

# Make Your New Job Count

by Caela Farren, Ph.D., MasteryWorks, Inc.

You may be new to the workforce or a seasoned worker in the same or different organization. Changing jobs has become the norm rather than the exception. A 2006 survey by Monster.com revealed:

- 25% of Fortune 500 managers change jobs each year;
- 77% of new employees go home early on their first day of work
- 6.2 months is the breakeven point for new managers

Here are eight tips to help you transition into new jobs or work settings. Follow them and take charge of your “on-boarding process.” Don’t be one of the statistics. Look like a “seasoned professional” to those that count. And, feel good about taking charge of your career.

## 1. Find out “what counts for success” in your new job.

Research suggests that 75% of performance problems exist because expectations and standards were not clearly discussed and understood. Today, work situations change at an ever more rapid pace and, therefore, work priorities change. However, these changes are not always communicated directly.

Get in the habit of having very quick but clear expectations exchanges with key people -- managers, colleagues, customers, etc. Ask three questions and listen well to the answers:

- What are the major results you expect me to achieve in the next few weeks?
- What results are most important?
- What changes do you see happening this quarter or next quarter that will shift my priorities?

This can be a quick ten minute conversation, but allows you to stay in sync with changing expectations and priorities.

After a while, you can start sharing the way you see things changing, what new results you think are important, and what you see as priorities. This will show your understanding of the changing work dynamics and give you credit for taking initiative in thinking through priorities and success factors. See what needs to be done. Make it happen. Let people know what you’ve achieved. Take initiative!

## 2. Clarify the mission and strategies of the organization and how your work contributes.

The mission and strategy of an organization is what makes it distinctive and binds hundreds or thousands of people together. For instance, one bank may stress customer service while another one stresses the diversification of its product line. These strategies distinguish one bank from another. In this time of mergers and acquisitions, downsizing, outsourcing, etc., some organiza-

tions have lost touch with their mission and strategies. Confusion builds cynicism and unrest in workers. We all want to know the purpose of our organization -- why we're here and how we contribute.

To clarify the mission and strategies:

- read the Annual Report
- review selection and recruiting literature
- study the website
- ask your manager and key associates for their understanding of the mission and strategies.

Listen to see if the feedback portrays a clear and consistent mission. The clearer the mission, the stronger the organization.

Lastly, get really clear on how your day-to-day work contributes to the mission or strategies of the organization. Check your understanding with your manager. Ask questions and get clarity. If you don't know how your work makes a difference to the organization, you will eventually lose your passion, enthusiasm, and initiative. Knowing the direction of the organization lets you see "what counts" on a day-to-day basis and where to put your priorities.

### **3. Learn the "culture" - the informal rules of your organization.**

Learning "how" work gets done is critical information in your early days in an organization. Find out what the values of the organization are. You might find them written in a Vision Statement. However, you need to look around to see how the culture really works. What are the personality traits and style of leaders - innovative, by-the-books, decisive, cut-throat, bottom-line-driven, fair, diverse, etc.? Ask the question, *what counts for success around here?* to your manager, colleagues, co-workers, etc. Listen for the words that keep coming up and then put together your own list of "what counts" in this culture

Check to see if the company values fit your own personal values. Sometimes, people get burnt out or feel dissatisfied because their values don't fit the culture of the organization. This can work for a short time. Over time, people want to feel comfortable where they work. All of us want to "be" ourselves, and not have to pretend we're someone else. Productivity and happiness soar when your values and those of your organization are in sync.

### **4. Learn how your work relates to the other parts of the organization.**

Your work exists in a system of related work. The presentation you're pulling together is for a customer or internal client. The financial analysis you're developing supports a decision, recommendation or justification of some kind. The more quickly you can see how your work fits into the whole system, the smarter your decisions will be when time or resources are limited.

Draw a diagram of your system of work, so that you can see the flow – inputs and results. Who do you need to count on for the success of your work? Who counts on your work for what they

do? Build strong relationships with those people. Meet them. Talk to them. Get them in your e-mail system. Include them in your “expectations exchanges” and get feedback from them regularly: What worked? What didn’t? What recommendations would they make to you for enhancing, changing, or improving your work in the future? This attention to their needs will let you be seen as a team player and a central part of the overall organization system. You will not only be doing your “job,” you will be helping others accomplish theirs.

