

Graduates' Perceived Differences Between College and Workplace

The nature of work and the processes of learning to work change drastically after college; most individuals are unaware of the differences until they begin their first full-time job.

The tasks a new graduate must master are heavily influenced by the values, beliefs and prior experiences brought to the new job. Managers want to see attitudes such as adaptability, strong work ethic, appropriate humility, open-mindedness, readiness for continual learning and commitment.

If the new employee's attitudes match those required in that situation, she or he is off to a good start. Employers are quick to point out that new graduates' unrealistic expectations about promotion, salary, and responsibilities contribute to bad starts.

Graduates should realize that being hired is not equivalent to being accepted, a process that is earned and takes time. This "breaking-in" time means having a strong work ethic, avoiding criticism of the new job/organization and admitting that there is much to be learned.

| College | Workplace |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Frequent, concrete feedback | Feedback infrequent and not specific |
| Some freedom to set a schedule | Less freedom to set a schedule |
| Frequent breaks and time off | Limited time off |
| Choose/control over performance level | "A" level work expected continuously |
| Correct answers usually available | Few right answers |
| Passive participation often permitted | Active participation & initiative expected |
| Independent thinking supported | Independent thinking often discouraged |
| Environment of personal support | Usually less personal support |
| Focus on personal development | Focus on getting results for organization |
| Structured courses & curriculum | Much less structure; fewer directions |
| Few changes in routine | Often constant & unexpected changes |
| Personal control over time | Respond to supervisor's needs & directions |
| Individual effort & performance | Team effort & performance |
| Intellectual challenge | Organizational & people challenges |
| Acquisition of knowledge | Acquisition & application of knowledge |
| Professors | Supervisors |

From: *The Senior Year Experience* by J. N. Gardner, G. Van der Veer and Associates, Chapter 7 by E. F. Holton, III, (p. 102), 1998, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

College to Career Transitions: Reducing the Need for an "Extreme Makeover" of New Grads by Paul I. Hettich and Camille Helkowski, 14th WACE Word Conference, 2005, Boston, MA.