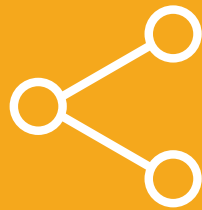# Your First Year on the Job

An IT Prepper

CompTIA®

WELCOME TO YOUR NEW OBSESSION

Technology will be on your mind a lot as you jump into the industry and discover how it forms the backbone of nearly all modern business and daily life. You'll build and maintain the underpinnings of this world, whether you work in development, customer service or repair. Like service members and social workers, your work will be profoundly relevant and impactful to many, many people.

Before we get too deep, here are some things you can expect in your first year on the job:

1 Expect to dig deep.

2 Expect to work on interesting projects.

3 Expect collaboration and teamwork.

4 Expect days where you feel invisible and days where you sweat under the spotlight.

5 Expect liberating freedom and rigorous responsibility.

Technology is fun and challenging, especially when you're first getting started. Use this guide to prep for your first year on the job — it's full of tips on how to raise your profile with a humble brag, set personal intentions for your next three years and crush it in your year-end review. Use your first year on the job to get noticed by managers, understand your place in the larger IT ecosystem and step lively into your first promotion.

Technology — and this guide — are designed for the veteran mom getting back into action, the QA analyst who prefers a nontraditional pronoun and the first-time job holder who has a question about ev.er.y.thing.

Ways to consume this information:

• Scroll from head to toe

• Download it as a PDF

• Choose tags to hit topics you're interested in.

• Have it emailed in sections so you can read it on your breaks

• Bookmark it and come back as often as you like

Section 1: The First 100 Days

Whether this is your first or 10th job, think of your new IT job as a fresh start. Use your first 100 days for reconnaissance, to gather as much information as you can about the landscape, people and possibilities this place can provide.

Your career here will be built on understanding how the people around you interpret and disseminate information. Watch people communicate and work together. Try to identify how you interact with people. Keeping a keen eye on the IT pros around you will help you learn faster, find mentors, dodge drama and make friends.

Get A Sense Of Your Daily Workload

Technology companies usually have an onboarding system to walk you through all the necessary new job stuff, like W-2s and parking passes. Some companies have you start some of that paperwork from home, and others wait until your first day on the job.

Eventually, you'll get to some actual work.

During your training period:

• Take notes

• Ask questions

• Absorb the information

• Ask "why"?

Most important: Learn who's above you and who to go to for help. Find out people's specialties so you'll know who to go to for specific questions.

Instinctually, you might want to let your trainer know that you already have a handle on this. Instead of pretending to know everything, be willing to learn and absorb information (even if you do already have a handle on this). *Bonus

points for reading and retaining the corporate guidelines.

Once you've got a handle on what's expected, familiarize yourself with the company platform and any proprietary systems to learn.

Throughout your career, pay attention to the software that will seemingly always be in your periphery, stuff like SharePoint and Outlook. Getting familiar with those programs will help you in any IT job, throughout your whole career.

Explore Your Boundaries

Learn where your freedom, passwords and access can lead. Find out what's cool to play with, and where your access leads. Play around, go into those admin areas where you're allowed access. There's nothing wrong with exploration. Action, on the other hand, you might want to clear with a manager. Same thing with hardware. Take a mental assessment of what's available, and how you might use some of those toys to learn new skills.

Identify Key Individuals

Watch your boss, decision makers and other department heads to understand how they communicate, lead and receive things like suggestions, new ideas and critiques.

Make purposeful connections to people who can answer your questions about corporate culture, salary negotiations and why things happen certain ways. In the future, you'll work with people who naturally become mentors, and you'll

be grateful when it happens; there are endless benefits to having a friend who roots for you, gives you opportunities, brings up your name in meetings, and reminds other people that you do good work.

Get Ready To Work Solo — And On Teams

After your initial training period, you'll be on your own to find creative solutions, which means a lot of time looking things up on the internet. When you're not alone, expect a variety of social scenarios: On the phone with customers, patiently waiting through marketing meetings, collaborating with other departments, and problem solving with a nearby team.

These groups will likely be diverse and inclusive. All types of people work in tech, because technology projects take all types of people. People from all over the world bring different skills, ideas and experience to IT, which provoke critical thinking and conversations that spark new innovations.