## **5. Know what you bring to team situations and how to maximize your contribution.**

Most workers play on a variety of teams these days. They can be formally constituted teams - the Project X Team, or they may be informal teams - your work group, taskforce, or product focus group. Some teams stay constant. Others change or end. Each team has a unique set of dynamics, based on the leader and team members.

There are four fundamental competencies needed for any team to succeed:

- 1) ***Generating and refining ideas*** — asking questions, playing devil’s advocate, using examples, challenging assumptions, building on ideas, etc.;
- 2) ***Building group esprit*** — getting participation, using humor, expressing support, honoring commitments, etc. ;
- 3) ***Organizing and integrating work*** — setting goals, maintaining focus, prioritizing tasks, tapping group resources, etc.; and
- 4) ***Managing boundaries*** — confronting disagreement, speaking for customers, forging alliances, surfacing complaints, etc.

Most of us are better in one or two of these competency areas than others. When teams are malfunctioning, some of these behaviors are usually missing. Know what you do best. See what others do best. And, always be on the lookout for what’s missing and move into the gap. Our [TEAMSMART® deck of cards](#) and guide can give you guidance.

## **6. Build a strong network of support in your chosen profession or industry.**

The pace and speed of organization change, technology, and customer requirements demand that you have a strong network of help in your profession and industry. To perform effectively and make a powerful contribution, you will need to be quickly connected to a variety of resources in your industry and your profession, as well as in your organization.

To build a network in your profession, ask colleagues what trade publications they read. Find out what associations they belong to. Learn the names of the key players and the leaders in your profession. Find out the names of the key people in your own organization (e.g. the best sales people, electrical engineers, software designers, project managers, scientists, etc.). Networking in your profession will help you continually increase your expertise and extend your influence. Use your “new” status to ask lots of questions and meet lots of people in your profession. See [NETWORKSMART™](#).

To build your industry network, observe and discuss trends in the industry. Which organizations are the industry leaders? What are the emerging technologies? What new products and services are coming to market in your industry? How does your organization stack up in the industry? Industry knowledge and connections help you prepare for the future and see changes that will impact your work.

## **7. Find multiple mentors or coaches.**

Mentors are “those who know more about a certain area of expertise than you do.” They may be younger or older these days. You might be a technology mentor or coach for a colleague or manager, while they become a mentor for you on understanding the organization culture. While new in a job or an organization, find three savvy mentors. Find an organization mentor -- who can teach you about the whole organization, key players, key customers, shortcuts, and the culture of the organization. Secondly, find an industry mentor. This person must have worked in the industry for many years, knows the competition, the customers, trends shaping the future, and will introduce you to key players and journals to read. And, lastly, find a mentor in your profession. Ask him/her about the key practices you need to master, core competencies, associations to join, and for introductions to other colleagues inside and outside of your organization.

