

5 common errors of recent college graduates

Recent college graduates thrilled to land their first “real” job invigorate a workplace with their energy and fresh perspectives. However, college graduates also can make their share of mistakes as they transition from student to employee.

While time often proves the best teacher, managers familiar with common errors may be able to assist in the adjustment process (and keep some office feathers from getting ruffled). Here’s a look at five mistakes and ways to deal with them.

1. Failing to ask for help

Eagerness to impress and fear of looking “stupid” sometimes lead new workers to stay quiet when experiencing trouble. Besides causing anxiety, such silence may result in serious problems that could have been nipped in the bud if caught earlier.

“College grads are likely to feel insecure in their new job, and they might consequently overcompensate by pretending to know everything. A manager should be in tune with this and make the grad feel comfortable asking questions,” says Nate Masterson, CEO of Maple Holistics.

Privately checking in on a regular basis may help, as can reminding individuals of the learning curve that comes with a new position. Assign an office buddy to give the newbie another (perhaps less intimidating) place to turn.

2. Acting entitled

A degree under one’s belt certainly is an accomplishment, but some grads mistakenly view the diploma as a ticket to certain stardom.

“I have found that the biggest misalignment of expectations between the manager and the new professional is the rate at which rise through the ranks occurs,” says global consultant Philip La Duke, noting instances of young people complaining bitterly about being with a company for “an entire year” without being promoted.

Managers can aid in forming realistic ideas about career progression by being open and honest from the start. Discuss promotion prospects, including how new titles and responsibilities are earned, not guaranteed.

3. Taking criticism too personally

Growth occurs when leaders provide workers with guidance. Some young employees, however, may come out of conversations feeling that the boss doesn’t like them or their work.

“Constructive criticism is part of the learning process, but I’ve noticed that critique is not gladly accepted and that often people get too emotional,” says Dewayne Hamilton of Web Cosmo Forums.

To aid in reception, work on making open communication part of workplace culture. Encouraging new grads to offer their own feedback on how the company can improve promotes an atmosphere in which speaking up becomes the norm.

4. Lacking professionalism

Consistently arriving to work on time, knowing when cell phones should be put away, cleaning up your own mess, proofreading documents before sending . . . establishing oneself as a mature colleague and good representative of the company isn't always second nature.

"I think the biggest issues with recent grads relate to professionalism in the workplace," says Matthew Ross, co-owner and COO of RIZKNOWS LLC. "For example, one of our recent female graduate hires had a bad habit of wearing inappropriate clothes to work. She would wear these tiny tank tops that left her stomach exposed. Another example would be a recent male graduate who kept using the term 'dawg' in emails in reference to people."

Ross and his business partner now make a point of reviewing the employee handbook with each new hire, literally going through it page by page to discuss what's acceptable and what's not.

"By doing so, we give employees no excuses when their behavior does not meet our standards. They can't say 'Oh, I didn't know.' Employee violations have decreased dramatically since implementing the new onboarding process," Ross says.

5. Stepping on toes

Lastly, savvy managers realize that new college grads lack familiarity with organizational structure. The "we're all in this together" attitude at many companies can cause further confusion, with the inexperienced worker not paying attention to chain of command.

"It's common for college grads to not fully understand the hierarchy within a company, and they, therefore, might overstep or go above people's heads," Masterson says. "In order to prevent any upsets or office drama, clearly explain to the new worker the proper protocol and order when encountering certain situations. Let them know whom to go to for which problems, who their superiors are, and whom to ask when issues arise."