

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

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**COMPANION GUIDE**

For Higher Education Professionals

# WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT YEAR ONE?

**Year One.** The first year of anything – a new job, a new place to live, a new relationship – brings with it a mixture of emotions, challenges, opportunities, and experiences that are unrivaled by any other time. When you are new at something, you see it with the freshest eyes you will ever have. It is the time of greatest excitement and anticipation, when everything may seem interesting and shiny and bright. It's also the time with the greatest potential for feelings of impostor syndrome, that feeling of questioning your own worth, your belonging, and your ability to be successful in this new place. Year One is the time to loosen your hold on what was known and familiar, to embrace something new and uncertain, which for some people is full of excitement and anticipation, and for others can contain moments of anxiety and dread.

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

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.

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, did a deep dive into their experience to create a tool that will be helpful to college students making the transition to young professionals, 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*. And, we hope it will be helpful to you as a higher education professional in supporting both your students and your young alumni.

## 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 both for 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 critical first year of work and life.

### **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 each**

## WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR:

- **Seniors: prior to graduation as they prepare for their transition**
- **New graduates: as they enter the workforce**
- **Employers: to effectively support their new hires and to better understand the challenges and opportunities new professionals encounter**
- **You: the advisors, mentors, and guides who are so critical to these young people's success, both before and after graduation**

In the pages that follow, we've provided some suggested ways to put this book to work, for you and for your students and alumni. And, we invite you to check out our Companion Guide for Employers for additional tools and guidance. It has been our experience over 25 years of work with students and professionals at all stages that applications such as these can increase engagement and provide ongoing and meaningful interaction between the institution and its multiple constituencies. We believe in education as a lifelong process. And, we believe that our role as educators is to give our students and alumni the tools, resources, information, and support they need to be successful throughout their lives. And it starts with Year One.

## HOW TO APPLY THE BOOK: FOR STUDENTS

Preparation for a successful life and career post-college can and should start before your students ever reach the point of graduation. Just like their academic endeavors should prepare them to be strong critical thinkers, communicators, researchers, scientists, business-people, and more, their growth from adolescence into adulthood should be an intentional journey of increasing responsibility and clarity of who they are as people, what their strengths, interests, and values are, and how those things inform their next steps. You cannot, of course, prepare them for everything that is to come. But just as you provide an intentional and meaningful orientation to college, it is incumbent upon all of us in higher education to provide an intentional and meaningful orientation to what comes next. There are a lot of unknowns about the transition from college to work and life after college. Let's make sure our students are equipped with what they need to work through that transition successfully.

- Share the book with mentors and advisors to discuss with seniors in spring semester. This is a great opportunity for these “wise counselors” to share the benefit of their experiences and wisdom and to give students a space to share their concerns and excitement about what’s coming next. Some key questions they might explore, together:
  - What are you most proud of when you reflect upon your time in college? What do you think you did particularly well, and what did you learn from it?
  - What are you most excited about when you think about what comes next?
  - What are you most nervous about when you think about what comes next? What strategies would help you to feel more confident or less concerned?
  - The move from college to work and life after college represents a big moment of transition. How do you feel about working through change? What has helped you when you have faced change in the past?
  - What does a successful life mean to you? How would you define it?
  - What are a few goals you could set for yourself for the next six months to a year?
- Create a pre-graduation social media campaign featuring quotes and questions pulled from the book to encourage seniors to start thinking about this upcoming transition. This is a great way to repurpose content and to build excitement about what is to come.

- Create Senior Conversation Groups during the spring semester of 8-10 students and use the book as a resource to help them reflect on their time as a student and prepare for their post-graduation life. These conversation groups are a great opportunity to normalize their experiences and to build community, as well as to share strategies and give one another feedback. Identify a staff or faculty member to serve as a group facilitator, to keep the conversation on track and moving forward. Some tips for a successful conversation group:
  - We recommend splitting the content over several meetings for a deep dive and to build engaged community:
    - Meeting One: Introductions, Chapters 1-3
    - Meeting Two: Chapters 4-6
    - Meeting Three: Chapters 7-9
  - Each group should have an identified group leader or facilitator. This person's role is to organize the meetings, keep the group moving forward and on time, and to provide the "connective tissue" between meetings. Ideally this person is older and has experience and wisdom to share; that said, each individual in the group is the expert on their own experience. This person is not teaching a class! They are facilitating the conversation.
  - Like any great mentoring relationship, set clear expectations upfront about participation, commitment, and what will happen in these conversations. Share the goals: to build community, to help the participants to make sense of their experiences, and to give one another feedback and learn strategies. Encourage group members to develop and agree to ground rules for participation.