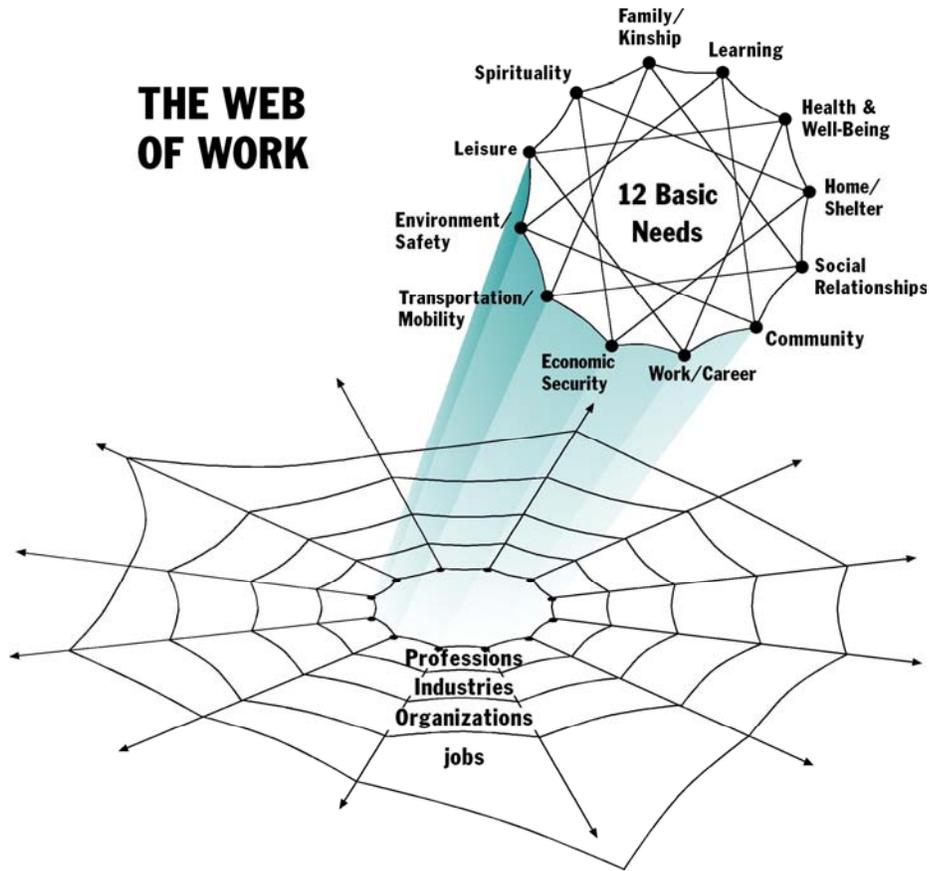
How do you find these people? Keep asking questions as to who are the good coaches, mentors, teachers in the company. Introduce yourself and ask them to be your coach. It’s often easier to do this when you’re new. Don’t demand much time, simply direction and occasional face-to-face or e-mail meetings. Remember to listen for what they need and offer to help them, as well as asking them to coach and help you. See [MENTORSMART™](#)

## **8. Use this job to help you validate the profession in which to excel.**

Choosing a profession is the most important career decision one makes. Why? Because it takes 10-17 years to be a master in any field. Sammy Sousa hit baseballs for over 25 years. Bill Gates has been marketing software products for over 25 years. Peter Lynch has been managing funds for 35 years. They are not switch hitters. They’ve chosen a profession that is enduring and meets a basic human need.

Professions are the most enduring part of the **Web of Work**. They have come into being to take care of basic human needs. Teaching, accounting, sales, marketing, biology, health professionals, materials managers, entertainers, etc., are all professions that have been around for centuries. The jobs in which these professions live change over time. However, you can count on a profession staying around and continually transforming, based on breakthroughs in technology or business.

# THE WEB OF WORK



Scan the model above listing the 12 basic needs and see which needs your current job is closely linked to. The closer the link the more chance that you are already working in a profession, rather than only a job.

It's easy to complete a degree, hold several different jobs, and still not have chosen a profession or trade in which to excel. People who are simply “jobbers”, who don't see their job inside of a profession or trade, are at risk. The job can disappear (red caps, phone operators, cable installers, secretaries, bookkeepers, etc.) because technology replaces them, or they get outsourced. Jobs are the most mercurial component of the **Web of Work**.

Look at the core professions in your current organization. Where are the majority of workers? Where are the highest salaries? Which professions do the leaders come from?

If you're still trying to decide on your profession, reflect on your most satisfying jobs. Which professions were they in? Reflect on your major work or school accomplishments to date. In which professions do they fit? (Fund raising, sales, coaching, science, photography, finance, operations, writing, graphic design, etc.). What kind of work do you want to be doing ten years from now?

To excel in any profession takes years of practice. Overtime, you want to choose organizations and industries where your profession is core. Choose mentors and learning opportunities that keep you “best in class”.

## Summary

If you follow these guidelines, you will be building a very strong career foundation in your new job or organization. People will respect you. You will have a sense of learning, contribution, and harmony between your expectations and results.

Review our self-directed guide – *How to Succeed in Your New Position*<sup>™</sup>. Use a tested and structured process for successfully negotiating a new position.