

A Hitchhiker's guide to the corporate world for newbies

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ABSTRACT

Stepping into the corporate world for the first time can be intimidating and exciting at the same time. It is extremely important to hit the ground running in a dynamic environment. A new phase comes with all the stressors of having new responsibilities, an unfamiliar culture, information overload, uncertainty in what is expected, and the list goes on. The key is to have a structured yet agile approach towards growth and learning at the inception of the career, to tip the balance. This paper brings out the essence of four cornerstones that can help build a strong foundation for a newbie in the corporate world – Communication, Collaboration, Self-leadership, and Feedback. My personal lessons learned will be shared at the end to provide the readers with the key steps and tips for sailing through the first of the career stages.

INTRODUCTION

Newbies enter the corporate world carrying enormous potential, fresh ideas, and a lot of enthusiasm. Although the first job can be an incredible learning experience and a launching pad for one's long-term career, it can also be quite a struggle. A surplus of information and an unclear path to support or guidance often accompany the transition from campus to corporate. This may result in a perplexing journey that is eventually addressed, but only at the cost of time and opportunities that might have been available from the start of the career. How, therefore, can one ensure that the benefit of time outweighs the cost?

Moreover, global focus on reskilling revolution has increased more than ever to foster the requirements of the future of work. A framework of global skill taxonomy by the World Economic Forum describes competencies that enable an individual to perform job roles. At the top of these skills are learned behaviors, emotional intelligence traits and beliefs that individuals exhibit, that influence their approach to ideas, persons, and situations (World Economic Forum, 2021).

This paper addresses the value of establishing a systematic growth mindset early in one's career by focusing on four key development areas that align with the power of using skill-based approach to coherent working style.



Figure 1. Four key professional development cornerstones for newcomers in the corporate world.

An interesting point to note in Figure 1 is that the term "Learning" appears in each segment. The significance of organizational learning and development is becoming increasingly important because of accelerated technological advancement. Organizational learning is more personalized than university education and is typically under the discretion of the individual. Depending on their goals, different people can acquire different skillsets. Therefore, it is imperative to pay attention to your learning strategy from the onset of the career to make the most of it.

COMMUNICATION

Building relationships and interpreting organizational culture tea leaves, both need effective communication. It involves understanding the communication styles of a new workplace to better define actions, strategies, and business processes (Church & Conger, 2018). Collaboration, productivity, and innovation are all greatly facilitated by effective communication. According to a salesforce research, employees are 4.6 times more likely to be empowered to put their best effort at work when they feel that their opinion is heard (Melanie Curtin, 2019).

With rapidly changing global trends of work, organizations are transforming workplace culture by prioritizing employee engagement initiatives (Jim H., 2017). But when done on a personal level, change is simple to achieve. Applying the "shrink change" idea is a straightforward yet effective tactic for dealing with sustainable expansion (Chris K., 2019). The idea is that you're more likely to achieve your goals when they are small and attainable. Layering this analogy to workplace communication, if the effort begins at an individual level, it will become easy to expand it across teams. This is a fundamental step that can be implemented at the inception of one's career.



One-on-one meetings, mentor-mentee program, cross-functional networking, participation in organizational communities and team-building exercises are a few impactful first steps for a new joiner to start cultivating relationships at workplace.

COLLABORATION

The phrase "*Of the people, By the people and For the people*" captures the best of Lincoln's thoughts. It is most used in connection with freedom and democracy, but it also extends to business, particularly the healthcare industry. Along the same lines, if you ask any experienced professionals to name a few values that contribute to organizational success, you will undoubtedly find collaboration on the list.

Although collaboration is typically associated with teamwork, it may also be adapted as a personal trait to advance in your profession quickly. From an individualistic perspective, collaboration is a holistic approach to learning. For newbies in the corporate world, it helps them feel a sense of purpose and belonging at work, which leads to an enhanced work environment, improved productivity and strengthened skills. Therefore, it is crucial to seize every opportunity to collaborate with your colleagues and focus on not only what they do but also how they do it.



How to collaborate at workplace as a newbie? - Participate in team building activities or forums, join learning communities (technical/non-technical), ask to shadow your mentor/project leader in the work they do, offer to work on the team presentations for parts that suit you the best or align with your skillset.

SELF-LEADERSHIP

Great leadership starts with self-leadership.

