



HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

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WHY DO EMPLOYERS EXPECT MORE OF ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEES THAN EVER BEFORE?

COLLEGE GRADUATES ARE EXPECTED TO COME PREPARED TO ENTRY-LEVEL POSITIONS AND INTERNSHIPS WITH MORE KNOWLEDGE THAN IN GENERATIONS PAST.

BY JARED LINDZON

When Grinnell College senior Ham Serunjogi began his first internship at an environmental technology accelerator in 2013, he was shocked by how much was expected of him in his first days on the job, and how little school had prepared him for entering the workforce.

"In my first meeting with the executive director, he was asking me about what classes I had taken, and he asked if I had taken a database class in college, and I did, and he said, 'Okay, good, then you can oversee this project of designing and implementing a new communication database for us,' he says. 'That was the first time I was ever brought into a project I had little or no knowledge about, and was expected to deliver results.'"

Serunjogi soon realized that there was an expectation for him to learn on the fly, and to make a meaningful contribution early on in his internship. And this past summer, Serunjogi began an internship at Facebook, where expectations were even higher.

"Facebook is a very fast moving culture," he says. "There's an expectation that you come in and you learn how to catch up with everyone else, otherwise you slow down the entire organization."

According to a recent study by Harris Poll, commissioned by education-technology company Fullbridge, 27% of the 319 executives surveyed said they form an opinion of entry-level employees in less than two weeks, and 78% decide in less than three months whether or not that employee will be successful.

"My generation, who grew up in the '60s and went to work in the '70s, we laugh because I feel like so little was expected of us. We had a year or two to prove ourselves," says Candice Carpenter Olson, the cofounder of Fullbridge. "It seemed like people gave us a long time to find our place and contribute, and understand the weird language that was being spoken and the culture, and I don't see that happening today."

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

NOT YOUR TYPICAL TIRED STARTUP ADVICE. FROM SURPRISING WAYS TO MAKE YOUR BIG IDEAS ACTUALLY WORK TO INSPIRING IDEAS FROM THE FOUNDERS YOU ADMIRE ABOUT WHAT THEY WISH KNEW WHEN THEY FIRST STARTED, HIT THE GROUND RUNNING WILL TELL YOU WHAT'S REALLY NECESSARY TO GET A NEW BUSINESS GOING WITH MOMENTUM

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WHY IS ENTRY-LEVEL NO LONGER ENTRY-LEVEL?

There are a number of factors that put this generation of entry-level employees under more pressure to hit the ground running. For example, in the data-driven workplaces of today, performance and output can be measured more accurately, and flying under the radar during those first weeks on the job is no longer possible.

Furthermore, as employers continue to provide more flexibility and benefits to their employees, they expect a higher output in return.



According to Nicole Cox, the chief recruitment officer of recruitment solutions provider Decision Toolbox, lingering effects from the 2008 recession, which caused widespread downsizing, continue to put pressure on new hires today.

"They downsized not too long ago, and they aren't necessarily hiring back to the headcount that they had before, therefore every hire has to be an A player," she says. "They need more out of every person that's on the team."

As a result, Cox has found that the most attractive candidates today are the ones who demonstrate a wider variety of skills.

"They've got a longer wish list, they're looking for a broader skill set and a more well-rounded candidate," she says. "For example, in the past you wouldn't have necessarily seen IT and accounting needs in one job posting, that would be two head counts, but now you can have both in one person. They're trying to get more out of one individual."

HOW TO MEET EXPANDED EXPECTATIONS?

Cox adds that the best way for a candidate to ensure their success in the early days of a new career is to clarify expectations during the hiring process.

"They should really interview the employer as much as they're being interviewed," she says. "And after they're hired, ask if they're meeting those expectations."

Carpenter Olson agrees, adding that miscommunication is common among entry-level employees who are not familiar with corporate culture. For example, the study demonstrates how executives judge their employees' levels of engagement in different ways. When asked which qualities are most attractive in a new hire, 23% wanted to see an internal motivation to succeed, 21% want the employee to demonstrate problem-solving skills, 17% are looking for a commitment to the company, and another 17% valued a "can-do" attitude.



"There's all kinds of miscommunication," she says. "The managers should be better trained to handle all of this, but you can see from these percentages that they're not on the same page."

In a high-pressure environment, where employees are judged days after they first step through the door, such miscommunications can lead to false perceptions of their abilities and misuse of their talents.

Carpenter Olson therefore encourages employers to provide enough time for entry-level employees to get acquainted with the work environment before passing judgement, but also encourages new employees to identify how they can prove their value to the company as quickly as possible.

She also recommends work-ready programs to help acquaint students with the corporate environment, such as those offered by educational institutions as well as private organizations like Fullbridge.

"They should walk into the game knowing all the rules and how to play it," she said. "From day one you want to demonstrate that you're actually going to make a difference, and they would really miss you if you left."

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