

## Defusing Culture Shock

(By Melinda Pittman)

Receiving and accepting a job offer is one of the greatest feelings in the world, especially if the job is one you've been working toward for quite some time. While such euphoria is a good thing and a natural consequence of personal achievement, it can often distract one from fully preparing for the potential pitfalls that await during the first 30 days of employment. One such pitfall is **culture shock**.

Every company in operation has its own culture, the way in which the company is run and the way in which things are done. Even if you make a career move within your chosen field and start work at a company that deals with the same product or market, you can still encounter culture shock. Many employees have been unprepared to deal with it, and as a result, what was initially a wonderful life-enhancing experience turned into a nightmare.

Just about everybody has encountered culture shock at one time or another during their career. The only difference is how much and to what extent you've encountered it. It may have consisted of minor instances that had no adverse effect on your employment, or it might have placed major obstacles in your path as you attempted to assimilate smoothly into your role at the company. Nothing can dampen the enthusiasm of a new job like being derailed by culture shock.

### People first, processes second

Successfully defusing culture shock requires some critical prerequisites. The first is the acknowledgement that it deals first and foremost with people and how they've chosen to do things within their present environment. The second is the acknowledgement that culture shock is going to exist, in one form or another, at your new job, and that you'll need to put forth effort in order to address it. And third (and this is the most important one for those of you in management positions), you won't be able to initiate positive, pro-active change within the company without first understanding completely the culture-driven practices that are currently in place.

Below are some strategies for dealing with culture shock and defusing the impact it could have on your new position.

- **Do some homework beforehand**—You know the old saying: “Preparation prevents poor performance.” It certainly applies here. Any information you can obtain about the company and how it operates before you actually start working there gives you a decided edge.
- **Maximize your “grace” period**—Co-workers at your new employer have subconsciously prepared to give you some slack during your first few weeks on the job. Take advantage of this and learn as much as you can. **Do not** be afraid to ask a lot of questions. You're making an investment in your new position and also in your future peace of mind.
- **Observe, observe, observe**—Asking questions is only half of the equation once you start the job. The next thing you should do is make a concerted effort to **watch** what others are doing and how they do it. This pertains not just to those who are training you during official orientation, but also to everybody else in the office.
- **Trial-and-error**—Face it, you're going to make some mistakes now and again. But by learning from your mistakes and understanding what works and what doesn't, you can dramatically improve your learning curve.

### **Position yourself for success**

The difference between success and failure can often be very small, especially when you enter a new company and attempt to become a valuable member of the team as quickly as possible. Not adjusting or adapting to culture shock is one of the things that can easily derail you and interrupt any momentum you might have generated during the interview process.

Don't let the excitement you're experiencing from landing a great job disrupt your focus. Ensure that your transition is as smooth as you can make it. The faster you start contributing to the company, the better it is for you, the company, and your future relationship. Prepare to defuse culture shock and take the steps necessary to make your next stop on the career ladder an enjoyable one.

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