toward work when they finally started. I have pictures of, unbelievable pictures of, five or six rolls, 200 pictures, of the trip that are sitting there on the mantel. It was a nice transition from school back to the city and starting a job. So . . . I took a two-week vacation, you might say, on the spur of the moment.

We only had about \$1,000 free cash in my checking account. We didn't have the money—did it on plastic. I'm still paying for the trip; I will be paying for the trip for a long time. When I came out of school, I was heavily in debt. I was as leveraged as I ever want to be. I was on loans; I had stretched financially even to be able to come back to school. I figured it out that, overall, I have, including undergraduate school loans, \$19,000 or so to pay back. And I had no cash, very little cash. The trip to California cost us about \$1,000. I usually do not use my credit cards. I'm a guy that charges on them and then pays them off, but I used them then. However, the trip was worth it.

There were some financial surprises. First, there was the brokerage fee. If you go through a broker to find an apartment in New York the buyer pays a fee of usually 15% of the annual rent. The company should pick that up; you've got to negotiate hard to make sure that the firm picks that up. You've also got to put down a month's rent for a security deposit, if you're lucky, possibly two months if you're not, and then you've got to have your first month's rent. So, you're looking at about \$3,000 on day one in a city like New York. Now, I don't know how many people have \$3,000 laying around, but I sure as hell didn't. I was fortunate the firm picked up the broker's fee, but I still had to do the embarrassing thing which was to borrow from my parents. I increased the lines on my credit cards when I got back from the West Coast, so I would have some slack. For the first time in a while, I was very, very concerned about cash flow.

I still do daily and weekly cash flow statements to see where my money's going. Maybe people who move into a non-New York atmosphere don't have to consider it as much. Another thing, you move into an apartment, and you've got to furnish it, draperies, rugs. Even if you've got some stuff, you've still got to buy some things for the apartment. Maybe you got by the interviewing season with one or two suits, and now you're not going to be able to do that, so you've got to go out and buy suits, shoes, shirts, etc. These are some things that hit me a little unexpectedly.

A funny thing looking back: you make a decision in a group environment at the Darden School. You make a decision with their help and advice, but when you make your decision, that support group is gone, and you're living with that decision, and your friends are in Chicago or Atlanta or wherever, and suddenly, it's you all alone. And, you've got to make it work now. You can't call "time-out" and say well, let's meet and talk about it. Those people are GONE. Now, you've got to make it work. It's a subtle thing. Some people don't believe in this positive men-

tal attitude toward it, but you get tested real early.

So, we had about a week before work to settle into the apartment. Then, one day, you wake up and you go to work. It's a funny feeling that first day: Even after all the preparation you're not exactly sure what is going to happen when you walk in the door.

Going to Work

I was part of a training program with 21 other people. I had been in touch with the firm several times: once to nail down moving expenses, another time to nail down what the real starting date was going to be, another time to find out what the training program was like, how it had changed people. I walked in the front door, and here's where I got a break that I'm not sure other people got. They said, Day One, we are going to begin a general introduction to the firm that will last the first week. So many weeks of analytic training, eight weeks of rotation, and you'll see in your booklet that you're going to be at this desk on this day, etc. You will be evaluated every day, and at the end of this we're going to have a draft pick. The firm delivered. The training program was extremely organized. Fifteen weeks. He spelled everything out which was phenomenal. I got a folder, and I knew where I was going to be, to the desk, on a day by day basis.

They spelled out the expectations for the training program right then and there. You see, I came off a 90-day game plan that we did in business policy. I knew that I had three goals in mind because I had been through similar situations. One, I needed to differentiate myself from the rest of the pack. I wanted to be considered among the top people. And two, I wanted to get to know the people who were in my training program very well, because they were a good resource. The third thing is that I wanted to get to know as many people in the firm as I could because this was a once-in-a-lifetime shot to circulate around the whole firm with no job to worry about and just talk with them about what they thought about the firm, what they didn't like, etc. Those were the three goals I took in, and I did get off to a good start.

We had a classroom part of the training in which we had some tests. I scored no. 1 in those. I kept studying and made sure that I came out no. 1. That gave me respect with my peers and the training people. Then the word started to get out that this guy can do the work which later helped out in the draft pick. And it built my leverage around some things that were surprising later on. I had some leverage.

After the first week of training, there were three weeks of classroom work where they give you three volumes of material to study. You had classes during the day and three volumes to review at night and were tested every day or at least at the end of the week on each major volume. It was straight memory work, back to undergraduate days. That's my ballgame. I knew it was my ballgame. I just basically studied the material very hard.

I was working in the evenings, too. There was a Darden student who was in New York for the summer as well; not at my firm, though. He graduated with me, and was spending the summer in New York with his wife. I would come home basically around 4:30 or 5:00 and have a little bit of dinner, study for a couple of hours, and maybe give them a call and meet them somewhere to just get out and walk around. The sublet was in Greenwich Village, and there is always entertainment on the streets in the summer. Then back and study maybe another hour or two, and hit the sack around 11:30. Then on Friday we would have an exam. We did a fair amount of booking it in those three weeks. I was making sure that I was memorizing the material that would help me through the registered representative exam, and I knew that it was a way to differentiate myself from the start.

