

## Coping With Anxiety in a New Job

You've just landed a new job. You're happy—but also scared. While getting a job inspires pride and excitement, the prospect of facing the unknown can be scary. Fortunately, there are commonsense solutions to dealing with new job stress.

“Since a new job is almost always accompanied by new surroundings, new co-workers, new responsibilities and many uncertainties, starting a new job is a significant source of stress,” explains Melissa Stöppler, MD, who writes for the *About Stress Management Guide*. “Coupled with the necessity of dealing with unfamiliar surroundings, people and expectations, beginning a new job is also associated with the fear of failure, losing the job and possible unemployment.”

But rather than let your new job stress overwhelm you, try to pinpoint the causes of your anxiety.

### **Making a good first impression**

Don't take yourself too seriously—cut yourself some slack if it takes you a while to learn the layout of a new building or get your co-workers' names right.

Try to personalize your workspace, but make sure you adhere to any company policies regarding office decoration. Also, ask about the dress code before you start.

### **Learning new rules**

You probably will encounter an entirely new workplace culture in your new job. You can minimize the transition period by learning the ins and outs of the job as quickly as possible.

Find out as much about your company and department as you can. Study the company hierarchy. Establish how rigidly your co-workers adhere to the chain of command and find out where you fit in. Learn whether your department encourages teamwork or independent work.

### **Working with new people**

Being the new kid on the block is one of the most intimidating aspects of starting a new job. Try to gauge the level of familiarity at the office. Do people treat each other as close friends or keep their work and personal lives separate?

Be friendly and respectful with everyone. Try to make yourself part of the office grapevine or you may find yourself permanently out of the loop. However, avoid getting involved in office politics, which often are negative.

### **Meeting new expectations**

Most managers who fail in new jobs start derailing during the very first weeks, reports management consultant Niels Nielsen in his book *Princeton Management Consultants Guide to Your New Job*. Nielsen cites a *Forbes* magazine article listing lack of communication as the biggest factor in that failure rate. Ask for clarification if you feel unsure about what's expected of you, even if that makes you uncomfortable. More importantly, listen to what people tell you.

### Dealing with fear of losing your job

When you start a job, your most immediate concern may be hanging on to it. Uncertainty about your performance, coupled with a fickle economy, may leave you feeling uneasy.

“Many people begin new jobs knowing that the rule ‘last hired, first fired’ will possibly apply to them,” Stöppler says. “You are entitled to ask questions about the company and its strategies for weathering (an) economic storm. Showing concern about your—and the company’s—future is a positive characteristic rather than a deficiency on your part. The more you know about the future prospects of your new job, the better you will be able to deal with stressors and unexpected situations that might arise.”

Use change to your advantage. Log your accomplishments as a way to track progress in your new position. However, if the stress associated with a new job is seriously affecting your life, make sure you get appropriate professional help.

Sources: Melissa Stöppler, MD; *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff at Work* by Richard Carlson, PhD. Hyperion, 1998; *Princeton Management Consultants Guide to Your New Job* by Niels H. Nielsen. John Wiley & Sons, 2003; *Surviving Job Stress: How to Overcome Workday Pressures* by John B. Arden, PhD. Career Press, 2002; *Take This Job and Thrive* by Anita Bruzzese. Impact Publications, 2000; *Winning the Job Game: The New Rules for Finding and Keeping the Job You Want* by Carol Kleiman. John Wiley & Sons, 2002.

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