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What is a Probationary Period?

So your dream employer loved your CV and you passed the interview stages with flying colours, and to place the cherry on top you received the offer of a permanent position, BUT, there's a small catch...

Like many other Companies your new employer will more than likely have the standard procedure of putting a probationary period in place before you officially have the job. The length of this varies from Business to Business, but it is typically anywhere from 3 months to 6 months, and the aim is for the new employer to confirm that you are definitely the right Candidate for the job and you can succeed in the role. Though it can be seen as a test, it is in everyone's best interest, including the employer's, for you to pass, and due to this you will find that there is lots of help for you along the way.

This is not solely a few months for your new employer to carefully watch you and check if you are suitable for the role, use this time to ensure the role and overall Business culture meets your wants and needs too, make sure the role lives up to your expectations.

One thing to remember, the probationary period offers an easier 'get out clause' for both the employer and yourself as a new starter than full-time permanent employment would. If things aren't working out within this period often only a week or two weeks' notice would have to be given by either party before dismissal or leaving employment. This can of course act as both a positive and negative.

Beginning a new career isn't always easy and straightforward. Like many others you will come across obstacles and challenges within your probation period, but the important thing is to know how to tackle these and thrive during your first few months within the Company, and here's how...

Start Early & Do Your Homework

Being proactive and aiming to impress doesn't have to wait until the first day you walk through the door of your new Company. You can benefit by starting early, using the first few days before you start your new role as the period to do the things you wouldn't particularly want to whilst in the Office.

- Use LinkedIn or the Company website to get a feel for your future Colleagues and start making connections - learn names, see who works in which departments and who you will be working directly alongside or above/beneath.
- Familiarise yourself with the Company culture and strategy, you can even ask for materials regarding the Organisation - brochures about their services and products, or any current projects they're working on.
- Take a look at your new Company's competition and get a feel for their current activity. Your present LinkedIn and contact details won't give anything away during this period, so it's a great time to get valuable insight.
- During this period write down any questions that you may have, this way you can ensure they all get answered upon your arrival.
- It is also a good idea to take a look at the location and travel alternatives and alternative routes if there is an accident or bad weather or your car is having its MOT or any work done, or if there are regular black spots along your normal route so that you are not constantly late due to being stuck at the junctions and traffic lights - local news and radio is good for this as well as the internet.

Be Punctual & Don't Take Time Off

Turning up to work late on a regular basis during your probation period is an assured way to acquire a big black dot next to your name. It is essential that you arrive on time every day to demonstrate to your new employer that you are not only punctual, but that you actually want to be there and you are taking your new role seriously.

Equally, it is just as important that you don't pack up your desk and leave the second the clock strikes 5 o'clock. You want to show your new boss that you are committed.

- Look around you and take lead from your new Colleagues, when a few start to leave for the day, you can leave with them.

Don't Take Time Off

Before you accept any role you should ensure that your new employer is aware of any holidays you may have already booked, it is important that they know well in advance. Besides any prior commitments, you should ideally not take time off during your probation period, it doesn't give off a good sign of things to come.

If you are not feeling very well do your absolute best to still attend work - if necessary you can always leave for the day early, but at least you have demonstrated commitment to your boss. If you are sincerely too unwell to attend work, ensure you follow the correct Company procedures.

- Call in to work as soon as possible to explain your situation.
- Apologise for your absence.
- Offer to present a doctor's note on your return.
- Make sure you know your new employers sickness procedures to make sure you do not break the rules.

Manage Relationships & Take Initiative

During your probation period you will more than likely be offered a 'Mentor', someone to ask questions and guide you through the learning process. Use this individual as a knowledge bank and take advantage of their experience within the Company. Do your best to grow a good working relationship with this individual from the outset.

Don't rely on your Mentor to organise all of your meetings and catch ups, take ownership and be prepared to initiate these yourself. You should want to know about your progress before the end of your probation period so nothing comes as a surprise, so ensure you plan to regularly catch up before your official induction is up, it is important to connect frequently. Within these meetings use the time to express any problems/concerns you may be experiencing and ask any questions that you may have without the presence of prying ears. Leaving all of this until the last minute will be too late, and you will find it near impossible to demonstrate any development in your performance.

It is, however, important to look further than your Mentor/Direct Manager when looking for advice to succeed in the role...

- Seek out the high achievers within the Company, how did they achieve their position?
- Can you learn from the way they do things?

Network and Make Friends

Your ability to fit in with the Company culture will be just as important to your current employer as your skill-set and experiences are. Make it evident that you can get along with the team and demonstrate your ability to build professional relationships.

It is more than likely that your Manager will have asked your Colleagues to feedback their opinions on you, not only on your performance, but your personality and aptitude to fit in with those around you. If you are upsetting Colleagues or causing office politics it is probable that you will fail your probation period.

Be Proactive & Set Your Own Objectives

At the beginning of your probation period set yourself some aims and objectives that you want to achieve by the end of your trial. If you are finding it difficult to identify one and unsure on what you want to accomplish other than passing these first 3 months, take time out to sit down with your Manager/Mentor and discuss your possible options with them. In many cases, your Manager may already have objectives lined up for you.

Take the initiative to revisit these objectives regularly. Though frequent/daily dialogue ought to be a part of any Manager's daily routine, if they aren't being proactive about your feedback and progress of these objectives, ensure you request feedback.

Take Note & Learn Communication Patterns

During your first few weeks it is important to keep an eye out for how the Company and/or your Manager operates and how your Colleagues communicate with one another: -

- How does your Manager like to stay in touch?... Email? Memos? Meetings?
- Does your Manager like to know every small detail, or do you only need to inform them as or when there's a larger decision/problem?
- Who needs to be involved in what meetings and how formal are they?
- How does your own favoured method of communication tie in with the Companies overall preferences?

Reflect on Yourself

Like you would study your future employer, it is also important that you do some research on yourself too. One of the main reasons you would have been chosen for your new position is the skills you are going to bring to the new Organisation: -

- Evaluate your personal skills, competencies and experiences - what needs improving to further succeed in your new role?
- Devise a plan to make the most of your strengths and advance your overall performance.

Conclusion

The probationary period is not a process that is in place to try and catch you out, it is a period that should be used to learn and engage, with the encouragement and support from members of the team behind you.

Passing your probationary period is not a walk in the park, to succeed you will need to be motivated, dedicated and willing to learn, and this behaviour will also be expected from your Manager too. It is impossible to control your Manager's attitude and behaviour during this critical time, but you are in complete control of your own actions and efforts. Initiate regular meetings, collect feedback and work on any small problems that may arise during your conversations.

The Future...

Following on from your probation, working on your ongoing training and development is key to success in your new role and ultimately your career advancement, which can lead to, pay reviews, additional responsibilities and promotion.

It is important to build on the outcome of your probation review and put a training and development plan in place with regular review meetings with your manager or mentor.

Your probation review will most likely give you a chance to plan the months ahead with your manager and will highlight key project in the near future, skills to practice and enhance and long term goals to achieve as your move forward with your new employer. It is important to treat these with the same amount of preparation, thought, diligence and planning as your first few months in the business as opportunity may be just around the corner.

Need more help?

For further or more specific advice on passing that important probationary period, contact one of our specialist Consultants on 0345 11 22 828 or at info@blayze-unquem.com.