

# PART THREE



## After your transition

Adjusting to your new work and staying ready for the future

### Part Three Overview

Part Three is beneficial both for former service corps members who are settling into a new job or those who've been working a while and want to reinvigorate their career. It discusses the following topics:

- **Section one: The shock of the new (starting a new job)** (pages 92-102)
  - \* Includes discussions of being a "rookie" at your new job (pages 92-93), getting accustomed to your new coworkers and workplace (pages 93-94), adjusting to the idea of an open-ended time commitment (page 94), taking ownership of the work you do (pages 96-97), adjusting to increased income levels (pages 97-99), and evaluating your feelings after three months on the job (pages 99-100)
- **Section two: Career growth beyond your service term** (pages 102-112)
  - \* Includes discussions continuing to self-assess and evaluate your career (pages 102-103), networking after your service program (pages 104-106), keeping your knowledge and skills current (pages 107-109), and ways to continue building your skills (pages 110-111)

Congratulations on completing your term of service! Your reading these words likely means that you've arrived in a new place in your life and career. As you move beyond your term, it's important to continue the good habits you started as a corps member in order to continue advancing your career—namely, building relationships and developing new professional skill sets. As a corps member you spent a lot of time discerning your career path; as a new professional, you'll want to reflect on your experiences to confirm that you've made choices in line with your short- and long-term professional goals. Although this is a time for celebration for you, you may also feel a sense of loss as you adjust to a new life without your service community to support you.

Part Three offers concrete suggestions for transitioning to a new job, including basics like putting together an affordable professional starter wardrobe, the more complicated adventure of figuring out if your new position is a good fit, and taking ownership of



your work. You'll read about ways to adjust to increased income as well as to stay on top of trends in your field by connecting with people, reading industry publications, building your skills, and attending relevant professional gatherings.

## Section one: The shock of the new (starting a new job)

**Warning: this section is not for the faint-hearted (but read it anyway!).**

This section outlines some of the challenges of starting your new, post-corps job. Depending on your experiences in the corps, you won't experience all of the situations described here. Feel free to skip past the points of concern that don't resonate with your experience.

The challenges covered in this section include losing your unique status and possibly autonomy now that you're no longer a corps member, adjusting to your colleagues and the office culture, the open-ended job commitment, taking ownership of your work, adjusting to increased income, and evaluating your first three months. This section also offers very basic tips around professional dress.

### **Just a rookie on a new team**

As a corps member, you were unique. Even if your service site hosted a few corps members, you were a shorter-term contributor to the place and the role you filled was special. Depending on your program, you may have had a clearly negotiated work plan or position description that guided your duties towards your core mission. Although you didn't earn much money, you may have been the recipient of special attention and leadership opportunities expressly because you were in a corps. You may have had a designated orientation, a team of other corps members to learn with, and service corps program staff to connect you with the resources you needed. You may have also enjoyed latitude to wear more casual garb than staff (AmeriCorps T-shirts, for example) or set your own hours (if you lived in a remote village where you kept pace with local routines rather than conform to the 9-to-5 schedule typical of a U.S. nonprofit). By the end of your term you likely mastered your assignment and felt very established on your team, or among your network of community partners.

Now, you are just a rookie on a new team. As you've transitioned to a staff role, you'll likely find you won't warrant any exceptional treatment. As a staff member, you may find *less* hand-holding and *higher* performance expectations, a less exhaustive orientation, and less access to professional development. Unless you have joined the staff

### **STARTING SCHOOL**

Part Three of this *Companion* primarily focuses on completing the transition to a job, rather than the transition to college or graduate school.

For suggestions about making the most out of college, check out the article "Setting yourself up for success as an undergraduate" in Idealist's **Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center** ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/settingyourselfup.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/settingyourselfup.html)). The emphasis is on preparing for grad school, but the suggestions work for career preparation as well.

If you're starting graduate studies, check out "Are you ready for the lifestyle changes?" which is also in our grad school resource center ([www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/lifestylechangesgeneral.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psgerc/lifestylechangesgeneral.html)). The article focuses on adjusting to the grad school experience.



of the host site where you served during your term, you are probably starting from scratch on new projects that will take a while to master. Most nonprofits expect staff to wear multiple hats and take on tasks that aren't in their job description—something that may be exhilarating to you, or stymieing, depending on your disposition and the amount of work on your plate. If adjusting to these shifts is unnerving, rest assured you are obviously capable of handling such challenges—you've responded to tough situations before as a corps member.

