

# LIFE AFTER STANFORD

## YOUR NEW JOB

### Supervisor

During the first year in any new experience, the “learning curve” will be great. While yearly or bi-yearly performance reviews are standard in many organizations, it is up to you to actively seek out feedback regarding your performance. Communicate with your supervisor from the beginning that you want to learn and grow with your position and therefore want open feedback. Do not expect to get feedback every time you meet with your supervisor or for every project. You will need to evaluate yourself and grow in your job without being told what to do every step of the way. At the same time, it doesn’t hurt to check-in with your supervisor regarding your progress every few months.

While you were hired because your skills matched the position, you aren’t expected to know everything immediately. Keep open communication with your supervisor, asking for clarification when a responsibility in your job is unclear. Establish with your supervisor what expectations he or she has of you. When you make a mistake, are criticized or embarrassed in the workplace, listen to any feedback provided by your supervisor. Take responsibility and set goals to address your challenges, keeping a positive attitude. Discuss with your supervisor what you will do differently next time and how you are working on improving the “weak” area. If the situation was not “your fault,” don’t complain or have a negative attitude. It will not help you in your career path. Alternately, if you are bored by the projects given to you, do not complain to your supervisor; rather, ask for more “challenging” assignments, identifying which skills you would like to utilize more effectively.

To communicate most effectively with your supervisor, discuss the logistics. Should you meet regularly, or is email correspondence sufficient? How much does your supervisor want to know about your given responsibilities? Do you need to provide a status report or only the final product? What kind of supervisor do you want? Communicating your needs will also be helpful for the supervisor.

### Finding a Mentor

Some organizations have mentoring programs already established within their organization, while others encourage their newer employees but don’t have any official process for mentoring. This doesn’t mean you can’t have a mentor, it just means you have to seek one out for yourself. The first step in finding a mentor is to determine what your goals are in having a mentor. What would you like to learn? What direction would you like your career to take? What qualities do you admire and would you like to embody yourself? If you can’t answer these questions at this point in time, think about areas in which you aren’t the strongest and look for a mentor who can help you grow in those areas.

Think creatively when looking for a mentor. It isn’t always the CEO or supervisor that makes the best mentor. An experienced co-worker can also provide you with excellent growth potential. Look for a personality fit as well as a career goal match. Also, make sure that the person you have in mind has time for you in return. Although both parties may have the best intentions in mind, if you or your potential mentor is too busy for a meaningful relationship, you may need to rethink your choice of mentor or your timing.

Once you have decided on a potential mentor, set up a meeting with that person to discuss why you would like them to be your

mentor, the qualities they have, and your goals for wanting a mentor. Also, discuss the time commitment you have in mind for that person. If they agree, set up regular meeting’s, shadowing opportunities and goals to work towards over a designated time period. Re-evaluate the relationship at regular intervals to make sure it is fulfilling and effective for both you and your mentor.

### Training and Professional Development

Some organizations have structured training programs for new employees, while others do not, although most organizations provide for some type of orientation that can include training. Structured training programs are found primarily in organizations that have large groups of new employees starting at the same time. It does not make the organization “better” than one that does not. If your organization does not provide a pre-set training program, evaluate with your supervisor where you need more information and create your own individualized training program.

At the start of your new position, investigate what professional development opportunities exist for employees and when they are available. If free workshops or seminars exist at your organization, go to them! If a stipend is given for professional development, investigate opportunities, create a budget and discuss the opportunities with your supervisor. If money is allotted on a case-by-case basis, discuss opportunities and costs to see what might be possible.

### Co-Workers

As a student you are trained to examine and question information put in front of you. While this is an excellent trait, as a new worker you may want to observe your co-workers and learn from them first before immediately questioning or critiquing. Observing and learning from co-workers can be one of the best ways to grow and succeed in your field. They have a wealth of experience and knowledge to share. Learn the group dynamics of your co-workers to determine if the group would welcome your immediate comments, or may need a little more time to “warm up” to you. Set forth a positive attitude, and volunteer for group projects above and beyond your regular responsibilities. This will allow you to work with more co-workers and sets the tone of you as a “team player.” Get involved in other group opportunities if offered by your organization, such as sport or hobby groups, exercise, health education, or public service. Also, invite co-workers to have coffee, or lunch, or go for a mid-afternoon break. You don’t have to wait to be asked.

Then there is, of course, office common courtesies. A 2007 survey released by Randstad USA regarding office annoyances reported these top 7 results:

1. Gossip
2. Poor time management (including making personal phone calls or surfing the Internet during work)
3. Messiness in communal spaces, such as unwashed dishes in the kitchen sinks
4. Potent smells like perfume, food, or smoke
5. Loud noises such as radios, speaker phones, raised voices or obnoxious ringtones
6. Overuse of cellphones, BlackBerrys or PCs during meetings
7. Misuse of email e.g. hitting “reply-all” unnecessarily or putting people in the BCC line

## Work Policies

It's easy as a student to know when and where to show up. Class starts at 10 am and ends at 11 am. In many working environments you are paid monthly or bi-monthly, rather than by the hour. It can be confusing to figure out work time expectations. Start by asking what the standard work hours are in the office. You may hear some surprising answers. A supervisor may tell you that the rest of the company works 8am - 5pm, but a particular department works 9am - 6pm. Observe and follow the lead of the workers around you. At other organizations, you work until your project is done, showing up and leaving on your own time schedule.

It is also good to know company and departmental policy about time off. Some organizations are very strict about using vacation or sick time (how much and when) while others are much more flexible. Again, ask your supervisor for departmental policy and co-workers for unstated company policy for more information. Become familiar with the policies for requesting vacation time, definition of sick time, and how and who to notify if using sick time.

Other office policies to clarify: the use of personal email, "web surfing," romantic relationships with co-workers, supervisors, or supervisees, and company credit card usage.