## TIP:

Great mentoring conversations, whether 1:1 or in a group, are built on thought-provoking questions, active listening, providing encouragement, seeking and listening to feedback, and accountability for next steps. Before stepping in to solve a problem, think: what's another question I can ask?

- Share the book with parents/family members to help them to have more intentional conversations with their new graduate. Ask them to think about:
  - What concerns might your student have, as they face the end of their college experience and the move to post-graduation life? What might they be excited about?
  - What have you noticed about your student when they are in times of stress?
  - What have you noticed about your student when they have been particularly successful or fulfilled by what they were experiencing?
  - How could you be helpful and supportive to your student as they move to a new place and start a new role?

If your institution has resources that will be helpful, such as alumni career support, make sure that both the student and the family member is aware of these and knows how to access them. Make sure both know how to update the student's contact information and that students know how to get involved with their local alumni chapter before they leave the institution.

- Develop a “Year One”/pre-graduation course or orientation program to prepare students for the transition from college to life and work after college. Use the content of the book as the curriculum, and engage alumni, employers, and others to help scaffold skills and knowledge about what comes next.
- Create short videos or webinars featuring content experts to build a library of information, guidance, tools, and strategies to navigate the transition from college to life and work after college. Recommended topics include:
  - Goal setting and managing competing priorities
  - Building relationships as an adult
  - Working through feelings of the impostor syndrome
  - Managing organizational politics
  - Creating an intentional career development plan
- Provide the book as a gift at graduation. As part of your welcome into your alumni community, provide the book to each of your graduating seniors as a gift to help them to launch effectively into their Year One.

## HOW TO APPLY THE BOOK: FOR YOUNG ALUMNI

Ideally you will prepare your students for this upcoming transition point before graduation. But engaging with young alumni around these topics provides additional opportunities for your institution to support these new graduates while they are having these experiences and gaining clarity around who they are and the lives they would like to build for themselves. And, it provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to their growth and development. Graduation should not be an endpoint. Learning and growing is a lifelong process, one which higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to support.

- Create short videos, webinars, blog posts, and social media content featuring alumni content experts to build a library of information, guidance, tools, and strategies to navigate the transition from college to life and work after college. Recommended topics include:
  - Working through career and life transition
  - Managing time and priorities
  - Setting personal and professional goals
  - Building adult relationships with work colleagues
  - Defining success
- Create separate online short courses for new professionals and for managers to walk through the book's content, advice, and strategies. Use the content of the book as the curriculum, and engage alumni, employers, and others to help scaffold skills and knowledge for navigating this first year.
- Create strategic skill-based programs related to the content to be delivered both in-person and online. Suggested topics include:
  - Goal-setting and action-planning
  - Giving and seeking feedback
  - Building personal and professional networks
  - Mentoring and coaching
  - Creating a career development plan

- Create Year One Conversation Groups of 8-10 new graduates and led by an older alumnus. Use the book as the text for discussing the challenges and opportunities of this unique year. These groups are great ways to normalize the new professional experience and to share strategies for building successful and meaningful adult lives. And, as a bonus, it begins the process of building community between alumni. Much like the Senior Conversation Groups, here are some tips for a successful conversation group:
  - We recommend splitting the content over several meetings for a deep dive and to build engaged community. You can organize these meetings for the participants, or leave it to the facilitators to schedule and plan for the meetings:
    - Meeting One: Introductions, Chapters 1-3
    - Meeting Two: Chapters 4-6
    - Meeting Three: Chapters 7-9
  - Each group should have an identified group leader or facilitator. This person's role is to organize the meetings, keep the group moving forward and on time, and to provide the "connective tissue" between meetings. Ideally this person is an older alumnus who has experience and wisdom to share; that said, each individual in the group is the expert on their own experience. This person is not teaching a class! They are facilitating the conversation.
  - Like any great mentoring relationship, facilitators should set clear expectations upfront about participation, commitment, and what will happen in these conversations. The goals are to build community, to help the participants to make sense of their experiences, and to give one another feedback and learn strategies.