### Action steps

- Give yourself time to learn the ropes, just as you did during your service term.
- Don't be afraid to communicate your needs with your supervisor so that you get the support and training you need to do your job well.
- If you struggle with this move, reach out to the corps members you served alongside to see how they are faring with their transition. Getting together after work or chatting with them on the phone might get you through this experience the way it got you through tough times when you were in the corps.
- Seek out other professional networks in your community. Local chapters of the associations of people in your field are a good place to start, for example. Networking groups like Young Nonprofit Professionals Networks and Green Drinks exist in cities throughout the United States.
- Depending on your preference, reach out to your new colleagues. A single trustworthy confidante can help you overcome self-doubt and guide you through awkward moments of your new job.

Chances are, you will stay in your job a year or longer, and you'll see that in no time your confidence in your new role will begin to match your feelings about the service project you've just left.

## Adjusting to your new colleagues and the office

You may also need time to adjust to your new colleagues and the office environment. While such adjustments aren't unique to former corps members, your recent service experience may be quite distinct from the backgrounds or recent activities of your new coworkers. Your term likely brought you into close contact with people and problems that can seem a world away from the confines of your new office, and you may feel that your colleagues' attitudes and sense of purpose don't match your own. But while your corps experience is one avenue to a career in public service, it's far from the only one.

### SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Situational, or contingency, leadership theory says that no single leadership style is appropriate under all circumstances, and that your leadership style can and should change as needed. Thinking about your term of service, you probably needed more support from your supervisor earlier in your term, and more independence from your supervisor later in your term. The same is likely to be true as you start out in a new role.

The problem is that not every manager adapts their leadership style according to the needs of their staff. The key to getting the support you need from your current boss is to ask for it directly and nicely, and to be persistent. This may mean asking for more meeting time with them in the beginning, more clarification of your tasks, more feedback on your performance, and more help with prioritizing your responsibilities. As you grow more comfortable in your position, asking for what you need may mean asking for more leeway and freedom to make your own decisions (within reason).

Your boss, although your superior in the organization, does not have super powers—they are human and as such the only way for them to “read your thoughts” is if you write them down in an email or communicate them in a meeting.

The more you and your manager and team communicate clearly in the beginning of your tenure at the organization, the better you'll be able to understand their expectations. Soon you'll be able to anticipate their style and needs, which will pay off over the long term.



### Action steps

- Give yourself some time to adjust, and proceed with an open mind. Your new colleagues likely have their own strong reasons for working in this field, and they simply may not be in a position to share their motivations amid the whirl of keeping their programs operational.
- As the new person in the office, do your best to professionally engage your new colleagues in the office—working on projects together and getting to know one another, you will move beyond this awkward initial stage.
- Invite them to take a coffee or lunch break outside of the office and create the opportunity to learn more about their background, passions, and personalities (as comfortable and appropriate as this feels for you). You can probably learn a lot from your colleagues' experiences, and you also have unique insights to share with them.

Ultimately, you may not agree with all your workmates on everything, but then, that's life—*vive la différence!*

## The open-ended job commitment

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During your service experience, you knew when your term was scheduled to end. Depending on your current position, you may be in an open-ended commitment with no specific deadline for moving on. Chances are, *you'll* decide when and how (and even if) you leave this position. That means you have the power and the freedom to leave, but also that you'll have to find new motivations for staying, and for improving your performance. There's nothing like an AmeriCorps Education Award or Peace Corps Readjustment Allowance awaiting you if you can stick it out for a few more months.

### Action steps

- You really do have to create your own intrinsic motivations, but the rewards are usually worth it: solving critical problems, growing professionally, emerging as a leader in your field, getting promoted to new roles, and determining your own path.
- Some of the steps you took during your discernment process (see pages 11-17 of [Part One](#) of this *Companion*) can help you now. Evaluating your experiences, for example, keeps you aware of how you're progressing, what you like and don't like. Prayer and meditation help some people understand their priorities better, and as a result the less important (but annoying) aspects of life can dissolve away.
- Also keep reading—pages 99-100 of this *Companion* cover the three-month review you should plan to take part in.



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position.”



## Fashion tips for the post-service professional

While many service corps participants must dress very professionally throughout their term of service, others adopt clothing styles appropriate for life in their sub-Saharan village (where different cultural norms may inform local dress), or for the type of work they'll be doing—keeping up with kids, maintaining trails, or rebuilding cities after a natural disaster. Whether you've been wearing the same clothes for a couple of years as an international volunteer, or surviving in your City Year uniform or AmeriCorps T-shirt, you might want to take a little time to revamp your wardrobe.