## Company Culture

Company culture can be difficult to navigate when first starting a job. It takes time to know the "personality" of an organization and department. While most navigate this process successfully, don't worry if you make a company "faux pas." It is all part of the learning process. Visible company culture is easy to pick up on; i.e., most communication is done through email. Hidden company culture can take more time to absorb; i.e., it is best to initiate a new idea by discussing it with a small group of co-workers or supervisor before bringing it to the rest of the department. Observe group dynamics to determine who holds the "power" in group meetings, as well as other roles. Understanding the company culture will be important when it comes time for your initiative or project to move forward.

## Time Management

Depending on your position and organization, you may have to learn new tools for time management. Your style of time management may or may not work for this company. You may not be given the amount of time you would like to finish a certain project, or you may need to report back on the progress of a project when you have never been required to before. Many students find that their standard of "pulling all-nighters" doesn't work in some environments. When given a new project, discuss with your supervisor how much information they would like to know about the project as it happens, if at all, and when they want it. This can help you plan out your project and manage your time most effectively. Likewise, time management of simple daily tasks such as email and phone calls may become overwhelming. For example, you may be receiving upwards of 50 or more emails a day, 20 phone calls and trying to meet a deadline. Test out what methods work best for you and create a strategy that will help you manage the constant communication flow in an office setting.

## Stress Management

Just as you sought out extra-curricular activities during your academics to relieve stress, it is important to remember to do the same as you transition to the work world. Identify activities, hobbies or interests that can help you "take your mind off of work." Work does not necessarily have to be "bad" in order for it to be stressful. The

excitement and amount of knowledge you gain from this new experience can cause "positive stress" which is still stress and needs to be released.

## When It is Time to Change Jobs

When starting a new job, you may find more challenges than accomplishments. This is normal. Give yourself a year at an organization. It takes time to transition into a new environment with different policies and personalities. If you leave before the one-year marker, you may "burn a bridge" with your current employer, because it takes a good deal of money to train and orient a new employee. Try to talk with your supervisor or co-workers about your challenges. Do your responsibilities need to be changed? Is your communication style effective? Try to pinpoint the challenges and work on them specifically. After one year, if you are still unhappy, evaluate "what went wrong." If it is organizational or personality related, could you have identified this challenge before taking the job? If yes, how will you investigate these factors when searching for a new job? If you have trouble pinpointing your dissatisfaction, set up an appointment with a career counselor at the Career Development Center. A counselor can help you identify what "didn't fit" for you and the organization and discuss strategies to identify and avoid this in future organizations.

## ON YOUR OWN

### Budget

For some of you, this may be the first time you have had to support yourself and live on your own. Familiarize yourself with how much you normally spend annually and how much you "should" spend given your annual salary. Living on your own also creates new expenses you may not have considered before, such as apartment insurance, commuting expenses, and furnishing your new place "like an adult." Utilize the worksheet at the end of this publication to determine what you regularly spend and if you need to adjust it given your annual salary or other financial goals.

A good way to stay out of debt and still have a comfortable lifestyle is to follow spending ratios when creating a budget. The following guidelines provide suggestions on the percentage of your monthly salary allocated to key expenses.

For example, to calculate your housing spending ratio, add up all your housing costs for a month. This includes rent and insurance, but not utilities. Divide it by your monthly income. The goal is to have your housing expenses be .28 (28 percent) or smaller. Since housing costs in certain geographic areas, such as the San Francisco Bay Area and New York are very high, if your spending ratio is a few percentage points above 28, you're OK. When it starts climbing over 45 percent, you should probably reevaluate where you live.

### Suggested Spending Ratios\*:

Expense	Percentage of Monthly Income
Housing	28
Food	15
Transportation	15
Leisure	10
Clothing	10
Personal	10
Debt	5
Savings	7

\* Spending ratio information for college students and graduates suggested by Consolidated Credit Counseling Services.

## Savings

It's never too soon to start planning for the future, whether it be to save for a new car, house, retirement or all three. Take the initiative to learn as much about your personal finances as possible. Some organizations provide information and assistance to their employees. There are also a variety of courses available through private organizations, colleges, and community organizations. Ask family and friends for advice or recommendations for a certified financial advisor.

## Connecting with the Community

As a student you were surrounded by people and opportunities every day. Now that you are on your own, you may need to be proactive in connecting with others. Remember to keep up with activities you enjoy such as sports or other hobbies. Continue to take classes through extended education programs or professional development seminars. There are alumni clubs throughout the United States and in many other countries that offer networking and social activities. To find the alumni club nearest you, go to the Stanford Alumni Association website, [stanfordalumni.org](http://stanfordalumni.org), and look under "Events, Reunions, and Clubs."

Connect with current Stanford students by being on panels or participating in other programs through the Career Development

Center. There are opportunities to speak on panels, be a mentor, talk with students individually or have your career profiled on the CDC website. Contact Marlene Scherer Stern, [marlene@stanford.edu](mailto:marlene@stanford.edu), for more information.

## CDC RESOURCES

### Career Resource Center

The Career Resource Library has a variety of books and materials on transitioning from student to professional, finding and working with a mentor and other workplace issues you may come across. Below is a selection of materials related to "life after Stanford." To browse our full collection, go to the Career Resource Library database, [cdc.stanford.edu/crc](http://cdc.stanford.edu/crc), or come in to use our resources.

- *Backpack to Briefcase: Steps to a Successful Career*
- *How to Network and Select a Mentor*
- *Life After School. Explained.: The Definitive Reference Guide*
- *Reality 101: The Ultimate Guide to Life After College*
- *Life After Graduation: Financial Advice and Money Saving Tips*
- *Handling Diversity in the Workplace: Communication is the Key*