Your Immediate Coworkers

These are the people you work near, ask about work issues and chat with over lunch. These are pretty low-pressure interactions, so use the time to pay attention to your coworkers and how they communicate, give instruction or advice, and work as a team.

Superiors And Seasoned IT Pros

When it comes to managers and supervisors, be professional, and let your work goals be known. Around the IT department, get to know people who have worked there awhile and find people who might help you with advice on your own career path.

People In Other Departments

You'll work with people in other departments on various projects, and sometimes do desk-side help for people in your office. Make small talk, or use the time to explain how you're fixing things.

Having allies outside your department can be valuable.

Customers

Customer service is a big part of IT, whether you're answering phones or fixing people's computers at a building across town. You'll talk to a lot of people every day, either at work doing desk support, or over the phone, fixing issues through the cloud. Common interests or some humanity can make the connection a little easier, even if the server keeps crashing while your client is on the line.

People In The IT Industry

There are lots of people like you working in companies all over the world, and you'll occasionally run into them at industry events or out in the real world. Add those folks to your LinkedIn connections, too — you never know when it will come in handy.

IT Pro Tip: **The technology industry works hard to be inclusive, with groups you can turn to when you encounter structural barriers you can't exactly see but you know exist. Turn to people outside your immediate work circle and find industry people who look and think like you. CompTIA's Future Leaders, Diversity and Advancing Women in Technology communities are filled with members who look, feel and act like you. If you're not finding those mentors in your job, find them in the industry.**

Self Check-In:

- Which of my skills are rusty?

- What do I need to learn?

- How can I fill that knowledge gap?

A Google Per Day Keeps Anxiety Away

The first year in IT can be stressful if you go into it thinking, "I have to know every answer, every time." First, there are no right answers, only best practices. Second, everything is researchable — even if you only learn that other people are stumped by the same thing.

Even though it feels awkward to solve tech issues for strangers, the goal is to make people feel like their concerns are being taken seriously. Remember that every system has its bugs and every system breaks eventually. When you're fixing a major outage, level with people. Practice transparency. If they experienced downtime, just apologize and work to fix it. If you don't know an answer to a support question, tell them that and go find an answer. There will always be one customer that goes on a tirade due to something breaking, but most people want to be heard and to know you're working on it.

Combat Insecurity With Knowledge

Feeling out of your element is normal, and drives a lot of first-job stress. Put that anxiety in check:

  * Take a class.

  * Study for a certification.

  * Ask questions and really listen.

  * Develop a mentorship.

If you're working in a ticketing system, look at other people's tickets for clues, or develop your own training system to get yourself up to speed. Put in some extra hours in and you can fill those knowledge gaps.

IT Pro Tip: Watch and ask more than you talk and declare.

Get Your Money Right

If this is the most money you've ever made, set some aside for the future. If it's a steady paycheck that's more than you're used to, set some aside for the future. Around 90 days, most companies start offering health insurance and other benefits, and many even prefer to directly deposit your check into the bank. It's okay to ask questions at these meetings, and to ask for a separate meeting so a member of the human resources department can help you understand what you're signing up for. Set your spending habits now and aim for a quality balance between work and leisure.

Outfit Your Avatar

The business version of you needs a uniform. A good work look denotes purpose and skill, and gives you psychological armor to boost your self-esteem. As somebody's dad once said: "When you look put together, you feel confident. When you feel confident, you do better work."

Some people always wear a dress and jacket or a shirt with a collar, regardless of corporate dress code. This works especially well for those who spend time with clients and want to appear professional. If you're 25 or younger, an adult look can get people to take you seriously.

In the tech industry, skill often outranks the dress code. As long as you appear clean and ready to work, most managers won't care if you're in dress pants or dark jeans. If you're in the office full time or solving problems over the phone, the dress code matters less. Stash a quick change of clothes at the office in case of a surprise client meeting or sit-down with the CIO. You can always dress down once you're at work, but it's hard to pull a blazer out of thin air.

Uniform Alternative

Your company might require a uniform — imagine a polo shirt and khaki pants situation — which is an option you can choose for yourself, if you'd prefer to think about fashion as little as possible. Stock up on polo shirts and dress pants, and rotate as needed. Even if your managers are fine with casual, your customers will expect a level of professionalism that a uniform provides. Things to nix entirely: Strong scents, flip-flops and objectionable slogans.

