



Don't forget these “four gets” when you start your job

I love this time of year. This is about the time when many of our new hires start their careers and begin the transition from smart, ambitious college students to smart, ambitious management consultants. I also love this time of year because it means lots of introductory phone calls from our new hires where we talk about all sorts of things: the company, our practice, how we serve our clients, and tips for surviving life on the road (just to name a few). It's energizing spending time with newly minted consultants on the cusp of a great career. I've had roughly 10 conversations since September with a variety of new hires from across the country and one universal question keeps coming up:

“What advice do you have for a new consultant just starting out?”

The first time I received this question I sort of stumbled my way through answering it and the conversation turned into a babbling list of “...and one more thing...and one more thing...” The response to this simple and innocent question from a new hire became an impassioned retelling of war stories inspirational anecdotes.

But in reality, the burning question on the minds of all new hires I've spoken to is: “what is the best way to

find that first project?” Getting staffed on one’s first project can be tricky but there are steps you can take to increase your chances of success.

So, I sat back and thought about how to distill some of my ramblings into four simple things to do – things that I call “the four gets” (so you don’t forget them) – when you start your new job. Although my perspective is written through the lens of management consulting/professional services, I believe these also hold true for other types of jobs as well.

1. Get mentored

Starting a new job can be intimidating. Companies ask new hires to digest a lot of information during onboarding and orientation, which can last anywhere from 1-to-3 weeks. New policies, processes, people, and systems; not to mention the technical skills you need to do your job! It’s a lot to take in...

In some firms, assignment of mentors is woven into the fabric of the culture and these people go by many names: counselor, career coach, advisor, onboarding buddy, and so on. In other firms, finding mentors requires a little more organizational savvy but finding them is well worth the effort. These mentors can be bosses, colleagues, or just an experienced co-workers wise in the ways of the company. You need not limit yourself to just one mentor; find a few trusted people who can counsel you on different topics from different perspectives. Seek out their help, guidance, and advice when you need it. These are great people to use when you get “stuck” and need a little direction. A network of mentors are your spirit animals on the journey into your new job.

“How do you find these people,” you ask? Ask around. Ask others “who are some of the go-to people in the organization?” Ask who has been helpful for others when they were starting out? You will inevitably be directed towards a helpful network of people all too happy to help you find your way.

2. Get known

You were hired for a “a very particular set of skills” (cue Liam Neeson from Taken). Whether those skills are technical or just good business problem-solving skills, your company saw something in you of great value. And your skills – and preferences for harnessing those skills – are unique. Ask yourself: “What do I want to be known for? What do I like to do? What do I want my brand to be?” As you think about these questions, answer them honestly and know that these answers will change over time. They will evolve and grow as you try new things and work on different projects. But it is important to have a starting point as you begin your journey. Think about your brand as a product pitch you see on Shark Tank or that resume pitch you used in the interview to get your job. Once you have it down, it’s time to take the show on the road and network, network, network!

Networking is all about connecting with the people who may be interested in buying what you’re selling (aka YOU!). It is vitally important that your networking activities be purposeful and focus on building a personal and professional connections with others so they think of you when the need arises. Sometimes getting known takes time and finding a buyer of your brand requires tenacity, but don’t give up! Keep at it. Keep networking and eventually your brand will become a household name.

3. Get involved

While networking is great, getting involved in key initiatives and programs is even better. Getting involved in the things that matter to the leaders of your business is the best way to showcase your talents. Try different things; you may even be surprised that you enjoy doing something you never thought you would.

Some ideas I discuss with new hires:

- Get involved in proposals and new business development.
- Do research on a new topic or issue on the minds of your leaders.
- Create a point-of-view or scope-and-approach deck for a service offering.
- Get involved in campus recruiting.
- Create methodologies, tools, and enablers from past engagement artifacts.

- Help with the operations and reporting of the practice or engagement.
- Build training and learning materials.
- Get involved with an industry group or account team and provide assistance where they need help.

Your goal should be to own and drive a piece of the business. Let your talents shine and get exposure to as many people as you can. Doing well on these projects – even if they are not client-facing or chargeable – will go a long way in building your brand and getting on that next project.

4. Get trained

The 1-to-3 weeks of onboarding and orientation I mentioned in the “get mentored” section may or may not include technical skills training. That initial training you receive is often required just to be able to do your job day-one. Sometimes, companies have longer, well orchestrated technical or core skills training programs that teach the fundamentals while other firms allow consultants to choose their path together with their career coach. Whatever the program, the type of training I am referring to here is the training that occurs after the mandated courses end; training that gives you high demand skills and prepares you for the projects being executed and/or in the pipeline.

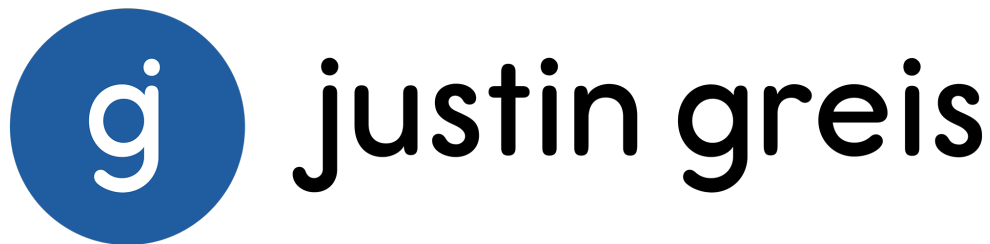
For example: if in the course of networking you discover a need for Office365, SAP, or mobile development skills, it's time to seek out training in those domains. This will make you a hot commodity when looking to staff these types of projects. There are so many great options for training these days: it can be web-based, intense in-person boot camps, self-study books, online courses, or internally developed courses, just to name a few. The point is to build these skills in high demand areas where there is a real market need. You don't have to worry about committing to doing this type of work for the rest of your life; everyone understands this is just a starting point, but you need some basic, foundational skills in an area where the market is hot.

Once you have your new-found skill-set, don't forget to market it and make it relevant to the leaders of your practice, those who are making staffing decisions. Talk to them about how you can apply your newly

acquired knowledge to serve clients. After all, what good is training if you can't apply it?

These four “gets” do not necessarily need to be done in any particular order. The important thing is to do them as soon as you start and keep doing them throughout your career. The process of cultivating a network of mentors, building your brand, owning and driving a piece of the business, and developing in-demand skills are lifelong goals and a recipe for accelerating your career.

Don't forget these “four gets!”



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(nice to meet you)

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