During your job search, you might have gotten away with having one good, professional outfit for interviewing. Or, if you entered your service corps from a corporate background, you may have a closet chock full of business suits, which may or may not be useful in your new nonprofit role.

As you settle into a new job, you will want to feel and look your best in your new role. Therefore, it's wise to pull together a small wardrobe—enough for the first week—that will help you look professional (see sidebar).

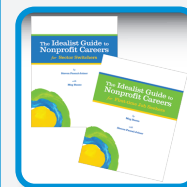
Before starting your first day, ask what the dress code is. Even if you have visited the office to interview and noticed how the staff dressed, save time and money by clarifying the dress code after you've gotten the job offer. In some situations, you may need to prioritize your professional image above your own self-expression, and/or follow safety guidelines, such as wearing closed-toe shoes and avoiding dangling jewelry. It's wise to ask before you purchase anything. If your organization is large enough, the human resources office might have guidelines prepared. Otherwise, ask your manager. Here are some basic tips and guidelines:

- Regardless of dress code, your clothes should be clean at the start of the day. Especially if you are in an office or indoor setting, your shoes also should be clean, and your clothes wrinkle-free.
- Avoid clothes with words printed on them, T-shirts, and clothes that reveal too much skin (i.e., plunging necklines, short skirts, sandals, inappropriately high heels, muscle T-shirts, anything see-through worn on a part of the body that shouldn't be seen publicly, etc.).

Invest in a few good, professional outfits according to the dress code of your organization. You don't have to buy expensive clothes, but know what you are looking for before you go shopping, or take a fashion-savvy friend with you. Always try an item on before you purchase it—a little time in the dressing room will save you money and hassle in the long run.

Sources of free or inexpensive clothes:

- Borrow from and/or exchange with friends (be sure to ask whether you need to return them, and by what date).
- Comb through consignment and thrift shops for professional clothes in good condition.
- Find discounted or inexpensive clothes at chain stores.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Nine of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) offers tips on making a good impression at your interview, but clothing and grooming can make a difference after you land a job, too.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch9.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch9.html)

### NERVOUS ABOUT PROFESSIONAL DRESS?

If you are starting your new job in an office setting, and you are unsure about what goes into a basic professional wardrobe, here are some general guidelines.

Aim to have a minimum of these items in your closet to make it through the first week without having to do laundry:

- Two pairs of dark-colored pants plus one dark-colored skirt for women
- Five shirts/blouses: collared, solid colors
- One suit jacket in case you need to dress up
- One pair of clean shoes

**Business casual:** Usually means slacks/skirt and a collared shirt or blouse, but interpretations vary, so play it conservatively at first until you get a clear sense of what to wear.

**Formal business attire:** Suit jacket, with matching pants or skirt. Dress shirt or blouse. Stockings or socks, dress shoes.



## Taking ownership of your work

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If you're like many corps members, at the end your term of service you felt on top of the world—you had mastered your projects and felt ready for anything. Embarking on a new career path, you may find yourself feeling low—looking up a steep learning curve or sitting at the bottom of the totem pole in the new organization. In your race to take the reins of your new work—to restore your place at the top of your game—you may face some resistance: colleagues who've been tackling a piece of the work that's now yours, a boss who has really firm ideas of the way things ought to be done, and/or an organizational culture that impedes change or embraces it slowly.

It's important for you to feel ownership over your new responsibilities, while at the same time figuring out how to balance the way things have been done with the way you'd like to do them.

### Action steps

- Be proactive, not passive. Make sure you know what is expected of you, and which aspects of your project you are personally responsible for. If it's helpful, create an action plan for yourself and share it with your supervisor and others with whom you share project assignments. Read about action plans on page 36 of [Part One](#) of this *Companion*.
- Give yourself time to get up to speed. Recognize that it will take time to feel knowledgeable in a new job, and that once you do, you'll likely feel more ownership over your work.
- Ask for reading and organizing days if you are learning a completely new field, e.g., you were working in public health policy previously but are now in economic development. Immerse yourself in the major publications, articles, and reports that can give you a better foundation for understanding and owning your work. Read on your own time, too.
- Take some time to organize your work space and files, especially if you've inherited documents and work from a current colleague or former employee.
- Ask questions, respectfully. Find out what's been done, and what the history is behind policies, as well as how things get carried out. Find out where there is room to make changes. Exploring these topics acknowledges that your organization and role have a story that predates you, and shows respect for what's happened before. As you learn where there is room for change, you can make suggestions or implement your ideas. Try not to sound disdainful of current policies—you won't win popularity points by disparaging the work of people around you, who likely created the policies (and who probably have solid reasons for them).
- Create a vision for your work. What possibilities can you imagine; what





do your colleagues and boss see happening in the future? What image can you connect with that inspires you to do your best work?