100-Day Check In:

The first few months can fly by, so take a minute at the end of your 100 days and ask yourself:

Do you enjoy this job?

Do you have growth potential?

Do you have knowledge gaps that are being filled in and have identified a pathway to do so?

Do you have a good team and/or good management that is working with you to develop?

Does the job feel like problem solving rather than reading from a script?

Answer: If you've said yes to most of these, you're in a good spot. If you're feeling stuck, talk to your manager about why these aren't true statements for you. Answering no to any of these questions, you've got six months to turn things around.

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MAKING IT TO THE MIDWAY POINT

The shine of a new job tends to wear around this point, and you can start being honest with yourself about your abilities with customers and your plan for growth. This part of the year will have you facing lots of truths, with yourself, your boss and with your customers.

Truth: There's No Right Answer, Only Best Practices

People have different ideas about the way things should be coded or what cloud hypervisor is the best, but once you've gone through the best practices, the rest is opinion based. Rather than lose allies and time fighting over how a data center "should" be designed, turn first to best practices and then decide what's right in that specific circumstance for that specific organization.

Truth: There's Room To Grow

The great thing about IT is you can create your own destiny. Within the company, start becoming the expert on some piece of information, system or project. Who can help you get there? Build on the people you identified when you first started. Identify mentors and promotion pathways, and use those people to request small projects to begin taking on more responsibilities.

IT Pro Tip: The secret to learning more is to tell somebody you're interested.

Truth: You Can Develop New Skills

Inside an organization, developing a new skill starts with saying it out loud. "I want to learn more about mobility." Say it to yourself, practice with a coworker and then lay it out for your supervisor.

A straightforward statement shows your higher-ups that career growth and new skills are important to you. It will change how your superiors see you as an employee. If your core work is handled and you're still thirsty, ask other department heads for work.

Truth: Technology Is Often Tracked Using Metrics, Not Hours

Keep tabs on your impact, and find ways to show the company you can improve this data point by 6 percent, or push a project over the finish line.

Truth: It Pays To Be Social

As you get more comfortable at work, ease your personality into the job. Put up a meteor calendar if you like space exploration. Put a tiny basketball hoop on your file cabinet if you're obsessed with the Lakers. Display your collage of the big dog you got last year and someone will definitely tell you about their own pups.

When you're doing desk side help, make chit chat about what other people are displaying. Pictures of their kids playing baseball? Ask how the team is this year. It's light and breezy, and it humanizes you. Or, comment on what you're doing. Take the moment to teach the user what's going on, and how they can fix it in the future.

Truth: One Person's Loudmouth Is Another's Great Storyteller

People comfortable talking about their successes get labeled suck ups, and those who are thinking interesting, far away thoughts get labeled loners. Instead of believing what people tell you, get to know people yourself. An office loudmouth can also be the right person to spitball sales ideas with, and a long explanation about caves in the south of Spain might be exactly what you need on a slow Thursday afternoon.

Truth: Your Break Time Is Your Own

There's a pro-networking faction that crows "Eat lunch with someone every day!" to maximize your chum-to-chum ratio, but here's the deal: There's no shame in turning down a Jimmy Johns invitation. Take a walk, read a book or hike the north 40 behind the office — your breaks are yours to fill however you like.

IT Pro Tip: **Surround yourself with people who lift you up rather than complain all day. Haters will drag you down.**

Half-Year Check In:

If you've made it this far, congratulate yourself. You've gained perspective, you know how to solve problems and who to turn to with questions. By now you've identified and molded into corporate culture — right? At the very least, you've got a much better handle on support portals, security policies and management tools.

* When you have a question, do you know who to ask?

* Have you figured out a low-key wardrobe game?

* Have you integrated your experience and knowledge into the organization's structure?

* Does your supervisor make it easy to talk about your career plans?

* Is there someone who can help you set up short and long term career goals?

* Have you met candidates who you might consider as mentors?

* What are some of your financial goals for the rest of this year?

* Is your savings on track?

