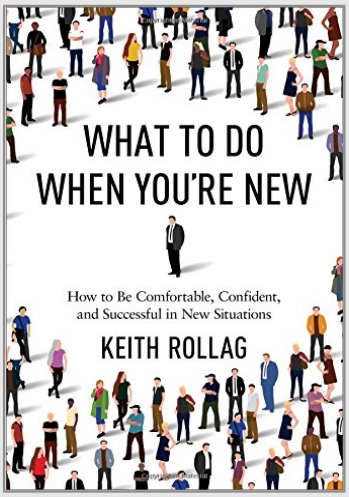

What to Do When You're New

How to Be Comfortable, Confident, and Successful in New Situations

Keith Rollag

240 pages
Book: getab.li/26624

Rating

8

9 Applicability
7 Innovation
7 Style

Focus

Leadership & Management
Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Finance
Human Resources
IT, Production & Logistics
Career & Self-Development
Small Business
Economics & Politics
Industries
Global Business
Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Success depends on being able to adapt to new people and situations.
- For thousands of years, avoiding strangers or anyone outside your own "tribe" was a fear-based habit strongly linked to daily survival.
- "Practice and reflection" can help you interact with new people without feeling at risk.
- As the "newcomer," rehearse introducing yourself. Write down your "opening lines." Consider what you'll say and what questions to ask. Thank people who help you.
- After an introduction, use "focused study" to associate names with faces and facts.
- "Asking questions" is a strategic skill you can use to get help and information, forge relationships, and gain feedback and advice.
- Plant, cultivate and tend your relationships to find the care, understanding and emotional support that bring real happiness.
- To learn, you have to put yourself out there and take part in shared activities.
- When you are no longer new, help future newcomers gain the skills to fit in.
- To sustain happiness, learn to participate in fresh activities that interest you.

Relevance

What You Will Learn
In this summary, you will learn: 1) How to overcome the anxiety of being a newcomer, 2) How to introduce yourself and recall names and faces, 3) How to ask questions to build new relationships, and 4) How to use "reflection and practice" to become comfortable performing new skills in front of others.

Review
Do you avoid people because you've forgotten their names? Do you take a friend with you to events so you're assured of knowing someone? You won't need to worry about such social anxiety if you follow this easy guide to handling introductions, remembering names and asking questions that lead to good conversations and great relationships. Keith Rollag offers straightforward, practical techniques to help you – as a newcomer – move past crippling anxiety about new situations. Although his directives are clear, he knows that changing your patterns of interaction isn't easy. He offers commonsense, clear techniques you can use to overcome social anxiety, starting with using "reflection and practice" to change your emotional responses and move past fear. Rollag emphasizes strong, interpersonal skills but and warns against becoming too attached to the Internet and social media. *getAbstract* recommends his advice for navigating new jobs and relationships to anyone who ever feels nervous in a social setting.

Summary

"We value people who can quickly get up to speed, but organizations rarely spend any time actually teaching their employees how to make introductions, remember names, ask questions, develop relationships, or perform new tasks.

"Being New"
To succeed, you need to keep learning new things. Whether you move to a strange city, change organizations, go back to school or adopt a new fitness regime, your happiness and success depend on how well you handle the fear of being the new person in a group.

"Always a Newcomer"
Throughout life, as you accumulate new experiences, you will always encounter situations where you are the newcomer. You might find yourself in the role of the new person in some fresh way almost every day. Your confidence as a newcomer can help determine your job performance and feelings of satisfaction.

In all kinds of settings, like family celebrations, doctors' appointments or seminars, you must be able to draw on the basic skills of meeting strangers, introducing yourself and remembering names. As an adult, your work may require you to network and build new professional relationships. Some people join organizations for the purpose of networking and then find that fear keeps them from introducing themselves to anyone new. If you are going to a gathering, don't take a friend. Having someone familiar with you will impede your efforts to talk to and get to know new people.

"Usually you have to figure these skills out on your own."

"The Science of Newcomer Anxiety"
Both human evolution and your upbringing taught you to fear and avoid strangers. You might have to work consciously to overcome your fear of new people. School and training classes don't offer these skills, but you can use "reflection and practice" to develop them for yourself. Your fears of encountering strangers or performing well in new groups are real, even if you consciously deny them. According to many child-development experts, humans are born with a fear of strangers. By the time babies are two months old, they prefer familiar people. At six months, they show anxiety around unfamiliar people.

