

Becoming Your Employer's MVP

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Introduction

Getting along well with your employer and co-workers can be more challenging than doing the work you were hired for. Enjoying them helps make your job fun. Employees who master the skills necessary to get along are highly valued. They are often MVPs -- Most Valuable Persons. Being named an MVP is a big honor in any organization. Such recognition comes from dedication, hard work and application of proven basics.

I want to suggest practical steps you can take to get along with your employer and co-workers. In the process, you will increase your worth, make yourself a highly respected employee, and create opportunities to advance your career in the farming industry.

Knowing how to get along is important for three reasons:

- Getting along directly affects your happiness, self-esteem and income.
- You are creating opportunities for yourself.
- You are managing a career not just doing a job.

The following lists give you a starting point to develop your own recipe for getting along. Not all the suggestions will be useful to you. Your strengths, weaknesses, interests and experiences will affect what you can do. The characteristics of your employer and co-workers also affect what you can do. Carefully consider the lists and then pick the suggestions that best fit you and your situation.

What to Do to Get Along with Your Employer and Co-workers

1. Arrive on time every day and stay until your day's work is done. Timeliness communicates a positive attitude about your job and employer.
2. Be competent at your job. Do well whatever it is you are doing. Accept the fact that the knowledge, skills and abilities you have this year are less than what will be necessary to do your job well in future years. Your training and learning will never be finished.
3. Ask questions when you don't understand instructions or need more information about your responsibilities. Pretending to understand rarely solves a problem. Asking good questions is a strength not a weakness.

4. Understand your employer's organizational structure. Know who reports to whom. Understand the job descriptions of your co-workers as well as people above you and below you in the organization.
5. Admit your mistakes. Any mistakes are likely to soon be known by your employer in spite of your efforts to blame someone else or pretend the mistakes never happened.
6. Expand your job. Find opportunities to do more than the minimum. Worry more about what you can do that will help your employer and less about what you were hired to do. Work with open eyes and ears. See what needs to be done without being told.
7. Be honest. If you wouldn't want to tell a "60 Minutes" audience what you are about to do, don't do it.
8. "Read" your employer's subtle and indirect signals about you and your performance. Look for important messages that come nonverbally, i.e., without words. A smile, a frown, the slamming of a door, a nod of the head or lack of the usual "good morning" can be as powerful as a message in writing.
9. Choose to be happy even though some people around you are unhappy. Yes, you can choose between being happy and being unhappy! Employers have a strong preference for employees who see beyond the day's frustrations, setbacks and inconveniences. Employers have many of their own reasons to be unhappy. You gain little by adding your unhappiness to theirs.
10. Practice consistency in mood, humor, temperament and cheerfulness. Make your motto, "What you see is what you get."

The first ten suggestions cover the basics. They are the foundation on which you build relationships with your employer and co-workers. The following suggestions add to the basics.

1. Accept responsibility. Career advancement requires ever increasing levels of responsibility. Resisting responsibility strains relations with your employer and robs you of opportunities to grow through new challenges.
2. Show pride in your employer. Wear a company hat or jacket with pride. Let your friends, neighbors and relatives know the good things about your employer.
3. Welcome new employees. Work hard to be friendly to new employees. Help make them feel welcome. Offer to mentor them. Patiently answer their simple questions without poking fun at them. Remember what it was like to be a new employee.

4. Learn about the farming industry. You are part of a changing and dynamic industry that offers many opportunities. Learn where your employer fits into the industry, how the industry is changing and the most important problems the industry will be confronting during the next five years. Subscribe to and read the leading periodicals aimed at your particular part of the industry.
5. Prepare for your next position. Be ready for opportunity when it comes. Better yet, create opportunity by showing your employer you have outgrown your current job duties and responsibilities. Attend professional meetings. Enroll in short courses and seminars. Get to know leaders and key people in the industry.
6. Recruit people to apply when your employer has positions to fill. Hiring is likely a major challenge for your employer. Help by getting your qualified friends and acquaintances to apply.

What Not to Do

In addition to the positive steps, there are negative actions that you should carefully avoid. These negatives may sometimes be quite appealing, especially when they offer you the opportunity to gain the favor of another person or take what seems to be an easy shortcut. Keep your bigger objective in focus -- getting along. Don't do any of the following.

1. Make the same mistake twice. Everyone makes mistakes. Making the same mistake twice because a lesson was not learned the first time is foolish.
2. Blame co-workers for your own shortcomings. Trying to fool your employer at the expense of your co-workers wins the disfavor of both co-workers and your employer.
3. Bad mouth your employer. Bad mouthing your employer is like bad mouthing yourself. Why suggest to anyone that the best employer you can find is the very one you are condemning?
4. Gossip. Gossip often seems harmless, even fun. In fact, gossip erodes confidence in your judgment. If you gossip about one person, you will be expected to gossip about everyone. Gossip erodes trust in you, the very thing you are trying to build.
5. Bring your petty personal problems to work. Family and best friends can help with these problems. Co-workers and employers quickly grow tired of hearing about one's personal problems. Save the help of co-workers and your employer for tragedies in your life such as death, divorce or a serious injury to a family member.

6. Gain the favor of co-workers by back stabbing your employer. Problems with your employer should be discussed directly with the employer. The employer is unlikely to want to hear about your complaints through the grapevine.
7. Join a group of negative co-workers. This may gain you their favor and provide you with quick and easy friends. However, neither your employer nor happy co-workers will respect you for your shortcut to being accepted.
8. Allow more experienced or older co-workers to intimidate you. Remember that you were hired for a reason. You are there because you deserve to be there.
9. “Show up” long-term employees. As a “new person on the block,” it is sometimes tempting to show senior employees how much you know and can do. What an easy way to lose their support!
10. Gain the favor of one manager at the expense of another, i.e., take sides in squabbles among members of the management team. Let the management team work out their own problems. It is highly unlikely that you will have all the necessary information to wisely choose sides.
11. Abuse the authority and power delegated to you by the employer. Abuse of authority and power will likely cause your employer to either reduce your authority or be hesitant to give you additional authority in the future.
12. Ask your employer for loans and pay advances. Your employer is not a banker. Asking for loans and pay advances suggests that you cannot manage your finances. Such a negative evaluation of your personal management abilities may threaten future career advancement.

And Now????

You may react by saying, “You are asking a lot of me.” Yes, because getting along requires going well beyond the average, the easy and what you would do “naturally.” The payoff to you is increased income, greater job satisfaction, happiness and opportunities for career advancement.

The choice is yours!