

I Just Started a New Job: How Do I Get to Meet My Coworkers



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: StephenSays@bellow.press

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter [@stephenviscusi](https://twitter.com/stephenviscusi), Like [Stephen on Facebook](#), and follow him on [LinkedIn](#).

Dear Stephen,

I just started a new job as a sales rep for a large furniture manufacturer, working out of a beautiful office/showroom in a major city. Everyone is physically back at work every day, and I'm keen to get to know the people on the team. I knew when I accepted the job that I would be expected to use the office as my base. All the employees are COVID tested regularly and my first impression is that there's a familial bubble of safety within the group.

Yes, I am one of the many people that changed jobs in the middle of the pandemic and so far so good – I'm glad I did it. There's PPE in place and lots of new protocols, same as almost everywhere I am sure. My question is how do I get to "know" my new coworkers. I figure the sooner I get to know everyone the better I will perform in my job, and I do not want any roadblocks to my success. We have plexiglass screens in front of our desk and we put our mask on when we're walking around the show-

room, just like any large social space. Designers and dealers come in by appointment and we have had more people than I expected. I guess people just want to get out of their home or office. Within the team there is a level of trust and social distancing so when there are no visitors the masks are often down. It works for me and everyone there. The team includes several other outside sales colleagues, a customer experience manager, sales assistants, and of course there is my new boss, the regional sales director. The entire team has been in place for a while. I feel welcome and there is a good vibe. I know this will be a great job for me, I just want to catch up on getting to know everyone so I can fit in. What are some "get to know you" questions in the workplace?

Signed,

Getting to Know You

Dear "Getting to Know All About You",

A good question because it is important to get to know your coworkers, beyond just their job function, to make work more pleasant (and productive). And just as important is for them to get to know you. Starting a new job is like starting at a new school - when nobody knows you, you can be a new you. Be real, be authentic but, if there are some things that have bothered you about your work persona, take advantage of this opportunity to change them.

I will answer your question as if there was no COVID, because as people return to work each company has a different set of protocols, and some day this

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nightmare will be over. It's just part of our character and DNA that we want to socialize with others, even from a modified distance, so my advice holds true even under these trying circumstances.

As far as questions to get to know your new coworkers, for me they fall into 3 categories:

1. Strictly Business
2. A Little More Personal
3. Just For Fun

Remember you are working everyday with your local team but there are many other people in your company at HQ you want to get to know virtually but for now let's stick to the local team. "Where" you ask your coworkers these questions is important so for the "Strictly Business" questions ask them in the business setting like a one-on-one meeting with a colleague, when the business topic ends but you are still together. Here are some examples:

- Can you help me understand who I go to here for (name a specific step or process)?
- Who is your 'go to' person in the office?
- What's the biggest mistake you can make here?
- Who gives the best presentations (and why are they the best)?

If you're having lunch for the first time with someone new in the office or you've asked a colleague to have coffee or a drink outside of the office, maybe you can get a little more personal and dig a little deeper. These are the cliché questions, but still are good conversation starters:

- How did you get in to this industry?
- What does your (spouse) do?
- Where did you go on vacation last?

- Once we all can travel again, where is the first place you will go?

And if you can go a little beyond work related to some "Just for Fun" lighthearted ice-breakers:

- What's your favorite way to unwind outside of work?
- What is your guilty pleasure binge watch show?
- Are you Netflix or reality TV? ESPN or Bravo?
- Are you a cat or dog person?
- If you could choose a super-power what would it be?

Ok, I see you rolling your eyes, but these really are ice breakers! When you are brand new in the office it never hurts to get to know your coworkers a little better. But let's face it can be tough to think of a question that goes beyond "What'd you do this weekend?" Starting a new job is also a time to start to be the new you. Do not ask anything that can be perceived as gossipy, do not over-share about yourself and please, right from the start, project a "can do" positive attitude. I get it: it is work and you are there to do a job and no one needs to know much about you, yet people work better and enjoy their job more when they are working with colleagues that they know and like. After all, many of us often spend more time at work than we do with our family. On a purely practical level you need to know who does what and who can help you do your job better, and that is usually not your boss, but the many people above and below you on the office food chain. So I personally think the key to get to know your coworkers is great questions with lots of answers. It will make for a better work environment, even if you don't like some of them!

Stephen