

Starting Your First Job Remotely? Here Are the Real Skills You Need to Learn

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Fresh graduates this year face the unique challenge of possibly starting their first jobs in a remote office. And it is going to feel different. No meeting your coworkers or boss face to face or having a colleague take you around the office to familiarize you. The online icebreakers may feel difficult at first and it may take longer to remember people's names and faces, but it is doable. You won't have the luxury of simply walking over to someone's desk to ask a quick question about the company or work.

Instead, how do you quickly learn what others already know at work, come up to speed with your responsibilities, as well as understand the processes and culture of your first company? You need to develop knowledge management skills. These often underrated soft skills will help you gain insight into the 'why' and 'how' of the different functions at your first job. It's more than just being able to ask someone how to do a task. Being open to learning from those around you and taking the initiative to learn the ropes from day one are examples of knowledge management skills that can help you [build trust](#) with your boss and peers.

Here are five ways to build knowledge management skills as you start your first job remotely:

1. Identify and distinguish information from knowledge.

Information is what fuels knowledge. Information can be found as processes, data points, cost spreadsheets, or lessons learned. Knowledge is a critical understanding of what the information means to your organization. For instance, a cost spreadsheet for a team project is the information. When you familiarize yourself with the figures on that Excel sheet and what they reflect about the project – say, there is overspending of budgets or lack of proper utilization of the funds, etc. – you gain knowledge that increases your understanding of the project.

Starting your work remotely can mean that you have to go through lots of files via a secure private network or firewall. First, you will need to learn how to access the information and review it for everything you will be responsible for. Once you identify the documents you will need, take time to read through them, and reach out to your team with any questions to learn what they mean for the

work you will be doing.

Don't wait until you have read everything you can possibly find since the information may change while you are making your way through all of the data. You can also share what you have learned to get feedback on it and find out if you understand it correctly.

2. Make your own knowledge maps

Have you ever made a plan to figure out how to add an extra course to your workload while in college? What did that look like? A knowledge map can be a great visual tool to help you figure out the information you have, the information that's missing, and the steps you need to take to fill the gap. Having knowledge maps can be the cheat sheet you can use to recall the location of knowledge within your organization. However, be mindful of what type of knowledge you put on it and where you store the knowledge map to prevent disclosure of business-sensitive information or intellectual property. Your boss can tell you the best place to secure the knowledge map. For instance, when you start your first job on a project team, you need to learn what the project entails and your responsibilities, the timelines, etc. A knowledge map can help you write in your words what the project involves and your roles and responsibilities in the project.

If you are joining a project team and want a good overview of the project and personnel, the following example could look like the figure below.

Sample Project Team Knowledge Map



Last Date Revised

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Make sure you update the date (last date revised) each time there is a revision made to the map. This is helpful, as anyone viewing the map knows when it was last updated.

3. Focus on learning the day to day from your coworkers

Knowledge gained through personal experience is considered tacit knowledge. Turn to your more [experienced colleagues](#) to discuss projects, tips on organizing your jobs, or how to take breaks during a busy day. This will show you are open to learning when you reach out in the beginning rather than waiting until you are in dire need of the knowledge.

When working remotely, find someone who is willing to help you with your questions either through an email, phone call, or via an electronic meeting through collaborative tools such as Zoom, Skype, or Teams. You may also be able to get quick information through messaging or chat tools, but still, be professional. As you are learning your job remotely, keep track of the questions you have either in a notebook or work computer. This is important since some of what you may be asking and the resultant responses may become the business-sensitive or intellectual property of your organization. You can find out what is business-sensitive or intellectual property by talking to those colleagues and your co-workers.

4. Keep organized notes and recordings


Understand why things are the way they are. It doesn't just help you learn about the past and how things were done but helps you understand how to make decisions. For instance, if you took over someone's position, try to understand the responsibilities of the person before you, how they managed their workload, and what are some of the processes they used that were successful.

5. Share knowledge

When you share knowledge, it demonstrates that you do not feel you are more important than the organization. That's important especially in a remote workplace because this is one of the few ways you can show your worth to the team since there is no daily social interaction.

Sharing knowledge in a remote environment is a bit more challenging than just walking over to a co-worker, but not impossible. Email, Slack, or message your boss or your teammates, to share any new insight or idea you may have. Just because you are new does not mean you do not bring knowledge with you that can help your co-workers. You can also share an interesting article, video, or news that you come across with your team to keep conversations going.

Bottom line: Pay attention. Identify what you know and do not know. Ask questions. Learn from your co-workers. In the end, the challenges of starting a new job remotely are mostly the same, but the location and means of daily communication are different.

 Have questions or feedback for us? Write to us at hbrascend@hbr.org

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