

Maximize your first few weeks in a new job by forming useful professional alliances

## HOW TO ADD VALUE IN 30 DAYS

**John Clemons offers the following advice on how to quickly establish credibility and demonstrate value as a senior communication practitioner, after joining a new company, agency or organization.**

While business functions, focus, strategy, goals and missions may differ, these are some tried-and-tested actions you may want to keep in mind during the first few days and months:

### Understand the business

Professional communicators can produce newsletters, create and manage special events, talk to the media and write speeches, but many of us lack an understanding of the day-to-day business operations that are critical to success and stability. You should have done preliminary research before joining a company, but now it's time to dig deeper and learn even more.

After a few days, you'll get a sense of those who have a full grasp of the business, its competitors, branding, differentiators and financials. Seek these people out and spend time with them, ask questions and get their perspective on the business on any ongoing basis. And show a bit of deference to those in the know – for now. The people around you know the company better than you do.

### Treat meetings as an interview

Your peers and those who you manage – primarily employee teams you inherit once hired – will subtly and deliberately be testing you, to see if you know what you say you know. There are those who will always think they know more than you about communication, so they may challenge you or even try to discount what you bring to the table. All of the recognition and

praise you may have earned in a previous position does not always transfer to a new position.

This bit of advice may sound negative but remember that you may not automatically “fit in”. Be professional, direct and actively listen during those early meetings. The outcomes will set the tone for future encounters and influence what others say about you when you walk out of their offices.

### Don't move too quickly

Many professional communicators feel compelled to join a company and begin demonstrating value by making decisions right away, decisions that could be premature and come across as an unwillingness to learn first, then act. Use all of your professional senses – effective listening, observation, relationship building, constant interest and awareness, flexibility, negotiation and persuasion – then implement changes that make sense.

### Learn who has the power

Find out who can really help you be successful in your new position. It may vary but if you are on a senior management or executive team, the president usually wields the most power and authority. However, leaders in finance, legal or HR will also probably have the ear of the president. They can provide support when you really need it. Also, on your own management team, there is usually one or two key employees who know who the power brokers are. Keep them close to you.

### Meet often with your supervisor

You are risking your success if you only meet with your supervisor when you need him or her to close projects, review documents or provide direction. Schedule regular

meetings, set an agenda, and use that time to share your thoughts not only on communications but other business matters as well. Without these meetings, your supervisor will never get a complete picture of you as a professional – what and how you think, your understanding of the business, your ability to provide counsel and proactively identify concerns and internal trends before they become major issues.

The key ingredient to a strong, long-lasting professional relationship is chemistry. You can work very hard, produce great work and still find that success eludes you if there is no bond between you and your supervisor. It's not enough to work hard. Strive to establish a professional connection early on.

### Stay positive

This is often easier said than done. You may, as many communicators can attest to, find yourself surprised by one or more of the following: a poorly managed business, small communications budget, or mediocre support staff. Don't let the realization that you are not in an ideal situation manifest itself in whining, bad attitude or worse, shoddy work product.

Make the most of your situation and keep your head high. You are being watched and your team will take its cue from your professional behavior while peers will decide whether to share key business information, invite you to critical meetings and social activities outside of the office, and consider you a team player.

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