
Tips for the First 90 Days of Your STPF Fellowship

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Along with the excitement of starting a new position, comes the anxiety of starting over and “proving yourself”. Whether a seasoned professional or a fresh graduate, we all wonder how to make the most of this new endeavor. The *First 90 Days* by Michael D. Watkins provides a framework to accelerate the transition into a new role or job. While the book focuses on leadership roles in industry, the principles translate well to other roles and sectors. Here are three of the principles of this framework that I applied as I transitioned into my AAAS S&T Fellowship.

Principle 1: Mindset

Don't assume that the qualities and skills that have made you successful until now will, by default, make you successful in your new position. Instead, keep an open mind and be intentional to gain a deeper understanding of your and your organizations' strengths and vulnerabilities. Check your assumptions by observing, listening, and inquiring.

PRO TIP

Even if your office has hosted fellows before, do not assume they have it all figured out. Take a proactive role in shaping your fellowship experience!

Principle 2: Secure early wins

Securing early wins will establish your credibility and allow others to better understand your value proposition (what you bring to the table).

First, within the first two weeks have an alignment conversation with your boss to clarify expectations. Inquire about what priorities (i.e. projects, tasks, topics) matter most to your boss (and her/his boss). Ask for specific accomplishments expected from you in the short- and long term. Agree on communication preference and strategy (e.g. cadence, medium, and style).

Organize your schedule for the 30, 60, and 90 days to first complete quicker tasks. Concurrently make time to work on longer-term goals, aiming to make significant progress during your first 90 days.

PRO TIP

Bosses may be cautious to not be perceived as micro-managers. Therefore, offer updates on your progress so they don't need to ask. This also serves as a way to "toot your own horn" without bragging.

Principle 3: Accelerate learning

Seek to gain enough understanding about the culture, work, and subject matter to determine where you fit in and how you can contribute. Because we come into the Fellowship with advanced degree, it is tempting to think we already know how to learn. Here are some tips to accelerate the learning curve.

First, identify what you need to learn to begin securing early wins. Focus on actionable insight: the knowledge that will make you effective earlier. For those of us who enjoy the process of learning, we inadvertently go on "rabbit holes", which delay our contributions. Make a list of your knowledge gaps, including both the subject matter and culture. Understand the history of your office and what purpose they serve. Learn about the subject matter by reading strategic documents, policies, reports, etc. Ask about the challenges and opportunity facing the organization and what is the path forward. Observe and inquire about the internal (office) and external (e.g. organization, agency, department) culture, norms, structure, power levers, decision-making, and roles and responsibilities.

Second, identify who to learn from. Ask your mentor to recommend reading material, trainings, and people who you can ask questions or shadow to close the knowledge gap.

Lastly, break it down! Prioritize what you need to learn by 30, 60, 90 days. Ask your mentor and peers to help you prioritize the readings and trainings so you may strike a balance between learning by content and learning-on-the job.

PRO TIP

Invite to lunch or coffee individuals with whom you will work. Get to know them professionally and personally.

Beyond the job

In addition to your Fellowship assignment (the job), you are expected to network and pursue professional development activities. All that while settling into a new life?especially if you are one of the many who is moving from outside the DC area. For many of us, balancing all this is daunting. Here are some tips to make it more manageable. Break down your professional transition into 30, 60, and 90 days. Outside the office, manage your energy to prioritize settling in. Getting our personal lives in order allow us to have more bandwidth for other activities such as networking. Keep in mind that networking may take different forms. During the first 30 days, prioritize networking activities that energize you or that deplete you less.

PRO TIP

When networking, be purposeful and intentional. This is especially useful for introverts and ambiverts who may feel a bit more overwhelmed than their extrovert fellows with the networking intensity of the Fellowship. Think of who you want to meet and why. Are their sectors, topics, or skills you want to learn about? Are there activities (improv, hiking, sightseeing) you want to share with other fellows? Networking goes beyond Happy Hours and activity- or topic-based networking have the added benefit of being more inclusive of those who don't drink alcohol.

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