Self-leadership is the practice of intentionally influencing your thinking, feeling and actions towards your objective(s) (Bryant and Kazan, 2012). Figure 2 shows the three key concepts of self-leadership – self-awareness, self-learning, and self-regulation – that are to be emphasized. It encompasses how we determine *what to do*, *why we do it* and *how we do it*. By concentrating on these elements, one develops curiosity and accountability, which improves the capacity to function both independently and as a team member. We are all aware that accountability leads to better outcomes.



Figure 2. Three elements of Self-leadership.

Building a solution-oriented mindset, being proactive, paying attention to details, being reliable, and being coachable are attributes of a self-leader that offer a lot of room for learning, especially early in the career when learning is most crucial.



Kickstart your self-leadership journey - Start by identifying what part of your job brings you joy, allow some time to understand the impact of your work, list down the skills and qualities needed for your work, start taking relevant courses/measures at your own pace. Repeat!

FEEDBACK

Feedback does not just help us perform; it helps us transform.

Top performers continuously look for the methods that make their best even better, which makes them top performers. Feedback fuels ongoing development and aids in upholding high performance standards. It is a wonderful approach for newcomers to comprehend what is expected of them, their job, and the impact that their work creates. Feedback helps one create a strategic plan for their learning journey and helps eliminate ambiguity to a greater extent. It is bidirectional, meaning that both giving and receiving appropriate feedback are crucial for developing a productive work path.

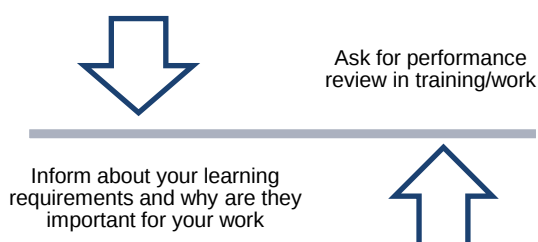


Figure 3. Bidirectional feedback to balance learning.

Making the process efficient and impactful, or comprehending its need, is another crucial part of feedback. When requesting feedback, it's crucial to emphasize on *how* it will benefit your learning process rather than merely your performance record. By undertaking this simple activity, you'll be able to receive a comprehensive evaluation of your performance as well as personalized advice based on your work from the reviewer.

When providing feedback, be sure to carefully analyze the work, training, or activity and include examples to support your opinion. Make sure to describe *how* and *why* the change will benefit you, *what* resources are required from the concerned team or individual. This will assist both sides in realizing the need and addressing it appropriately.



Here are a few examples of requesting a feedback - ask for feedback after finishing a training program, project or presentation. Get a performance review from your mentor/manager on a regular basis, ask specific questions pertaining to your performance - for example, "What are some of the points I can work on? or What are some skills that I can take an advance training on?"

Here are a few examples of providing a feedback - after a training program, tell the trainers what parts of the training were helpful and where you need more clarity or extra resources. Based on your objectives, inform your manager/mentor of any resources that you might need. Identify if a process can be streamlined and provide a feedback to the concerned team with appropriate examples.



MY LEARNINGS / CONCLUSION

My campus to corporate transition has been nothing less than a roller coaster ride. First few months were spent bridging the cultural gap between the office and college environment. For example – huge diversity, learning abbreviations, new information (both technical and non-technical), unknown expectations, accountable learning, etc. Well, once I settled in, I began to contemplate the process of my learning. Although it is an interminable journey, here's what I learned so far –

What to do?

Through some of my corporate experiences and the opportunities I have had, I have concluded that to flourish in my work (statistical programming) and evolve with the emerging trends, I need to establish a foundation of both technical and interpersonal skills early on in my career. My job is rewarding because of how this understanding has improved

my ability to relate to the work I do and the impact it makes on the society. It enables me to have a healthy work-life balance and to be more mindful about my professional growth. *Here's how it all worked out –*