Experiments show that being the new person in a group – even if all the group members are strangers to each other and the group has existed for only a few minutes – adversely affects creativity and participation. Those skills return to normal when the new person goes back to a familiar group.

"The nice thing about being new is you have the implicit right, permission and justification to introduce yourself to just about anyone."

Early humans survived by living and working in groups. Being excluded from or rejected by your tribe was tantamount to a death sentence. In tribal times, bonding and staying with your family ensured your survival, since the group helped its members find food and shelter, confront predators, raise their young, and defend themselves and their children. Within that prehistoric group, status hierarchies controlled who got the first choice of food, shelter and a mate. Those hierarchies still exist today. Knowing this can contribute to your anxiety when you start new relationships or perform in new situations. Nowadays, the consequences of losing status may be unpleasant, but fortunately they're rarely fatal. Social rejection is unsettling, but seldom final. Don't let it hold you back. Move on to another job, another club or another friend.

"As one newcomer put it, 'It's who you know that counts, and you have so much more mileage if you have already been introduced.' To that I would add, 'or if you have introduced yourself'."

Reflection and Practice

If you reflect on your feelings, you can work to reduce your anxiety and accept any lingering nervousness as a valuable spur to action. Then you can embrace new experiences and the satisfaction that will follow. Once you understand that rejection doesn't really change you, you can attain that moment when you finally take on and succeed at doing "the thing that scares you," such as selling to strangers on the phone or offering people information by going door-to-door.

Plan what you are going to say, but don't fall into the bad habit of following a "behavioral script." Instead, embrace a variety of techniques for coming out of your social shell. Psychologist K. Anders Ericsson suggests a step-by-step breakdown based on "deliberate practice", that is, imagining the desired behavior, analyzing each bit of your performance, mindfully observing yourself, getting feedback from others, identifying ways to improve and then making time to practice. Repeat these steps for continual improvement.

"Successful newcomers remember names."

You might enjoy using another tactic: adopting the "mind-set" of an observer. See yourself as a detached and curious scientist, a goal-setting coach, a risk-taking game player or a beginner whose mind is open to new experiences. Take on whatever attitude works to help you move through four stages of social ability. Beginning with a state of "unconscious incompetence," you can work toward a state of "conscious incompetence." In time and with practice, you will shift further toward "conscious competence" and ultimately arrive at a state of "unconscious competence," where you are socially skillful without having to think about each step.

The "Newcomer Skills"

You can use a set of strategies based on reflection and practice to master five basic newcomer skills that can help you push through your fears, adapt to new groups and make progress toward unconscious competence. These skills are:

"A little bit of anxiety about doing these things is actually a good thing."

1. "Introducing Yourself"

Introductions can lead to social connections, job opportunities and even initial employment interviews. When you start a new position, meeting new colleagues can provide you with the "information, help and advice" that can lead to success. Because self-introductions don't fall under any clear social norms or rules, start by figuring out whom you need to meet. Your list may range across the people in your new company, from your boss's boss to the

people who serve lunch in your company cafeteria. Determine how to approach someone and what you should say based on your expectations of the relationship you seek.

"Our natural and learned stranger anxiety was mostly beneficial in a primitive world where encountering strangers was rare and often dangerous."

Rehearse your "opening lines" – starting with a brief greeting. State your name and explain why you're introducing yourself. Such small talk isn't petty; it makes a difference in forging an initial communication path. To demonstrate your sincere intent, ask questions about the other person's job, interests and expertise. "People tend to gain energy from talking about themselves." When you end your initial conversation, thank your new acquaintance, and offer your contact information. Hopefully, the other person will offer similar information in return. Go back to your office and write down everything you remember about the encounter. Practice, reflect, improve and repeat.

2. "Remembering Names"

Names are important. When you meet people for the first time after your initial introduction, you can impress them by quickly and correctly recalling their names. You will look smart and professional. The fear of not remembering a name can make you turn away or pretend not to see a person, but you can learn techniques for preventing that embarrassing moment.

"We haven't evolved fast enough to be comfortable newcomers."

