

How to Survive The Career Jungle as a Young Professional

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The average person spends a total of around 15 years in the education system. At the end of that formative tunnel, the newly minted young professional has so many expectations of the working world. Most of us see ourselves well on our way to the lifestyle of our dreams but nobody ever really prepares you for the jungle that is the workplace.

Some workplace statistics from the United States National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health revealed that more than a quarter of the workforce indicated that they were often or very often burned out or stressed by their work.

To be better kitted for longevity and success in the workplace, here are some of the things that the young professional should keep in mind.

Managing expectations

There are a great many television shows these days that are centered on the professional workplace. On set, the workplace is displayed either through rose coloured glasses where the incumbents hardly encounter any make or break issues and the offices are decked out by the latest technologies. Alternatively, television can also send shows can also TV showing stereotypical working conditions for some sectors that do not necessarily hold true in real life.

Managing your expectations of the workplace can save you from possible disillusionment. The research company Gallup has constantly shown that employee engagement in the United States economy has been hovering around 30% for the past few years. The term employee engagement can be loosely defined as a measure of employee involvement, enthusiasm and commitment to their jobs.

Knowing from the outset what is expected of you and the realistically scoping the environment you will be working in is one way of managing expectations. It is also important to keep in mind that most roles that you undertake at the start of your career are a stepping stone to that corner office that you can only dream about at this point. Unlike in entertainment where a promotion happens every second week, the process takes time and you should be willing to put in the work albeit strategically.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is defined in the Harvard Business Review as the ability to identify and manage your own and others' emotions. In the work environment, unfortunate truth is that one is prone to a lot of stressors and managing how you handle them can increase the trajectory of your career. A [study](#) done by TalentSmart, which resonates to a lot with the recent research done around emotional intelligence, found that emotional plays the biggest role in performance when compared to 33 variables. The findings

were that emotional intelligence influences 58% of success across every type of job. Suggestions that were given by Harvard University's professional development unit to increase emotional intelligence include;

- Increasing self-awareness so as to understand what triggers you and how best to manage these emotions and behaviours when they occur
- Being empathetic to co-workers- understanding things from their point of view.
- Developing your soft skills so that you can be in a better position to work with people and negotiate out a position.

Work-life Balance

The workplace can be a rat race with everyone competing to get that top position or promotion. *Job burnout* is defined as being in a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involves a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity. It is so easy to lose sight of life outside of work and in the long run, this can lead to health problems and alike. One should carefully engineer their work-life balance so as to avoid this.

Networking

Networking is vital to career growth. Networking is actually about building long-term relationships and getting to know career individuals in the same or alternatively fields that are different to yours which ultimately stand to benefit you.

With the advent of professional online spaces like LinkedIn, it has become easier to get in touch with people that share the same professional interests as you and or are higher up the ladder than you are and could provide invaluable insights on the industry. This, however, does not nullify the need to attend events and other functions that are geared towards professional business networking. With increased network capital, the benefits that you stand to gain include:

- Staying in the loop about industry advancements hence giving you an edge. A wide network of informed, interconnected contacts means broader access to new and valuable information
- Having an ear to the ground in terms of new opportunities. Forbes magazine estimates that 80% of job opportunities are found through networking and referrals.
- Getting advice on potential projects. If you have someone in your network that specialises in an aspect you are unfamiliar with, it becomes easier to get qualified guidance and potentially future business partners if it need be

Professional networking is not necessarily confined to those people who you aspire to be but can also include co-workers and friends.

Networking also affords one the opportunity to get a mentor.

Professionalism

As you go through your career, some things will become habits if not corrected. Are you known for always being late? unkempt? Always at the center of office gossip? Separating the personal from the professional will go a long way into cementing your reputation as you go along the career chain. As new opportunities are sometimes from recommendations, being an unprofessional individual can hinder your career without you even knowing it.

Being a young career professional can be challenging in this day and age. The workplace has changed very much from the ones that our parents grew up in. What remains constant however is the basic etiquette and some guidelines that are sure to give you some success and longevity in your career.

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