The half-year mark is a great time to set career and financial goals for the end of the year. If you're answering no to any of these questions, you've got six months to turn things around.

THE SECOND HALF OF THE YEAR

Starting the second half of the year, you're bound to be familiar with support portals, security policies and management tools, and you've solved or know how to find answers to the common questions. If you've mastered your day to day work and feel like you have more to give, start to take ownership of your role.

DOUBLE DOG DARE: Try some of these career-boosting moves and use the victories to boost your self-esteem and increaseyour manager's confidence in you.

Make A Difference

By this point you've probably noticed company processes that take more time than they should, or that there are hang-ups in the system that confound you. Now that you've integrated your experience and knowledge into the organization's structure, can you see room for improvement?

In line with finding ways to make your supervisor and team look good, take on a nagging problem and develop ideas for optimizing the system. Present those ideas, with proposals on how to track the metrics, to your managers, and see if you can get some buy in on your proposal to solve the problem.

If there's no hangnail to clip, take on a project you're solely responsible for, and try to achieve some desired results on a project that you can put your name on. Ask your manager, "What projects have been stalled and how can I move them forward?" These types of things show early initiative and make you look great.

Volunteer And Accept Invitations On Projects

Show people you're willing to learn and willing to be flexible. When a manager stops you in the hallway and proposes you help on a router issue,

you're free to decline, but a yes will get you a lot farther than a no. Same goes for volunteering. Raising your hand earns you experience and appreciation, even if the work is fairly lame.

Stretch yourself in some of these ways and supervisors will start to offer you more responsibility. Keep your eyes out for opportunities, and always angle for a promotion.

Push Things Through

Lots of products and projects fail because they get hung up by user feedback, bugs and evolving user needs. Here's an easy way to stand out in the first year: Find a project stalled by feature creep or incessant redevelopment and timing. Frame your work around a well-structured, viable product that will get you across the finish line, and then improve from there. With exception, it's more important to get something out that's 90 percent done than to wait on those last pesky bugs.

Humble Brag, With Extra Credit For S/Os To Your Team

Introduce yourself and your skills to a manager at least two levels above you. Articulate what you've accomplished in your time there, and drop names.

"Hi, Todd. I'm Marcy, and I handle all of our ingoing and outgoing emails. You know yesterday, when all the servers went out and people were stressed because they couldn't get any out-of-network

emails? Our team — Calvin, Sherry, John and I — figured out it was a compression thing that was haywire, and upgraded 74 computers to fix it."

Be clear, not obnoxious, and follow it up with more metrics.

Specialize

The technology industry is full of holes that need plugging. If you want to specialize in cybersecurity, for example, the right training and certifications will get you to the top of your game in less than five years. Once you've developed a specialty, find a way to apply it around the office. You could suddenly be the company's mobility expert, simply because you have the knowledge and experience.

4 Steps to Specialization

1) Tell someone you're interested.

2) Find a suitable certification and get busy with study guides and practice tests.

3) Volunteer for related projects that offer hands-on experience

4) Once you earn a related certification, crow about it on your resume and LinkedIn page. Let people know you're an expert in the field.

Bonus Round: Improve Relationships At Work

Once you've established a community at work and even hold some seniority over those hired after you, join forces with others and help other people achieve their work goals, too. Check in to see what activities could use your skills and where you could help your coworkers out. This type of volunteering shows you know how to create a collaborative culture at work.

If you have working relationships you want to improve, take stock of how you might be able to reset a relationship that got off on the wrong foot. Make your relationships stronger and, in turn, build a stronger team.

Year End Check In:

Score your job! Rank your company's potential as a lifelong commitment:

* Does checking afterhours email make you crazy?

* Are you all too familiar with mandatory overtime?

* Too slammed to use your vacation days?

* Are you feeling stale? Are you doing the job, or is the job doing you?

* Can you see yourself doing this for another year?

* How will you challenge yourself in year two?

* Is this a starter job?

* Am I in this for a few years?

