



ILLUSTRATION: AZRA HUMAYRA

CAREER

Lessons my first job taught me

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There's a lot that you have to learn through experience that academia simply cannot teach you; this is why experiential learning exists to begin with. Oftentimes, as students, we underestimate just how much of our lives will be spent working after graduation. Additionally, coming from a controlled, regulated academic environment and being flung into the "wild west" can be jarring, to say the least. So, for your reading pleasure, here are the most important lessons I've learnt over my first year of employment.

Your degree does not matter as much as you think

I remember being at the end of my second year of university, completely freaking out, because I didn't know what I wanted to major in. I had Excel sheets pulled out of which majors led to which careers and a hundred tabs of Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and even Wikipedia, trying to figure out if I should study Finance or Supply Chain Management. Imagine my surprise, a couple of years later, when I interned at a major bank, where a third of the people around me were engineers, and the recruiter was a Life Sciences graduate. While your degree is an important factor, most jobs can be learnt through experience. In my experience, a can-do attitude and transferable skills turned out to be more important than a piece of paper stating what my degree was.

Having a job you enjoy is pretty important

Do you ever look at people working in corporations, telecommunications, and banks and envy them for how good their lives look from the outside? Well, chances are that these same people are actually miserable Sunday through Thursday, crying themselves to sleep for the price of a lifestyle that isn't even sustainable long-term. However, many people, while underpaid and potentially still overworked, are not having a mental breakdown at every minor inconvenience, as they have a job aligned with their interests or values. While self-fulfilment shouldn't be the core driver behind your employment decisions, having a job you enjoy is pretty important to your overall well-being. After all, you spend 40 hours a week at work at the bare minimum; you may as well do something that is worthwhile.

Work-life balance is a mythical concept

While people and companies are more aware of the relationship between productivity and rest than they used to be, work-life balance is not as enforced as social media would make you believe it is. Even though people now get catered lunches and office events, their work still creeps into hours beyond scheduled times. But it's also important to note that even though no one will hand you a balanced work schedule, it's important to advocate for yourself and create that balance. Setting boundaries and learning to say

no, even as a fresh graduate or new hire, is not a crime and may even lead to your supervisors and team gaining some respect for you. Please feel free to utilise Outlook's out-of-office features as they are designed.

Not everyone is your friend

Sitcoms set in workplaces have really done so much to strengthen the corporate propaganda of "we are a family". It is possible to form lasting and true friendships with your coworkers. Being in close proximity to others going through the same nightmare scenarios is a catalyst for trauma-bonded friendships. However, every sitcom has a villain, and corporate theatre is no different. Unfortunately, not everyone has your back, and sometimes stepping on toes is a requirement for others to get ahead.

As I have mentioned before, this is the wild west, and anything goes as long as performance targets are satisfied. Another thing to note is that it's not possible to make everyone happy, and many people will dislike you for the most trivial of reasons, and there's not really much you can do about it. But it's also important to recognise and learn to navigate tricky situations while keeping your sanity intact.

Taaseen would like to highlight that he is not a career coach and cannot be legally held liable for any unexpected outcomes resulting from this article.

