

# How to be the NEW GIRL

Congratulations, you landed the job! Now what? We've got the answer to every question swirling round your head at 2am the night before you start.

By **Kate Bussmann**

**B**eing offered the job of your dreams is one of the best feelings in the world. All that stress throughout the interview process was worth it; now all you have to do is hand in your notice and shop for a new wardrobe to match your shiny new job title. There's just one snag: the Olympian somersaults your stomach is performing. "When I started out, I cut my hair short and wore lots of black, thinking people would take me more seriously," recalls Josie Rourke, now artistic director of London theatre the Donmar Warehouse. And no matter how high you climb, it doesn't get any easier. "I still often feel nervous going to work," laughs Helena Morrissey, CEO of finance firm

Newton Investment Management and founder of The 30% Club, which campaigns to get more women on boards. "People at the top have the same uncertainties as everyone else – it's just a very well-kept secret." But, as it turns out, there's a good reason for new-girl nerves. "During the transition into a new job, you're under unusual scrutiny," says Michael Watkins, author of *The First 90 Days*. "People want to figure out who you are and what you represent, and we know that when impressions form, they harden, and they're very tough to reverse." So, while it may take fewer than 90 days – or as long as a year – to feel you really belong, those first three months matter. A lot. But don't panic. We've got your worries covered...

## THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU START

**1 "WHAT'S IT LIKE TO WORK HERE?"**  
It might sound obvious, but it's the most important thing you could ask. "The number one reason people fail when they're coming into an organisation from the outside is cultural," says Watkins. "Talk to people who've worked there, to get a sense of whether it's a good fit for you."

**2 "WHAT ARE YOU EXPECTING OF ME?"**  
You can re-read the job advert and you took notes during your interview. But take it all with a pinch of salt. "Recruiting is like romance – it's not that they're lying, but everyone's putting the best face on things," warns Watkins. "A lot of it revolves around how much scope you'll have. Double check what you'll be expected to do."

**3 "HOW DO YOU PREFER ME TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOU?"**  
Just because your last boss was a crazed control freak who'd burst a vein if he wasn't cc'd in on your every move, don't assume your new one will appreciate the same treatment. "It's really easy to wind people up," laughs Denise Taylor, author of *How to Get a Job in a Recession*. That said, not everyone will be self-aware enough to understand the question. "If they look a bit blank, ask if you can book in a weekly catch-up – not just to update them, but to get feedback on how you're doing."



## Q I hate my new job! Should I just leave?

**A** "You need to stick it out for at least six months longer if it's your first job," says Caroline Ghosh, co-founder of career-girl social network the Levo League. "Unfortunately, being in your first job for under a year is a red flag to employers." It might not be your dream role, but look for opportunities to develop the skills and contacts that will help you get where you want to go.

## YOUR 'SECRET WEAPON' DOCUMENT

No, not your contract. It's your job description. Why? Because if you're the ambitious type, it could help you get a raise or a better job title. "Look back at your job description after three to six months to see how much more you were doing than what you were originally hired for – that will give you the confidence to ask for a raise," says Amanda Pouchot, co-founder of the Levo League with Caroline Ghosh. That's assuming you are taking on more. A 2012 Levo League survey found that 37% of women aged 18-34 haven't asked for anything at work – not to run a project, get a mentor, or receive feedback.

## WHAT TO EXPECT IN YOUR FIRST JOB

Maybe you graduated with a first. Maybe you ran the student union. Your star may have shone so brightly that they renamed the physics faculty in your honour. But in your very first job, you'll still be making the tea. "You're probably going to be the lowest of the low," warns Denise Taylor. "People will have been working there far longer than you, so you must be open to what they have to say. Be friendly, not an upstart." But that doesn't mean you should wait to be told what to do. "If you're in sales, for instance, you've got to be assertive; if you're assisting a senior person, be proactive and anticipate what they need." ▶



**“Let’s cascade some ideas through the think pipe...” and other crimes against the English language**

The latest office lingo you need to know to demystify your first meeting

**Put it on the park-it board**  
= Ignore it

**I’m going full open kimono**  
= I’ll be honest

**This is a JFDI = Just f\*\*\*ing do it**  
**Conduct an enter-and-view**  
= Visit

**The COO prefers a deep dive**  
= The boss likes a lot of detail

**She’s got the bandwidth for that project** = She can do it

**Double down** = Focus

**I have a hard-stop at 4**  
= I need to leave at 4pm

## Workplace types A SPOTTER’S GUIDE

Whether your office is a hospital, TV studio, kitchen or, erm, an office, you’ll find the same characters everywhere – and the same office politics. Philip Jones, a careers coach who specialises in workplace dynamics ([workplace-dynamics.co.uk](http://workplace-dynamics.co.uk)), reveals how to handle them



**The sneak**  
Miss O’Brien in *Downton Abbey*

“There’s always someone who wants to draw you into their own beliefs about an organisation. Be careful about what you learn early on, because it may not be reliable.”



**The rising star**  
Bel Rowley in *The Hour*

“Find out who’s well-liked by the senior staff. Then observe what they do that gets them that approval. That’ll show you what’s important to the company.”



**The hottie**  
McDreamy in *Grey’s Anatomy*

“I always advise people not to make special relationships in the first few months, be it a boyfriend or new best bud. Spread yourself out – don’t be exclusive.”



**The sleaze**  
Pete Campbell in *Mad Men*

“There are predatory men who aren’t necessarily after an affair, but enjoy having a woman around. Closed body language demonstrates that you’re there to work, not flirt.”



**The bruised ego**  
Karen Cartwright in *Smash*

“The one who wanted your job. Asking their opinion might help defuse any animosity, but don’t rely on them. You want to reassure everyone that the right choice was made.”



**The firewall**  
Donna Paulsen in *Suits*

“It’s not only the boss who holds the power – often it’s someone more junior, but close to them, such as their PA. So turn up the charm – you never know when you’ll need them.”

### SO YOU’RE THE BIG KAHUNA NOW?

Here’s how *not* to turn into David Brent

You’ve got an office, an assistant, a fancy new title – and a tightrope to walk. “The transition from being a worker bee to leader is one of the most difficult you’ll make in your career,” says

Watkins. Come in all guns blazing and you’ll make enemies; try to be everyone’s friend and you won’t get anywhere. Here’s how to tackle the common pitfalls of being the boss.

**Being too cautious** The good news: you were so good at your last job, you got a promotion. The bad

news? “To step into the leadership role, you’ve got to learn new skills: giving feedback, coaching, setting goals,” says Watkins. “Find role models (people who are great at the job you’ve just taken on) and seek advice.”

**Being too bullish** “A common trap that managers fall into is feeling that they

have to prove their worth immediately and that they are in control,” Watkins explains. “Insecurity can cause you to overcompensate.” “Don’t come in too strong,” advises Stephanie Phair, MD of [theoutnet.com](http://theoutnet.com). “The early months in your role are about fact-finding and listening.” ☺