The Gen Z guide to thriving in your first job

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Your first job is 50% tasks, 50% learning how to navigate tasks. The real advantage comes when you consciously build a learning system tailored to your role. Instead of waiting for onboarding sessions to hand you everything, take initiative: search for internal documentation, past reports, project archives, and templates. Spend your first few weeks spotting patterns.

Your first job feels a bit like walking into adulthood with Google Maps turned on, praying the little blue dot knows where it is going. You are excited, anxious, overprepared in weird ways, and underprepared in the ways that matter. But the truth is, entering the workforce in your early twenties is not just about learning office etiquette or remembering everyone's name on day one. It is about designing the systems, habits, and expectations that will shape your entire professional identity. So, here is a grounded, strategy-forward guide to what you should do before and during your first job.

Build your professional operating system before the job starts

The smartest thing you can do is set up your own professional OS before your first official morning commute. This means creating a digital and mental toolkit that will help you organise tasks, track progress, and avoid drowning in small responsibilities. Start by setting up a task-management space through tools like Notion, Todoist, Google Calendar, or ClickUp. Your goal is not to aestheticise productivity but to build a system where every deadline, learning target, and recurring task lives visibly. Before the job begins, sketch out templates for daily logs, weekly reflections, and project trackers. This habit trains your brain to operate rhythmically instead of reactively, which is the difference between surviving your first job and quietly excelling. This system also becomes your personal archive, capturing accomplishments, challenges, and learning moments you will later need for appraisals, job switches, or higher studies. Essentially, you build the scaffolding so that when the real work starts, you are not wasting bandwidth building your processes from scratch.

Set expectations with yourself instead of obsessing over perfection

One of the biggest traps in your first job is believing you need to prove yourself immediately, flawlessly, and loudly. That usually ends with burnout, overcommitment, and a personality crisis by the end of your first month. The better approach is expectation-setting - not with your boss, but with yourself. Sit down before joining and interrogate what you expect this job to give you. Is it skills? Exposure? Stability? A launching pad? Alignment matters because entering a job expecting mentorship when the environment is sink-or-swim is a recipe for resentment. When you are clear on why you joined, you can remain emotionally grounded even on tough days. Once you start, observe the pace of the workplace, understand the implicit expectations, and gradually adjust instead of trying to outperform everyone right away. Learn to differentiate between visibility and value because you do not need to overdo it to be recognised; you just need to contribute thoughtfully and consistently.

Learn how to learn on the job, not just how to perform

Your first job is 50% tasks, 50% learning how to navigate tasks. The real advantage comes when you consciously build a learning system tailored to your role. Instead of waiting for onboarding sessions to hand you everything, take initiative: search for internal documentation, past reports, project archives, and templates. Spend your first few weeks spotting patterns. Try to understand how decisions are made, how communication flows, what your team prioritises, and what metrics matter. Set up weekly self-reviews where you interpret what you learned, what confused you, and what you need to clarify. This builds a compounding knowledge base that slowly makes you irreplaceable. When you treat learning as an active process rather than something that happens passively around you, you accelerate your ramp-up period and quietly build a mastery that others will eventually notice.

Master workplace communication without losing your personality

Communication is the secret skill that determines how people perceive your work, your competence, and your reliability. It is not just about writing proper emails; it is about developing a communication presence. Before your first day, practice rewriting your texts, emails, and messages to be clearer, shorter, and slightly more structured. When you start the job, observe how your team communicates to understand whether they are formal, rapid-fire, emoji-friendly, context-heavy, or context-light. Mirror the tone without erasing your own voice. Learn the art of sending progress updates even when nobody has asked yet; it reduces micromanagement and builds trust. Another underrated skill is learning how to ask for help elegantly, framing it as "I have tried X, Y, and Z; here is where I am stuck." This makes you appear proactive even when you are confused. Over time, you find the balance between professional clarity and personal warmth, i.e. the place where you sound like yourself but also like someone who knows what they are doing.

Build financial habits from day one, even if your salary is screaming otherwise

You do not need a massive paycheck to build good financial habits. You need discipline, awareness, and maybe a soft scolding from your future self. Before your job starts, set up a second bank account that acts as your invisible money vault; later, this becomes the home of your savings, emergency funds, and eventual investments. Use your first month to observe your spending patterns, then gradually tighten them. Review subscriptions, set bill reminders, automate savings, and calculate how much you spend on food vs. commute vs. spontaneous impulse purchases. Introduce categories in your finances like mandatory, growth, and chaos, because you are not trying to become a finance bro; rather, you are trying to avoid crying at the end of each month. Your first job is less about earning money and more about learning how money behaves around you. And that lesson stays for life.

