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Five Ways to Build Leadership Skills in an Entry-Level Job

by Peter Vogt
MonsterTRAK Career Coach



If you want to start developing leadership skills in your first job, here's Lindsey Pollak's advice: Begin with your eyes and ears. That's what she did in her first role as a program coordinator for the American Woman's Economic Development Corp. in Stamford, Connecticut.

"My pay was very low, so my terrific boss -- the executive director of the organization -- used to let me tag along to meetings, conferences and networking events," says Pollak, author of *Getting from College to Career*. "I would even sit in the room with her when she made some important sales calls to potential funders."

By watching and listening, Pollak started building leadership skills she still uses. You can do the same thing, especially if you add other leadership-development strategies like these to your daily entry-level job routine.

Be a Thinker, Not Merely a Doer

It's one thing to simply do the job you're asked to do. It's another to look for additional opportunities to contribute value, says Michelle Tillis Lederman, founder of corporate training and coaching company Executive Essentials.

"Don't just be a doer; be a thinker," Lederman advises. "If you're asked to crunch the numbers, go the extra step and analyze them. Think about the implications of the results and what may be important to highlight."

Take Proactive Action

Just because your boss is in charge of you doesn't mean he's focusing on your professional development as much as you are. So instead of waiting for him to offer feedback or give you an assignment, make the first move.

"Ask your manager, 'What more can I do to contribute to the company and develop my skills?'" says Pollak. "Be proactive."

Or as Joe Takash, CEO of Victory Consulting in Chicago, puts it: "Manage your boss."

Volunteer Beyond Your Job

Every organization, regardless of size, has important work that simply isn't getting done. Look for these hidden (and sometimes not-so-hidden) tasks in your company, and [volunteer](#) to do them.

"Volunteering allows you to get outside your comfort zone and hone your skills in new areas," says Alaina Levine, president of Quantum Success Solutions in Tucson. "It also shows your boss and colleagues that you're not afraid to get your hands dirty and that you want to be a leader."

Respectfully Challenge the Status Quo

Once you've been on the job a few months, you'll undoubtedly begin to see things your organization could improve upon. Now is the time to not only speak up but also to offer to tackle these problems.

Case in point: Rhys Gerholdt, e-advocacy and e-communications coordinator for United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) in Washington, DC. "In recent months, I've plunged UCP into using blogs, started viral campaigns, enhanced our e-newsletters, explored using wikis and Flash games and am currently adding video interviews to enhance an advocacy campaign," Gerholdt says. "The most exciting part of my job is exploring new techniques, questioning our limitations and reevaluating the status quo."

Ask Questions and Listen for Wisdom

Your new coworkers, especially those who have been in the workforce for years or even decades, will not be impressed if you immediately come across as a know-it-all. But you will definitely grab their attention in a positive way if you clearly demonstrate you're interested in learning from them through thoughtful questioning.

"You should ask a lot of questions and not fear that you'll be perceived as young, inexperienced or dumb," says Karen Friedman, a communications coach in Philadelphia. "You are young. You are inexperienced. But if you ask good questions, you will appear genuinely interested in learning and contributing, and you'll be perceived as someone with great potential."

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