- Make a plan and achieve your goals. Keeping in mind the vision, set goals and assign priorities. People will accept that you're the owner of your work when they see you thinking ahead, making steady progress toward your goals, and succeeding on deadline.
- Find ways to do what you do best given your job priorities. If you are passionate about managing other people, ask about recruiting volunteers and interns. If you love to bake, set yourself up as the baker for staff celebrations.
- Report back. Let your boss and key colleagues know about your progress and difficulties. Especially at the beginning, more communication is better than less. If your boss seems anxious to relinquish control, offer them your daily and/or weekly priorities so that they can see what you are up to, as well as the logic behind your approach.
- Ask for help. If you are struggling with any aspect of your work, or having trouble taking ownership, ask for help. Unless you are in a job-training program, your biggest priority is your productivity. If you can't do it all on your own, your team would likely rather chip in than have you fail.
- Delegate when necessary. It's better to realize that you need help, rather than find out too late that you're not getting your work done, or missing deadlines. If you can, ask others—like volunteers, interns, colleagues, or even your boss—to take on specific tasks. Offer them clear and manageable guidance and deadlines.

If you find yourself struggling, remember that you were hired because several people in the organization were confident that you could do the work and that you were the best candidate for the job.

## Adjusting to increased income

If your new hourly wage or salary is significantly more than what you earned during your service term, you may face a period of adjustment. Sometimes the most stressful experiences can come from removing restrictions. You've been living in financial confinement, and now you have more wiggle room in your budget. The result can create unanticipated stress.

You may feel guilty about bringing in so much more money overnight, while many of the people you grew close to during your term of service are still struggling with poverty. You may have trouble recalibrating your budget when it has doubled or tripled from the levels you had while in the corps. Finally, you may at last be able to take care of expenditures you weren't able to before—repay student loans, invest in a computer or car, or buy a new pair of glasses.

## CROSS-CULTURAL RE-ENTRY

Some time in the months following the end of your service term, the emotional impact of your service experiences might start to catch up with you. If you've returned home after working in another culture (either overseas or within the United States), you may have been, up until now, busy reuniting with old friends, looking for a job, and catching up on things you used to love to do. As you start to settle in to the new normal, you might feel more acutely the loss of the communities you've left behind.

Cross-cultural re-entry means facing previously familiar surroundings after living in a different environment for a while. During your term, you were immersed in new perspectives—you adjusted slowly, and learned more every day. Now that you are home, you have to reconcile all that you have learned, all that you have become, with your old life (and how it, too, has changed in the interim).

If you are like many people returning home, you may struggle to stay true to the values, attitudes, and insights you gained during your service.

Give yourself time to overcome this "reverse culture shock", and to integrate the insights of your service into your current life and work.

Learn more about the challenges of coming home in the Idealist International Volunteerism Resource Center, [www.idealists.org/en/ivrc/return.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/ivrc/return.html).

More advice on coping with re-entry is available in **Psychosocial**, at [www.idealists.org/en/psychosocial/reentry\\_index.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/psychosocial/reentry_index.html).



