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Make a good impression — fast

Starting a new job? One study finds that most employers won't wait long before making up their minds on your work performance.

BY KRIS B. MAMULA
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

PITTSBURGH — Time may be shorter than you think to make a good impression on the job.

Think of a clock starting to tick when you show up for your first day of work as a reminder that some employers — 9 percent, according to a study from Robert Half Finance & Accounting — will make a determination about a new employee's performance in less than a month.

A majority of employers surveyed by the placement agency, which is based in Menlo Park, Calif., say they will make up their minds on an employee in less than three months.

Only 4 percent of companies surveyed by Robert Half were prepared to give newbies "as much time as they need" to learn the ropes, the survey found.

Instead, employers are looking for people who are able to prove themselves quickly, according to Bill Rushlander, division director at the Robert Half offices in downtown Pittsburgh.

Rushlander said many employers will say they "need the applicant to hit the ground running."

"A majority of companies have a 90-day rule," he added.

Robert Half Finance & Accounting called more than 2,200 chief financial officers



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in a random sample of companies in more than 20 of the biggest metropolitan areas in the United States.

Job search giant Monster.com says that an increasing number of companies are using probationary periods for new hires as a hedge against poor hiring choices — and to save money, since wage and benefits can be less for probationary employees. Job candidates who accept a tryout generally view it as unavoidable.

But making that good impression and succeeding at a new job begins long before

the first day, Rushlander said.

Some simple questions during the interview can make all the difference before the typical three-month probationary period expires.

Rushlander advises applicants to help manage their supervisors' expectations. Start by asking questions, he said.

"Let them know that you're open to constructive criticism," Rushlander said. "I want to succeed here; how can I succeed? What do I need to do in 90 days so you feel I've mastered what I need to do?"

Building a book of business,

which can be part of some sales jobs, may require longer than three months, so finding ways to measure progress along the way is a good tool in measuring performance.

The applicant would do well to focus on measurable skills as much as possible, Rushlander said.

"Be on the same wavelength as the boss," he said. "Ask, 'Can we establish some common goals here?'"

"Don't just assume that you and your manager are going to be on the same wavelength," Rushlander added.

Here is some more advice for getting through probation:

- Show up to work early to give yourself enough time to settle in and organize your day.
- Check in with your boss on a weekly basis to get feedback on your progress and to discuss further training.
- Invite your colleagues to lunch or coffee to gain insights about the office culture.
- Build trust with your co-workers early.

Meanwhile, consistently missing deadlines, frequent absences or tardiness can be a red flag for problems ahead, Rushlander said.

Monster also advises that probationary employees discuss wages and benefits with their employers up front.

Employers can delay benefits and compensation can be lower for probationary employees than regular employees, so it is necessary to budget accordingly.