

First day on the job

On your first day at work, be sure to bring a notebook, pen, and all the paperwork and/or documentation you can think of that will be needed for human resource administrative purposes. This might include:

- Your social security card and driver's license, or other identification.
- Special certifications and licenses, if applicable.
- Family contact information, like telephone numbers and addresses.
- Form W-4 information (the number of dependents you wish to claim for tax withholding purposes).

Whether your new job is with a small firm or a large corporation, your employer will probably spend some time orienting you to your new workplace and co-workers. And although you may already know much of what you will hear during orientation, you should nevertheless carry your notebook and pen with you at all times so you can take notes if necessary. Even if you don't need to take notes, let that notebook and pen serve as reminders that you should be in a listening mode. Jot down any questions you may have, and pay special attention to the names, faces, and titles of people you meet or hear. Not having to ask about someone's name or title later will show your employer and co-workers that you are a good listener, willing to learn, and are interested in becoming part of the team.

The company culture



In the same way that first impressions were a deciding factor during the interview stage with your new employer, they will be important as you begin to build relationships with your new co-workers. One of your biggest challenges will be to adapt smoothly to the culture of your new workplace and, eventually, to enhance that culture by contributing your own unique qualities. In the same way that your new company culture will influence you, you will influence it.

It is very common to experience at least some degree of culture shock when you start a new job. It's okay to have some questions on the first day. In fact, if you're doing your job right, you may continue learning new things about your organization for months—even years.

Getting started with teamwork

When starting a new job, it's natural to want to distinguish yourself as a good employee. It's always wise to behave professionally, courteously, and intelligently on the job, but it's also smart to realize that you are part of a team. Your first goal should be to integrate smoothly into that team. This involves respecting leadership, working well with others, and performing responsibly.

If you succeed in fitting in well, at some point you will have the knowledge, experience, and familiarity needed to widen your focus. In some cases, this may occur in a matter of days or weeks; in others, years. But when that time arrives, you'll know that you're now a full member of the team and that your ideas will be heard. For example, when you first start a job, you may know a better way to perform specific tasks than those used by your new co-workers. The problem, of course, is that your team members don't know you yet, and will possibly see you as an opportunist rather than a team player. If you remain focused on the teamwork itself, however, your patience will eventually be rewarded, and you will have an audience for your ideas. And once your ideas have been heard and respected, you'll find that your horizons will quickly expand and give you the freedom to grow.

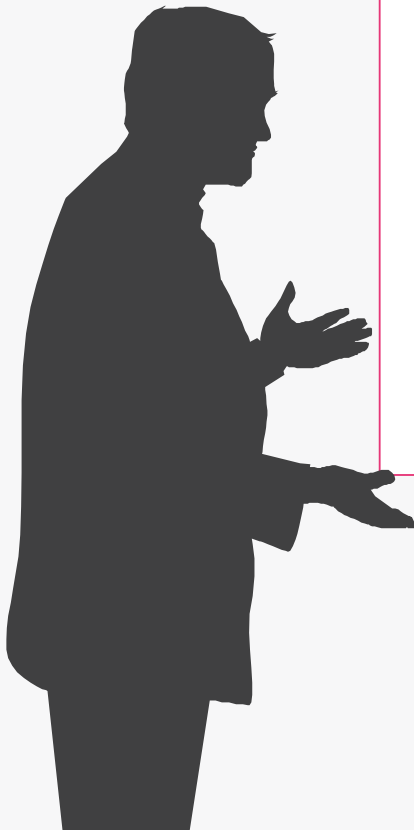
Questions to ask yourself as you begin a new job

Who is in charge, and how should I relate to them?

What, exactly, is the scope of my new job? What are my duties and responsibilities?

What is the overall structure of the department in which I work?

Who are my co-workers and superiors? What are their names, and what are their roles in the organization?



Important workplace issues

In all likelihood, your employment situation will be pleasant and harmonious. However, you need to know that an employment relationship is not only economic and social—it is a legal relationship as well. Both you and your employer have rights and responsibilities. Answers to some frequently asked questions are provided below. General labor law information is also available on the Louisiana Department of Labor's Web site at www.LAWORKS.net under Questions about....Labor Laws.

What can I expect to be paid?

Your wage level will depend on lots of things, including how much education and experience you have and the type of work you do. The Louisiana Department of Labor publishes information on wages in over 500 occupations around the state. To find out the average wage level in your occupation and your area, you can go to the Louisiana Department of Labor Web site at www.LAWORKS.net (then scroll over Labor Market Information, click on Occupational Employment and Wages"). You can also call the Louisiana Department of Labor's Research and Statistics Office at (225) 342-3141 or toll-free at (888) 302-7662.



If you work more than 40 hours per week, you are entitled to overtime pay of one and a half times the amount you usually make per hour. For example, if you normally make \$6.00 per hour, your overtime pay would be \$9.00 per hour. (Salaried employees, however, are often expected to work more than 40 hours per week without overtime pay.)

Under what conditions can my employer fire me?

Louisiana is an employment-at-will state, which means that an employer can legally hire, fire, suspend, or discipline an employee for almost any reason. However, there are some exceptions to this. An employer can't fire any employee who advises the employer that the business is in violation of a law, and the employee either discloses, threatens to disclose, or testifies about the violation of law. Also, the employer can't fire an employee for refusing to participate in an employment act that violates the law. An employer also cannot fire an employee for:

- Being called to military service
- Political opinions or voting
- Wage garnishment
- Filing a worker's compensation claim
- Being called to jury duty (Employer must also pay the employee one day's wages during the jury service)
- Contacting a labor union or voting to be represented by a union.

The structure of an interview

What about discrimination?

An employer cannot legally discriminate because of sex, race, age, religion, national origin, or disability. This means that an employer cannot discriminate in any aspect of employment, including hiring, firing, and promotion; wages and benefits; employment tests; use of company facilities; training programs; and other conditions of employment on the basis of any of those characteristics. For example:

- An employer cannot make a decision to hire or fire someone because of that person's gender. Under almost all circumstances, an employer cannot make a hiring decision based on assumptions that members of one sex can perform a task better than the other.
- An employer cannot deny employment to someone on the basis of race—nor can they deny employment on the basis of affiliation with someone of another race.
- An employer cannot pay different wages to two employees who perform substantially the same work, regardless of race, sex, religion, age, disability, or national origin.
- Pregnancy and other conditions related to childbirth must be treated the same as other short-term conditions.
- For both men and women, sexual harassment in the workplace is illegal. “Sexual harassment” includes a variety of behaviors ranging from directly propositioning someone to creating a work environment that is hostile.
- Employers cannot deny benefits to older workers on the basis of their age.

This doesn't cover all situations or circumstances. If you have a specific problem or question, you can contact the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission national office (202) 663-4900 or the New Orleans field office at (504) 589-2329.

