

To the class of 2022: It's a great job market. You've got this.

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FULL TEXT

I'm hard-put to advise today's graduates on how to succeed in the workplace. After two years of navigating virtual schooling, they know how to connect, adapt and endure. Many of them cut their teeth on the concepts of mental health, social awareness and emotional intelligence, so they're naturally inclined to seek out balance and equity in their personal and professional lives.

The typical advice aimed at helping them succeed in the workplace —show up early, stay late, dress well, make connections at the water cooler —falls flat in the era of remote workplaces.

And they're entering the most employee-favorable job market in decades. Job candidates are telling employers what they're looking for, and smart employers are listening like never before. It's a powerful position to be in. But you know the adage about great power and responsibility. If you tell employers what you need to succeed, they need to see you succeeding. You're right to demand that your work and time be valued, but you also have to show the value you're providing. Here are timeless tips on how to do that.

Work ethic

Whether you're hired into an on-site, remote or hybrid workplace, being strategically present tops being always present, but developing that strategy may take a while.

At the office or on Zoom, be no later than on time, especially for online meetings when the clock is right in front of everyone's face.

You probably have more reserves of time and energy now than you will in later years. Be as generous with them as you can to those who need and appreciate it.

When you need to ask for help on a work task, be ready to show how you tried to figure it out yourself first.

Dressing for the role

Learn your employer's dress code, then err on the conservative side until you're sure it's safe to relax your standards.

Office fashion splurge: comfortable, supportive dress shoes.

Remote fashion splurge: full-spectrum adjustable ring light.

Work friends

Politeness is the minimum; warmth is a bonus; friendliness, if you can muster it, is gold plating.

Spend your trust wisely, especially when you're new. Some colleagues are super nice, right up until they aren't.

Some are great confidants, until they aren't. Some invite you to hitch your star to their wagon, and then the wheels come off.

Although socializing in person is harder than in the Before Times, texts and IMs make it easy to bond with colleagues through articles, memes and jokes that take only a moment to send and enjoy —or wreck your reputation. If you have to ask, "Is this okay to send?" —it's not.

Being informed

You know the next best thing to being knowledgeable? Being curious. The hack for looking smarter? Ask questions

and seek opinions.

And what if you're genuinely, objectively knowledgeable and smart? Just remember that progress humbles every one of us over time.

In the late 1990s, I was kindly, patiently coaxing senior colleagues off text-based DOS terminals and onto graphics-based Windows operating systems, wondering why they were resisting change that would make their jobs easier. Now I'm often having my hand held (figuratively) by colleagues half my age (literally) as they kindly, patiently help me abandon the familiar and functional for the sleek and smart.

Extra credit: Virtual meetings

Even if you don't have a Room Rater-worthy home office, you probably know all about video meeting etiquette from the past couple of years. But humor me:

Even if you just rolled out of bed or are in from the gym, you shouldn't look it.

No picking, clipping, grooming or chewing while the camera is on.

Protect your bubble. The occasional disruption will be forgiven, but few have patience for unlimited barking no matter how adorable the source.

In the minutes before a meeting starts, check your posture and background to make sure the image you're projecting matches the one you want people to have of you.

The workplace you're entering is not your parents' workplace, and success takes many forms. But there are still some principles you can hold fast to: Respect people's time, offer your best, and try to be the kind of colleague who makes the work experience more pleasant.

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