We went out as a group a lot of times, going out to bars after the exams, you know, finding out where the people are from and what they are like, what their past experience has been. I made an effort to do that. It was a great way to get to know those people. If you're generally interested in getting to know them, then they become interested in you, and you get along very well, and that was important to me.

Plus all this time I was trying to find a permanent apartment. The person that I had talked with in Personnel had agreed to pay my moving expenses on a U-Haul basis. He agreed to fly me back home when I found a permanent place to pick up some stuff I had stored. I had stored some of my stuff at my fiancée's place and some at home. So, he said I could go back down and get it. It was a long, drawn out process. I didn't find a place until late in the summer. The actual move into my own room didn't take place until the Labor Day weekend. On Labor Day I flew back down home, picked up all my stuff, drove back up, unloaded the trailer.

Then we began our rotation. We were on a schedule, so we sat with the same group of trainees. There were four major areas: Equity, Corporate Finance, Municipal Bonds, and Money Market Securities. We spent about two weeks in each area. Each Monday would usually be a lecture day where someone from that area would

come in and teach a class and give us the product knowledge. At the end of each day, they evaluated you on such things as interest, attentiveness, and ability to learn. They sat there, and you asked questions. You had to go home and think about what you were going to ask these people. At the same time everybody else was rotating through different parts of the firm. Here's where the contacts that you had made in the first three or four weeks of the classroom session became very helpful because you knew this guy would treat people like dirt, he wouldn't answer questions, or this guy was great, ask him anything you want, he's a good resource. We swapped all of these stories.

We were getting closer to this giant draft pick for final assignment. People, very similar to Darden, were very cooperative, but there is a little competition and as that begins to shape up, people begin to express some preferences. Then the mass of politics starts going, certain people make sure they get known in certain areas. This is what they really want, they try to nail down some kind of commitment for a final assignment.

You have to express three preference areas within the firm, and then you have some time to rearrange those, communicate those to the management in those areas, and they give you feedback whether they liked you or didn't like you in kind of a general way. All through the training area trainees start communicating bits and pieces about their needs and likes.

All this time there are contacts within the firm. All this time you are finding out who you want to work for, what they are like, things you need to do to be good, what the firm likes, the people. It's just a whole socialization process that they use to get to know you.

Then management sits down one day and has a giant draft pick. Like the NFL, I guess. They've got the performance on the classroom part. They've got your evaluation sheets which were all quantified: People skills—one, two, three, four, five, excellent, good, whatever. And then the four heads of the departments sit down, and they deal. They have their political interplay. They all want the best people and certain people do emerge as top candidates. Then a little swapping goes on here and there, and then you are assigned to that area.

Joining Up Again

Then you get your permanent assignment. October 16th. I emerged as one of the top three out of the 21 in the training process. I had expressed some preferences in corporate bond sales and

told them that I had wanted to do that. I have to say, there were a lot of interesting positions across the floor; there were a lot of things that I could have done and would have enjoyed very much. Anyway, apparently, I was bid for in all four major areas; they were bidding for my services, and I ended up assigned to an area that I hadn't put on my preference sheet at all.

And here's where I cashed in some chips. I had been a top performer in the training program, everybody had liked me. It just so happened that in the political situation in the wrangling, corporate bonds had ended up with one of the other top three people in the training class. So, then they said they wanted a salesman. All of the other people sort of said, well, okay now you've just got a trader, so you're not going to get one of the top people to be a salesman. So, I ended up assigned to an area I had not chosen. It was a great opportunity as a start-up position, and a great job, a challenging job, a sales job that I liked, but I had ignored the department.

I was called in by the partner of that area and he told me that I had been assigned to that particular job, and I cashed in my chips. I told the person that I had realized what had happened. Then I said in a not-so-controlled voice, "One, I want accounts and I want them early, I don't want to wait. I want to get on with it and perform." He assured me that that would happen, that my immediate manager who reported to him would convey that and that that would happen. "Two, if I produce, I want to be paid." As it worked out, having gone on record for that, it was a smart thing to do.

All along I was making sure that I met those three criteria that I brought in for the first 90 days: (1) try to shape myself as one of the top performers, (2) know the people in the training program very well which has turned out to be great, and (3) make sure a lot of people in the firm, top management, etc., get an exposure to me.

Becoming a Colleague

Now, once I got into the department, I also did something else. I went home the evening of my first day on the job and did some scratch sheet analysis on some bonds. The reason I did that was I said "This is Day #1, and I don't want to be treated just like another person. I am going to go home and do this." The World Series is playing, and I'm punching out on my calculator. I was just doing some averages and some standard deviations which is helpful information. Now, believe me I am not a mathematics buff—I know zippo, just the bears about quantitative analysis, but I

worked up some standard deviation numbers on these averages.

They absolutely loved it. All of a sudden, my boss tells me that my name has come up with management and senior management and the president of the company, and my boss is telling the president about this standard deviation analysis, that it was a way that they had not looked at a particular thing before.

I had to explain it to the entire department at a meeting and say this is what is available to you, and I will help you in any way I can. So, now I have positioned myself within the department as

somebody. And they're thinking, Okay, this guy knows what he is doing. I am going to respect him. He has a little bit more on the ball than somebody else who has just come on. He is above the average bear.

They said that I would get my accounts around the first of December. On Friday, December 4th, I received my accounts, on schedule and in half the time it took the people in the department from the training class before me. And so far, all indications are that the money will flow if the production is there. I have a very challenging position.