

Time to Perform

By

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Each minute counts when you're on probation, writes David Wilson.

You've squeezed through the interview process and managed to get your foot through the door at your dream job.

The only problem is that rather than being taken on full-time, you've been asked to serve a three-month probation. At the end of 90 days, your bosses will decide whether you will be given a full-time gig or handed your marching orders.

It's an increasingly common scenario for job seekers, according to the experts.

Stephen Shepherd, president of peak human resources body Recruitment & Consulting Services Association, says most new employees are hired subject to a probationary period.

Organisational psychologist Christopher Shen agrees and says trial periods are particularly prevalent when seeking work with government bodies and large corporations. Probation is attractive to employers, who see it as a good way of making sure they hire the right person.

How do you persuade your would-be employer that you warrant more than an abruptly terminated glorified internship? The secret is to be positive, perform and fit in.

Do your homework

Research before you turn up for your first day, Shen advises.

Understand the organisation's corporate culture, how long it has existed and its purpose. Subtly tailor your behaviour to suit.

"If your research indicates that environmental sustainability is a core value of a prospective employer, ensure you can speak credibly and knowledgeably about this issue," Shen says.

Let your bosses know you applied for the job because you rate their organisation as an industry employer of choice. If you mean it, let them know you love working there and admire the company's work.

Ensure your demeanour reflects and reinforces the message. Be professionally groomed. Walk and stand straight with your shoulders back.

Look the prospective employer in the eye in an assertive yet friendly manner.

Quell your nerves

Remember that who dares wins.

If, like many candidates, you feel intimidated, try to overcome fear by doing what psychologists call "cognitively reframing the situation". Rather than thinking about being on trial, consider you are also trialling the company to see if it suits you.

Don't grovel and risk undermining your rights out of desperation. No job is worth that.

Convey charisma with enthusiasm. Instead of hoping to be retained, be proactive. Say: "Give me the opportunity. I won't let you down."

Sell your talents

Whatever you say, coming across in the most engaging, outcome-oriented way possible will reap dividends.

"Certainly, a very positive and ebullient disposition is very highly regarded by hiring managers," Shen says.

Also, point out the benefits you bring to the role.

"It's really about being able to convey, in a courteous manner, how your background, knowledge and skills can be deployed to advantage."

Be respectful and honestly admit your areas for development. This indicates a capacity for critical self-reflection and humility. Both are appealing qualities to hiring managers.

Network energetically

Cultivate everyone, from managers, co-workers and clients to suppliers, suggests career coach Lynn Williams, the author of several job search guides.

She suggests never shunning opportunities to meet someone.

Get your face known, find out who does what and for whom. Understand the hierarchy and your position within it.

Learn people's names, ask what they do.

In your efforts to cement connections, do not neglect the obvious. Get to work on time. Say "Good morning", "Please" and "Thank you". Smile and be cheerful. Don't surf the net or phone friends on company time.

Deliver on promises

Remember you were hired for a reason. Your colleagues have expectations about what benefits your presence will bring.

David Nour, author of the professional networking guide, *Relationship Economics*, says the 90-day trial will expose your shortcomings. Try to be versatile, tackle any project that comes up with enthusiasm and deliver on your "brand promise".

Raise your game

Set high personal standards: whether reaching milestones on a vital project or closing a sale, nothing trumps performance, Nour says.

"If you're incompetent or incapable of doing the job, you'll be out within the first 10 days - if the hiring manager is worth their salt," he says. Just remember: every minute counts. "If you want the job - if you really want this job, you have to show it in what you do every single day."

Trial and error

Because each workplace differs in the way jobs are done or dodged, the key to a successful probation is adaptation.

Trial periods are less about validating your skills and experience than proving your ability to adjust to cultural and operational quirks, says Maneck Mohan from Recruit.net.

Beware of overcompensating for nerves and appearing bombastic. A common gaffe is to adopt an assertive attitude on how the business should run without troubling to learn how it functions.

"You need to fit in, understand the work flow and develop relationships with your colleagues before you can be an agent of change," Mohan says. "Listen, watch and learn."

And do not worry too much. Mohan portrays passing probation as fairly straightforward unless the job-seeker has embellished their resume or lied during the interview.

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Based in Melbourne, Australia, Christopher Shen Consulting brings organisational psychology solutions to workplaces, helping people become stronger leaders and teams become better performers.

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