

ARTICLE WRITTEN FOR MAJORITY

The Migrant Guide to Working in the US

What to Expect When Starting a Job in the US

Have you ever heard of first day jitters? It's a real thing. That nervous feeling deep down in your belly that appears on the first day of school or the first day of starting a new job. Most people can't help themselves; any "first" will ignite feelings of fear and nervousness. It can be especially nerve-racking when you're doing your new thing in a new country (double whammy!)

Hopefully, with the help of this article, you'll be well prepared and ready to start a new job, in a new country, with ease and excitement.

Workplace Culture.

There's an old saying in the US, "You only get one chance to make a first impression." It's true. Your new bosses and co-workers are going to greet you on the first day and you want to knock it out of the park. Most US companies work from 9am until 5pm. On the first day, show up early and plan to stay late. Be well dressed and well prepared.

Every office and every job are different, so the culture can vary from business to business. It's important to ask questions and know what to expect from your new place of employment. Some work environments are more casual, while others are more professional. For the most part, in this day and age, you'll find US offices to be laid-back. Don't be shocked if you walk in and see that people have brought their pets to work. Dogs in the workplace is becoming more and more acceptable.

One of the things you may notice about working in the US is, there are a lot of meetings. Americans love meetings. They'll have a meeting to talk about the next meeting. Usually, everyone will sit around a big table and discuss ideas or analyze data as a group. It's generally okay to offer your opinion and it's also okay to bring a drink into the meeting with you (you have no idea how long it's going to last. Might as well come prepared for the long haul!) Americans love to carry water with them, and coffee is common and consumed in large quantities throughout the day in most offices. Most people will also keep snacks in their desk. This is acceptable as long as the food isn't smelly or messy. Some nice options include, crackers, pretzels, and granola or protein bars.

Health and hygiene are two very important things in the US. Most workers shower every day before coming to the office. Eating a healthy diet and getting a little exercise is also valued. Don't be shocked if someone asks you to take a walk at lunchtime. It's a nice opportunity to get to know your co-workers and build a friendship.

Making Money

In the US, employees are categorized both on the type of job they do and the ways in which they get paid. There are hourly employees and salary employees. Let's break down the difference.

An hourly employee is paid based on an hourly amount. For example, if you make \$10 an hour and work 8 hours, you'll make \$80 for the day. Hourly employees are only paid for the hours they work. Those hours have to be documented and it's important to keep track of them accurately. Some offices will have a "time clock," that you register with when you come and go. Others, will just have you write down the hours on a piece of paper. There is no federal law that requires employers to give hourly workers a set number of hours every week. If you work less than 40, you're considered part-time and if you work a full 40, you are considered full-time. One of the benefits of being an hourly employee is eligibility for over-time. If you work more than 40 hours a week, you may be paid extra for that time. Sometimes this is time and half or double time. That means, if you generally make \$10 an hour, over-time pay could be as much as \$15 an hour or even \$20. Holidays are often paid at a higher rate, too.

A salaried employee is paid an annual amount. Then, that number is divided equally between pay periods for the year and based on 2080 hours worked. Some companies pay every week, others pay every two weeks. Most salaried employees are exempt from over-time pay, which means if you work more than 40 hours a week, you are still paid the same amount, nothing extra. However, the reverse is also true. If a salaried employee works less than 40 hours a week, the pay remains the same. You are not paid "less" for working less hours.

Pay day is different at all companies. Some will pay every other week; others will always pay on the 15th and last day of the month, it all depends where you work. But one thing is pretty consistent, the method in which you get the money. Most US companies use something called "direct deposit." When you start a new job, you'll fill out forms with your banking information. You provide an account and routing number and then on pay day, the company automatically puts the money into your bank account. It's that simple (and very convenient!) When you wake up in the morning on pay day, the money is there.

In the past, some companies would hand you a check on pay day. Then you'd go to the bank to either deposit it or cash it. Those days are long gone.

Common Employment Benefits

Employee benefits are any form of compensation paid to employees over and above regular salary or wages. Employee benefits come in different forms and are an important part of the overall compensation package offered to employees. Here are some examples of benefits you may receive from your employer.

- Paid Time Off (PTO), vacation days and holidays
- Health Insurance
- Life Insurance
- Dental Insurance
- Vision Insurance
- Retirement Benefits and Savings Accounts
- Disability Insurance
- Tuition Reimbursement
- Relocation Assistance
- Childcare Benefits

Days Off from Work

As mentioned above, Paid Time Off (PTO) is a workplace benefit. Here's how it works. PTO combines vacation days, sick time and personal time into a single bank of days for employees to use when they want (or need) to take a day off and still get paid for it. In the US, there are also several national holidays that are recognized by many companies. Some businesses are closed on national holidays and you won't have to work, but you'll still get paid for the day. Others are open for business on national holidays (hospitals for example, they never close) and you may have to work. If you're a salaried employee and you have to work, you may earn what's called a "comp" day. That means, you work the holiday and then get a paid day off to be used at a later date. If you're an hourly employee, you could get holiday pay. Like we mentioned earlier in this article, that usually means time and a half or double your usual hourly rate. Not all businesses offer holiday pay or comp days, it's something you'll need to discuss when getting hired. Here are the public US holidays that are often observed:

- New Year's Day (Jan. 1)
- Martin Luther King Day (observed on the third Monday of January)
- President's Day (celebrated on the third Monday of February)
- Memorial Day (observed the last Monday of May)
- Independence Day (July 4)

- Labor Day (observed the first Monday of September)
- Veteran's Day (Nov. 11)
- Thanksgiving (Fourth Thursday of November)
- Christmas Day (Dec. 25)

Getting Promoted

The next most exciting thing after getting the job is getting a promotion. If your boss thinks you are performing well, they may promote you to a higher position. With promotions usually come more money and also more responsibility. You could be asked to lead a team or complete more assignments. But the bottom line is, getting promoted is a good thing! Congrats.

The best way to be considered for a promotion is by doing a good job. Showing up, on time and ready to work every day. Taking pride in what you do and being an overall "team player." Managers love employees who don't require a lot of hand-holding or instruction. If you can be self-sufficient, you will stand out in your boss' eyes and it could pay off in the end. A good thing to remember is, don't expect a promotion, earn one.

Laid-off vs. Fired

While both of these result in losing a job, there is a big difference between them. Being laid-off is the fault of the employer. If a company is struggling financially and needs to reduce the workforce to cut costs, employees will sometimes lose their jobs and be laid-off. It's unfortunate, but it happens. If you are laid-off, it will be easier to find another job, because the next employer will understand that you lost your previous job at no fault of your own. Verses if you were fired, getting hired at another company could be a problem. Here's why. Being fired means you were performing poorly or not meeting your boss' expectations, and not doing your job well. That doesn't make you look great, and it could be held against you when you go out and try to land another job.

Did you know the first ten years of work sets the trajectory for the rest of your career? If you follow the advice in this article, you'll become irreplaceable, worthy of a promotion and a raise. You're well on your way to a successful life and career. Good job!