Your prehistoric brain doesn't remember names well. Introductions are the worst time to attempt to remember a new name. Take steps to reinforce the link between a person's name and what you know about him or her. When you meet new people, distractions may keep you from getting their names into your short-term memory. The rush of information you are learning about them and about other people at that moment keeps you from moving the name to your long-term memory. Fight this "interference" by repeating the name to re-input the data into your short-term memory.

Seeing a written name helps. President Franklin D. Roosevelt visualized writing a person's name on his or her forehead. Politicians study the guest list before they arrive at an event. To build name-recognition skills, write down new acquaintances' names, study them and test yourself.

"When you're nervous, your brain releases a tiny bit of adrenaline that flows through your body and helps keep you focused and alert."

3. "Asking Questions"

Cultivate the skill of asking questions at work and in your social life. You may fear that asking questions could expose your lack of knowledge, thus resulting in a loss of status or leading to rejection. This can make you reluctant around busy people or those of perceived higher status.

To make it easier to ask questions, build friendly relationships with people before you need to ask them something. Consider beforehand exactly what you seek: Is it time, advice or permission? Know what you want and why. A quick search on the Internet will tell you if the answer you want isn't clear or obvious. Determine who should know the answer and whether that person is approachable. If you are at a gathering, assess whether it offers a good time to approach him or her. Once you're talking, ask brief questions. Show you've done the basic research and have a reason for asking. If you need more information, ask a follow-up question, but "don't overstay your welcome." Thank the person for helping you. Follow up about the outcome of your query.

"None of the strategies and techniques…will quickly transform you into a memory savant...Like all the other newcomer skills, it takes practice to see real improvement."

4. "Starting New Relationships

So far, you have introduced yourself, remembered names and asked questions to start new relationships. However, the quality of your closest relationships – personal and business, old and new – is tied to your mental and physical well-being.

When you decide whom you wish to befriend and the nature of the relationship you want, how do you build from there? Start by trying to see things from the other person's perspective, being optimistic and offering sincere compliments.

"The key to becoming a better newcomer is to stop seeing 'being new' as something you fear and endure, but as an interesting challenge you can learn to improve through reflection and practice."

Use "reciprocity to build relationships, giving priority to others' needs without neglecting your own." Imagine yourself as a detective, a journalist or a good host while you draw out your new friend. For an icebreaker, invite that person to an activity that's not in your normal frame of reference.

5. "Performing in New Situations"

People have to learn new things. Whether you take up tennis or learn to run a sales meeting, you start as a beginner and learn by practicing your new skill with and in front of other people. Even if you practice playing the guitar alone for hours, people won't know you can play until you perform in front of them. Many people suffer from performance anxiety and enjoy an activity less if they have to do it in public. They procrastinate and sometimes quit altogether.

When you are new in a group, your fear of being judged and possibly losing status increases. Many parents and teachers inculcate the idea "that intelligence and talent are things we have rather than things we develop through practice and effort." When underperforming students learn they can indeed improve a talent and they do get better, their anxiety lifts and their ability to learn increases. To gain confidence as you prepare for a performance, rely on rehearsals, mental walkthroughs and a written script. Decide how to handle mistakes and meditate for stress reduction. Place reasonable expectations on yourself, accept your mistakes and applaud your improvements.

"Once you're integrated, productive and happy in your new group or organization, you have an obligation to 'pay things forward' and find effective ways to welcome those who join after you."

"Pay Things Forward"

When you settle into your new duties and become familiar with your new firm and colleagues, give something back. Recall what it was like meeting so many new people, trying to remember names and asking questions. Make changes that will help the next group of newcomers.

You might offer better information, such as giving a newly hired person a list of the main people he or she needs to meet. Or put a box of fresh doughnuts on the newcomer's desk and tell everyone to come share. The quality of a newcomer's initial job assignment makes a long-range difference. That first set of challenges correlates with promotions and career success years later.

"Your ultimate goal isn't simply becoming a more comfortable, confident newcomer. It's the success and happiness you find when you're more willing to seek out and take advantage of new opportunities and experiences."

"Get Out There"

Since people tend to get less enjoyment from activities they repeat over time, learning and doing new things strongly relates to sustained happiness. To stay sharp, focus on easing other people's fears and not your own. Show your interest in other people. Don't look for perfection in yourself or others; put yourself out there, and learn or start something new.

About the Author

Organizational researcher and consultant **Keith Rollag** is associate professor of management and chairperson of the management division at Babson College. He writes for *The New York Times*.