

Navigating Career Development in Your First Job

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Your first job opens the door to boundless opportunities for you to develop new skills and grow professionally. A degree in ISE provides you with a strong foundation to build upon, but it is up to you to continue building by making the most of the opportunities your job presents. Consider the following tips to learn how to excel both in your job and in the larger professional and networking environment.

Succeeding in your position

- Read and understand your job description.
- Work towards the next level's job skills.
- Gain as much experience and knowledge as you can from each company and each position you hold.
- Be open to learning and absorbing new experiences.
- Learn about the company's products and the product build-sequence (or the main function of the site you work at).
- Develop a network of useful company contacts.
- Dress similar to your co-workers (don't over-dress or under-dress).
- Act professionally, so you will be treated professionally.
- Pay close attention in staff meetings for new opportunities, and take careful notes.
- Learn what your boss' hot buttons are, so you can avoid them (and not tick them off).
- Prepare well for annual performance reviews (if these are being used).
- Don't feed the company rumor mill, but do pay attention to impending news that may affect you.
- Bring some of your university textbooks to work, to use as references.

Volunteering

- Volunteer for a new assignment at least once each year.
- Look for an opportunity that you are uniquely qualified for (e.g., helping build a departmental website or helping set up a simulation).
- Work on one fun volunteer activity to broaden your company contacts (e.g., a back-to-school backpacks activity or community service team).
- Offer to help others, occasionally, with their projects.
- Let your manager know of your outside volunteer activities (e.g., Engineers Week or IISE Chapter).

Project Management skills

- Develop strong project management skills and use them often.
- Take care when starting a new project and when developing the objective, scope, and approach.
- Develop strong interviewing-for-information skills, to use in conjunction with your technical skills.

- Keep very organized files, both electronically and manually (in file folders).
- Keep very organized correspondence, calendar of meetings, and contacts lists.
- Leave time during each day to think and bring something useful to all your work and projects.
- Buy some basic project management texts, offered through the Project Management Institute (PMI), and consider taking online training through PMI.
- Learn how to use your company's project scheduling software well enough to assist others with their projects.

Personal skills

- Get plenty of sleep and pace yourself for a full 40–45 hour work week.
- Be on time each day for work and all meetings.
- Listen much more than you talk, particularly early during a new project.
- Be very sparing in giving your opinion, best to be asked first.
- Try to be a team player and get along with everyone (even if you don't really like someone).
- Develop a good attitude about your work and your job.

In-house Training

- Take advantage of the internal training that your company offers (much of it online).
- Talk to co-workers about useful in-house training.
- Stay current on all mandatory training & certifications for your group (or job description).
- Consider taking additional certification training (e.g., Lean/Six Sigma, project management, safety, and ergonomics).
- Utilize useful company websites for information.
- Practice your technical report writing skills and presentation skills.

Professional Society activity

- Join the Institute of Industrial & Systems Engineers (IISE) as a professional member and volunteer. (Joining is half price for the first year after you graduate, if you were previously a student member.)
- Attend some local chapter meetings and events, or work with an IISE Society or Division.
- Develop a professional network through IISE.
- Try to attend professional conferences often, and consider being a speaker.
- Consider starting to prep for the Principles and Practice of Engineering (PE) exam in order to get your Professional Engineer License.
- Take the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) exam, towards becoming an Engineer-In-Training, during your senior year.

Career Planning

- Enjoy your career as it unfolds.
- Make a career plan and update it periodically.

- Find a few mentors and follow their advice, but only if it works for you. (Utilize IISE's Mentoring Board.)
- Practice life-time learning, to stay current in your field. (You can become outdated in less than 5 years.)
- Buy a few job-related textbooks each year.

Give back

- Give back to your university & the ISE Department; your degree is only as good as the school's current reputation.
- Continue to promote the ISE profession, within your company and globally, through organizations like IISE.
- Later in your career, be a mentor. (Start early, as a mentor to university and high school students.)