- In my first position as an Associate Statistical Programmer, I began my corporate learning through a combined technical (SAS & CDISC data standards) and business excellence training program organized by my colleagues at Novartis. People from cross-functional teams were involved in the jumpstart training program, which encouraged inquisitiveness and provided the jump-starters a forum to interact with people from different educational and geographic backgrounds. In addition, we received training on a variety of pharmaceutical industry aspects, including statistical programming, sales and finance, ethics and compliance, data management, regulatory affairs, trial management, and much more, irrespective of the type of job we would ultimately undertake for the organization. This made it easier for the new joiners to grasp what we do as a company and how we deliver innovative medicine to people all around the world.
- Furthermore, it gave us the opportunity to work on projects in groups using the knowledge we had gained which developed collaborative spirit in the teams. All new hires were assigned mentors to help them understand the business functions or serve as their initial point of contact should they require support. This was quite beneficial while learning new things. For instance, my mentor and I had frequent technical meetings, which helped me better understand various aspects of clinical trials and how diverse organizational processes worked. My mentor inspired me to join the Novartis SP R community, and I actively engaged in activities like standard program creation, associate R training, cross-industry projects *etc.* Over time, all of this helped me gain confidence in both my capacity to learn and my ability to face the challenges of a new job.
- In the meantime, I also began to apprehend the significance of accountability and self-learning at work. I frequently participated in senior leaders' "coffee connects" or "fireside chats", which helped me learn how to take charge of my own progress and find my purpose. This in turn taught me to assess my progress by regularly getting feedback from my manager, mentor, teammates, and leaders, which ultimately helped me design a personalized growth strategy and establish realistic goals that meet my requirements and the organization's values.

Why to do it?

A simple answer, because of the fundamental differences between how we learn in the classroom and at work. The popular 70/20/10 learning model suggests a proportional breakdown of effective learning (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1996) i.e.

Learning proportions	Useful soft skills
70% from tackling work assignments	Communication, Collaboration, Accountability
20% from developmental relationships at workplace	Communication, Collaboration
10% from professional educational training	Communication, Self-learning, Feedback

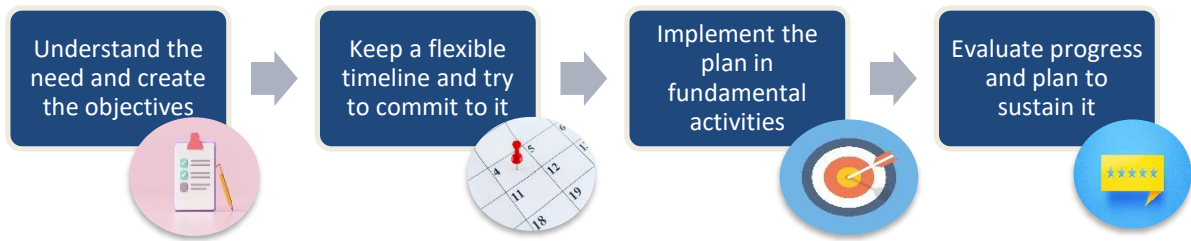
The growth plan must evolve in tandem with the learning style's sharp shift from campus to corporate. The stated abilities can help to address the ambiguity and pressing need for structured growth that comes along with the independence of personalized learning.

How to do it?

According to a survey I performed of about 40 people from statistical programming community with varying degrees of expertise, while most individuals concur that professional development skills are essential in the corporate sector, their approaches to meeting those demands vary. This brings me to personalized learning and development. In contrast to academic learning, corporate learning is far more flexible and may be tailored to a person's own goals. For instance, based on what they aim to do in the future, two people with identical work profiles may have radically different learning and growth patterns.

A personalized development plan may be highly beneficial for integrating the skills required to succeed at your job and for adopting a comprehensive approach to your career growth. Although learning patterns may be customized, here are a few elements I believe are essential for a newcomer to settle in:

- **Cultivating relationships** *via* communication and collaboration is the first and foremost step to having a sense of belonging in a new organization. Regular catch ups with team members, colleagues, managers, and senior leaders are helpful.
- Write down your **objectives** based on the timeline that suits you. Understand the need, secure the commitment, design a flexible plan, implement, evaluate, and sustain.



- One of your main objectives should be to hone your **self-leadership abilities** to build a strong foundation. These skills will increase your accountability at work and will also prepare you for the future of work which requires constant reskilling.
- **Find a Mentor.** Learn about the people and processes. Take active participation in mentor-mentee programs.
- **Learn on the go.** Join communities, technical/non-technical and participate in pragmatic learning.
- **Feedback to feed forward.** Ask for feedback whether official/unofficial, whenever you deem it necessary. Make it specific – for example, ask for your work efficiency on a project or in a presentation etc.

Something for the managers/mentors/senior-leaders – Despite the fact that this paper is primarily aimed at people new to the corporate world, it has valuable takeaways for all levels of experience. Furthermore, I would like to capture the attention of the managers, mentors, and senior leaders who certainly have a great influence on newcomers to the company. People with extensive industry experience could inspire new recruits to put their best at work by taking small measures like encouraging inclusiveness in team interactions, sharing personal experiences, supporting in the construction of a professional development plan, and organizing a reverse mentorship program. Combining all these factors can help in creating a workplace that is healthier and more productive.

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