

How Young Professionals (And Their Managers)  
Can Thrive in Their First Job After College

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**COMPANION GUIDE**

For Employers of Young Professionals

# WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT YEAR ONE?

We've all been new at something at some point. We've all had the experience of graduating from college and heading out into the world, uncertain of what may come next. We know the experience of full-time work and adulthood are structurally unlike anything else that comes before it. For example, nothing about work and life, unless you work in education, is organized by semesters. There are no more course syllabi, no more grades. The rules for success are different. It may have been a while since you were in college, but if you are reading this, then you probably have had the experience of working with a young professional at some point, and you've seen how this happens. Or, you're about to take on the role of manager to a new professional, and you're looking for some guidance. We get it, and we encourage you to remember this: for some, it will be a welcome change and they will be fully ready, while for others, it will be a bit different.

**We know because we have been there, and so have you.**

Here at Wake Forest, we spend a lot of time talking and thinking about these topics through our work with the Mentoring Resource Center and the Alumni Personal and Career Development Center, both of which are part of the Office of Personal and Career Development. Much of the work of our Centers focuses on the first five years after college, a key period of transition and learning. We created our Five For Your First Five™ model to do a deep dive into the five competencies that we believe every young professional should master in their first five years after college: Do the Work, Build a Life, Create Community, Practice Reflection, and Own What's Next.

We have spent many years teaching and meeting with young professionals as they work through these first few years. And one thing we have learned is that, as much as the responsibility for that work rests on the shoulders of the young professional, it is the manager who can make or break that early adulthood experience. And many managers are unaware of their responsibilities to do this work well and actually can end up doing harm. This is one of the reasons we created this resource: to help you better understand who these young people are and how you effectively can support them as they get started in work and life.

Each year we have the great gift of working with our Wake Forest Fellows, who complete a one-year post-graduation fellowship in different offices on campus. In 2020-21 the Fellow in our office, Katherine Laws, and her mentor and manager, Allison McWilliams, decided to do a deep dive into their experience together, to create a tool to help college students making that transition to young professional, and to their managers who are so critical to their success. The result is this book, *Year One: How Young Professionals (And Their Managers) Can Thrive in Their First Job After College*. We hope it will be helpful to you as someone who has hired one of these new professionals, just as we hope it will be helpful to those you are supervising and onboarding into your organization.

**We believe that Year One is one of the most important years that these young people will have. And you are critical to that experience.**

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The book is structured as part reflection, part instruction, part conversation between the two authors, as well as between the authors and the reader. It contains advice for both new graduates and for their managers, to answer one simple question: how do you make the most of this year? It starts with that first point of transition, graduation, and then moves through the first days and weeks of work, and the first weeks and months of life as a newly minted college educated professional. The chapters in the book aren't chronological, per se, but cover a range of topics we know will come up at some point during this first year of work.

### **Each chapter includes:**

- 1. a reflection by Katherine on her experience**
- 2. research, tools, and strategies to advise the new professional and the manager**
- 3. a set of guided reflection questions for new professionals and managers**

## WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR:

- New professionals in your organization: to help them navigate their transition to the workforce and your organization**
- Managers: to help them effectively support their new hires and better understand the challenges and opportunities new professionals encounter**

# HOW TO APPLY THE BOOK

In the pages that follow, we provide some suggested tools and key questions you can use to put this book to work within your organization, from effective onboarding, to ongoing mentoring and coaching, to providing feedback to support transition and ongoing career development. It has been our experience over 25 years of work with students and professionals at all stages that tools such as these can increase employee engagement and provide ongoing and meaningful interaction between your employees and their managers, resulting in a better experience for all.

- Provide the book to managers and their new hires and encourage them to read it together as part of regular coaching and feedback conversations. Managers can use the reflection question provided at the end of each section to guide these conversations. Great coaching conversations always start from a place of learning, using open-ended questions to encourage reflection and sharing. Encourage your managers to refrain from making assumptions about their employee's experience or trying to reach a "right" answer or to fix problems. Instead, encourage them to try asking questions like:
  - What was your reaction to this chapter? How is your experience similar to or different from what you read?
  - What has been most challenging for you related to this content? What has been surprising?
  - What has helped you to be successful?
  - How could I or others here in this organization be helpful to you?

Managers should feel comfortable sharing their own experiences, as well, and be willing to disclose some of their own challenges or strategies that have worked for them. Ultimately, however, coaching conversations should not be about the manager. It's about helping the new professional to thrive in their Year One.

- Create separate new employee and manager conversation groups to discuss their experiences with their peers. Convene small groups of 8-10 staff members to discuss challenges and strategies related to their roles within the organization. Identify a conversation leader or facilitator, whose primary role is to keep the conversation moving forward and respectful. They should be skilled in asking questions for deeper reflection and making connections between conversation topics. The goal of these conversations should not be to create a place to vent or gripe, but to identify challenges and strategies to meet them, for individual and organization development. Suggested topics include:
  - Working through transition
  - Managing time and priorities
  - Setting goals and upholding accountability
  - Building adult relationships
  - Seeking out and providing feedback
  - Defining expectations for success
- Provide clear tools to managers to ensure that they are equipped to perform their roles. One of the greatest failures of effective management is the failure to set and communicate clear expectations. Often, this failure is due to a lack of understanding or awareness of how to do so. Organizations should provide clear direction and tools to support managers in their roles, including:
  - Onboarding new employees (see chapter 2)
  - Feedback and performance reviews (see chapters 5 and 7)
  - Coaching and mentoring (see chapter 6)

There are many other topics that could and should be included here, some of which will be unique to your organization. What are the organization's expectations for effective management? What are the things you say you reward and measure? Just as new professionals shouldn't have to work to figure out how to be successful in their roles, neither should your managers. Give them what they need to be successful and to thrive in their roles.