Liking your job has a big impact on the rest of your life. Make sure you're in the right position and not just settling for the sake of security.
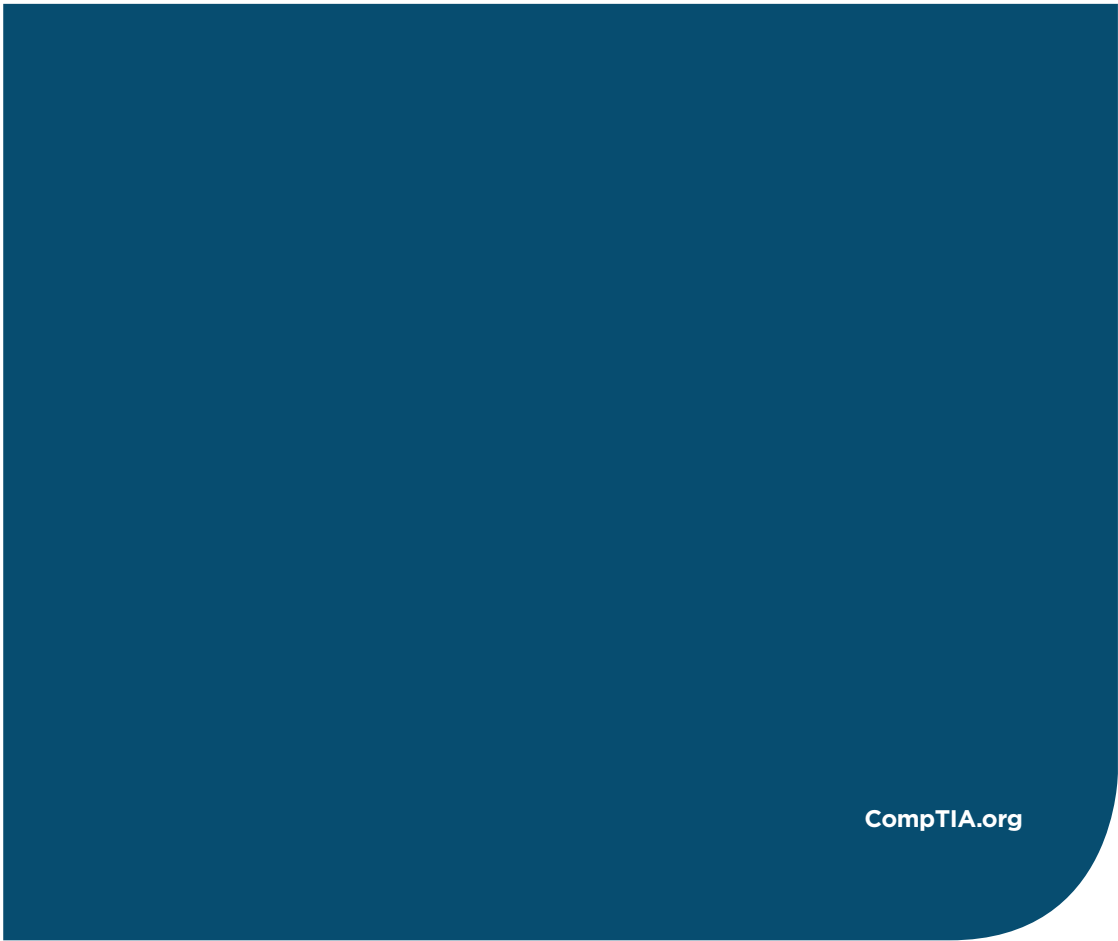
Outro: Wrapping Up A Successful Trip Around the Sun

You have enough experience and perspective to identify the job's freedoms, and the positive challenges that help you grow. Remember that staff party where John ate too many pickles? Or that insane day when nobody's OS wanted to work? With perspective, it's good to laugh about some of those nightmare experiences, and celebrate making it through. See if you can weave some of these more personal moments into your performance review, in addition to any metric you were able to affect.

Plan To Move Up Or Plan To Get Out

You're part of a business and an industry that changes all the time. One day, you might move to a different team and be expected to lay more cable than you prefer. You can roll with it, or you can keep an eye out for better opportunities.

If you're feeling antsy after 12 months, or like you can solve a problem before the words are out of the caller's mouth, it's probably time to move on. Look for positions at your company, or start searching for jobs that include roles you'd rather be playing. Some places will offer you a satisfying challenge and three weeks of vacation. If you feel like you could get a better deal, look for other opportunities.

In technology, your first job is rarely your last.

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