

Ten Tips for Leadership Trainers

By Thomas W. Meryer

Starting a new job is an exciting time. You're busy getting to know your co-workers, familiarizing yourself with the organizational culture, and trying to settle into the position and get some work done. All this excitement can be stressful. I know. I recently took on a new leadership development position. And as someone recently acquainted with the joys of new jobhood, I'd like to offer the following 10 tips to other leadership developers in hopes that they may benefit from my experience and acclimate to their new roles with ease.

Tip 1: Network, network, network. As a trainer in leadership development, part of your job is to work with supervisors, managers, directors, vice presidents, CEOs, and so forth. Position yourself to meet those key players because your first few weeks on the job is the time to set the foundation for future relationships. Attend important meetings where those people are present, and listen actively. Present yourself as friendly and cooperative, and find out as much as possible about the organization. Offer your future assistance, but be careful not to overcommit yourself to too many projects. Remember, you're just getting started.

Tip 2: Establish your role. When you start a new position, you should also make clear to others your role in the organization. Role definition is important. Meet with your boss to outline the role you'd like to play within the organization, and envision yourself filling that role. Others in the organization may think of training as purely a classroom activity. That's OK if you and your boss agree on that definition of leadership development. But if you view your role as more of a performance consultant, then you likely see classroom training as just one aspect of your duties. By clearly defining your role, you establish credibility in your initial meetings with leaders, and you experience greater job satisfaction in the long run.

Tip 3: Obtain the equipment you need to do your work. Many of the essentials you need to do your job may be overlooked in the push to get you to work developing leaders. You'll need a workspace, a computer with up-to-date pro-

grams, a printer, a telephone, Internet access, email, and training materials such as transparencies, flipcharts, markers, and so on. Don't take for granted that your new organization will provide you with those necessities. Use kind persistence to ensure that you get all of the materials you need.

Tip 4: Use this time to clean house. Starting a new job is the perfect time to reorganize your materials and get rid of items you'll no longer need. Time management gurus suggest, "When in doubt, throw it out." Chances are, if you're not sure whether you'll need something in the future, you probably won't. If you do find that you need a particular job aid or document later, you can usually find someone who saved a copy. Another benefit of cleaning house? When going through all of your old materials, you may find items you'd forgotten about that could prove useful after all.

Tip 5: Discover the company's culture, and work to fit in. Every profession and employer has its own culture. It doesn't matter if you're a trainer in a corporate environment, a consulting firm, a government agency, or the medical field. Each employer you work for will have new and different ways of operating, varying levels of bureaucracy, and established expectations and assumptions about how a person in your position should act. Use your first few weeks to uncover that culture and work to adapt to it. Adaptability is crucial to your success as a leadership developer.

Tip 6: Be visible. Don't underestimate the importance of visibility. People will be curious about you and what you'll be doing. Let everyone know that you are a leadership developer and that you're always available to talk with. The trainer who sits behind an office door isn't as effective as one who goes out and meets people and finds out what they do and what they have to say.

Tip 7: Underpromise, overdeliver. At the start of a new job, be careful not to take on more than you can handle. Networking, establishing your role, getting your equipment and materials, cleaning house, assimilating to the company's culture, and remaining visible should be enough work to keep you busy. But your boss will

undoubtedly have some start-up projects for you. Because no one knows what to expect of you, underpromise and overdeliver. Better to wow your new co-workers and boss by doing more without having promised it than to renege on assignments because you're trying to do too much.

Tip 8: Don't dwell on the old job. Your priorities should be to establish a rapport with co-workers and tackle new challenges. Although it's tempting to reflect on your success in your previous position, now's the time to concentrate on your new role. A comment such as, "Have you thought of...?" works better than, "At my old job, we did..." Generally, people don't relate well to stories about how you approached business at your previous job, so it's best not to offer aid in that context. It's good to review what did and didn't work for your previous employer and to understand how those lessons might help your new workplace, but it's better to offer such ideas in a general context.

Tip 9: Remain flexible and pliant to change. Change is as common in the workplace as the computer. To succeed at your new job, you'll have to alter some of your work regimen. Your new employer or boss isn't likely to share the same expectations as your former co-workers. In leadership development, it's important that you embrace such changes rather than shy away from them.

Tip 10: Enjoy the honeymoon. Starting a new job is an exciting time, for you and your employer, but don't be surprised if you experience significant downtime your first few weeks. Take advantage of this time while it lasts because most employers will find projects to fill your slate. Before you know it, you'll have plenty of new and challenging assignments.

Tom Meyer is a senior employee and organizational development specialist for Caremark Inc; thomas.meyer@caremark.com.

Send short, how-to articles on training basics to Training 101, Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043. Email T101@astd.org.