THE BOSSMAN
BY E. RAZA RONNY

AI agent performance: more isn't always better, study finds

NEXT STEP DESK

It's long been assumed that if one AI agent is good, more must be better. But new research from Google Research, Google DeepMind, and MIT reveals that's not true. In fact, the study has found that adding AI agents can sometimes slash performance by up to 70%.

The finding comes from one of the largest controlled studies on AI agent systems to date. In a study, titled 'Towards a Science of Scaling Agent Systems', researchers tested 180 different setups across financial analysis, web search, game planning, and office tasks. They compared single-agent systems to multi-agent systems with different communication styles: independent workers, manager-led teams, peer discussion groups, and hybrid models.

What they found was striking: Multi-agent teams performed brilliantly on some tasks - improving financial analysis by over 80% - but failed dramatically on others, like

IMAGE: **UNSPLASH**
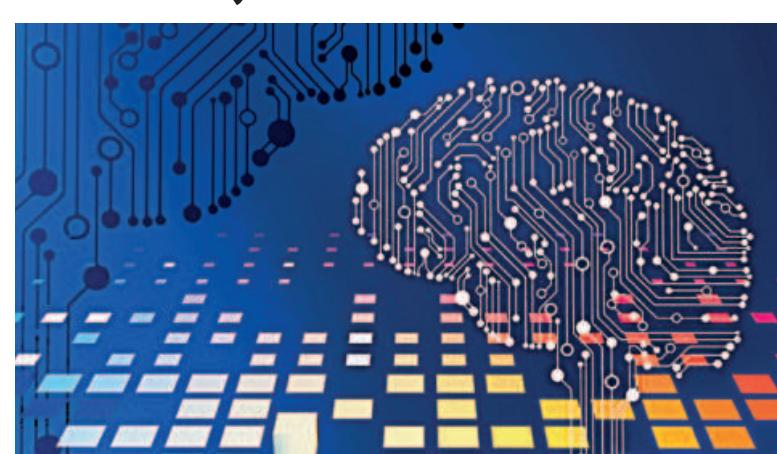
step-by-step game planning, where they performed 70% worse than a single agent.

The reason, as the study says, is "task fit". Tasks that can be split into parallel subtasks benefit from multiple agents. But tasks that require step-by-step logic get bogged down in communication overhead. The more complex the

tools involved, the worse multi-agent systems perform.

For AI developers and businesses, this changes a lot. Instead of defaulting to multi-agent setups, teams should now match the system to the task. This shift will lead to smarter, faster, and cheaper AI deployments, and a new era of precision in AI system design.

Human typing speed is slowing AI progress: OpenAI executive

NEXT STEP DESK

Alexander Embiricos, Product Manager of OpenAI's Codex coding agent, has recently stated that a key bottleneck in developing advanced artificial intelligence is the speed at which humans can type.

In a podcast interview, OpenAI senior executive Embiricos argued that progress toward artificial general intelligence (AGI) is limited by the human role in the process. He explained that current systems require people to write detailed instructions, or prompts, and to manually review the AI's work, which creates a slowdown.

Embiricos also said the "current underappreciated limiting factor" is "human typing speed" or the speed at which people can multitask to create prompts. He suggested the next step is to build systems where AI agents can autonomously validate their own work, removing the need for constant human oversight.

His view is that when AI can operate and self-correct without waiting for human input, it will lead to explosive "hockey stick" growth in productivity. Embiricos predicted that early adopters will begin seeing this surge in efficiency starting next year, with larger companies following in subsequent years.

# AI might be weakening core coding skills, Anthropic study finds

NEXT STEP DESK

A new internal study at AI company Anthropic has found that engineers using its Claude AI are concerned about the decline of their fundamental programming skills, even as their productivity increases.

The research, based on a survey of 132 engineers and 53 interviews, revealed a significant tension. While employees reported using Claude for nearly 60% of their

work with a 50% productivity gain, a notable concern emerged about skill retention. Engineers specifically worry that over-reliance on AI assistants leads to the weakening of the deep, hands-on coding abilities developed through manual problem-solving.

This decline in skills is considered problematic because effectively using AI requires strong supervision and validation of its output, a task that depends on the very expertise that may be

IMAGE: **UNSPLASH**
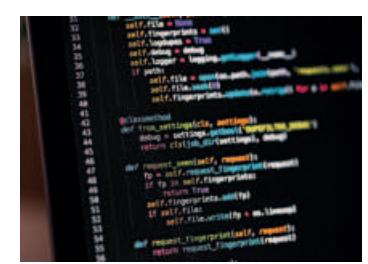
diminishing. In the study, some engineers reported deliberately practising tasks without AI to

maintain their proficiency.

The study also found that Claude enables engineers to complete 27% more work, often in areas outside their primary expertise, making them more "full-stack." However, this broadening of capabilities exists alongside the anxiety about losing foundational coding skills. The research from the AI developer suggests these professional challenges may foreshadow similar shifts across the tech industry.