## Action steps

- Open checking and savings accounts at a federally insured bank or credit union, if you don't already have them. People without checking and savings accounts pay higher transaction fees for cashing their paychecks, taking out small loans, and remitting money to family members in other countries. Also without an account to deposit money in, cash can be more easily stolen, lost (as in a house fire), and spent. Read more: <http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2009/05/01/unbanked>.
- Create a budget for yourself. As you may have during your term, figure out how much of your money is going to expenses like rent, utilities, transportation, student loans, and food. At the end of the month, how much money is left over for savings, entertainment, and larger purchases?
- Pay yourself first. Save for long-term goals and larger purchases. If you'd like to invest in a computer but don't need it immediately, set aside a few hundred dollars a month until you've got enough. If you'd like to buy a home in the next few years, it's never too soon to save for your down payment. Set up a retirement account and responsible investments through your new job or an independent financial advisor (but it's best to avoid investing in things you don't understand—it's your money and no one has worked as hard to earn it, or cares about its future as much as you do). For all of these goals, living on a budget during the corps was great practice for becoming a wise steward of your financial resources now.
- Separately, brainstorm your wish list of one-time expenses—and then prioritize the items on it. For example, you may want to make a donation to an organization that's meant a lot to you, purchase a bicycle, and buy a new watch. Make decisions on what you can afford to take care of first based on how much it costs and how soon you need it. If you need a bike to get around, for example, that might be the top priority among the examples above.
- Remember to enjoy your new income. Decide on a reasonable monthly allowance for yourself, that you can spend on eating out, movies, gifts, and other casual expenditures that come up more often. An allowance will let you spend money guilt-free, but also keep your spending within limits that make sense given your overall budget.
- Educate yourself. Learn how to build a good credit history—including the careful use of credit cards. Talk with family and friends about how they manage their money, and for ideas about financial planners you can trust. Often community-based banks or credit unions offer free, basic financial literacy workshops. Also look for home-buying workshops that can take you through the steps of buying a home, starting with learning more about your credit score and saving for the down payment.

## FINANCIAL EDUCATION AND PLANNING RESOURCES

Check out **Making a Difference: A Guide to Personal Profit in a Nonprofit World**, a free PDF book from Idealist.org and the National Endowment for Financial Education.

[www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/financialadvice.html)

The **Financial Planning Association** has great resources for the general public.

[www.fpaforfinancialplanning.org](http://www.fpaforfinancialplanning.org)

**Money Smart Adult Financial Education Curriculum** is a free tool from the FDIC you can use by yourself and with people in your community.

[www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/overview.html](http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/overview.html)

**MyMoney.gov** is the website of the U.S. Financial Literacy and Education Commission.

[www.mymoney.gov](http://www.mymoney.gov)

**Get Rich Slowly** is a blog that covers topics like planning well and living simply.

[www.getrichslowly.org/blog/](http://www.getrichslowly.org/blog/)

**Mint.com** is a free online financial budgeting tool that can also keep track of all your financials in one place.

[www.mint.com](http://www.mint.com)

It's a good idea to check your credit history once a year. The website **Annual Credit Report** is the official site that offers you free reports from the three credit reporting agencies. You don't get your FICO score (the three-digit number that tells a lending institution how credit-worthy you are), but you do get to review your credit history, and check for errors or acts of fraud against you.

[www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)





- Just because you have more money doesn't mean you have to spend it. From your service term and maybe other life experiences, you know that you can live successfully on little money, borrowing books and DVDs from the library rather than buying them, and enjoying free community events. Use that sense of thrift to your advantage as your income grows throughout your life. One famous example of living modestly is Warren Buffet—one of the wealthiest businessmen in the world—who still lives in the modest house in Omaha, NE that he bought for \$31,500 in 1957.

## Evaluating the first three months

Many people quit their jobs during the first three months. In the initial months in a new position, a new hire has more time to fully grasp the job description, working conditions, organizational culture, colleagues, and manager—more than they could have during a few interviews, even if they were proactive about researching the organization's culture during the interview process (See Chapter Seven of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* for more on evaluating organizational culture). Beyond those factors, it's also safe to say that a new hire—fresh from the throes of a major job search—may be offered a job at another organization that was slower in making their decision.

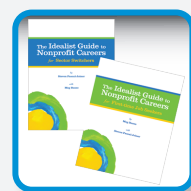
### Action steps

- Time flies. If all is going well, you shouldn't be asking yourself if you want to stick around. With any luck, you'll be diving right into your tasks, getting along with your colleagues, and feeling challenged by the opportunities you have in front of you.
- Evaluation. Just as you relied on first-hand experiences during your term of service, be aware of how you feel when you are on the job now: Excited? Annoyed? Energized? Depleted? Do you have the chance each day to do what you're best at? Are you learning what you hoped to learn? Is your job what you thought it would be? Are the number of hours expected of you per week sustainable? Keeping tabs on yourself and your new activities can help you discern what you love and don't love to do as part of your job.
- Three month review. Many organizations offer new employees a three month review—a time to check in formally with their managers, receive an initial performance evaluation, and find out if any improvements can be made in communication or execution of job tasks. If your organization doesn't offer a standard review to all new employees, take the initiative to request one. Use the three-month mark as a time to take stock in your experiences so far and to see if the job is heading in the direction you had hoped it would, to find out how your supervisor rates your progress and

### AWKWARD TO HAVE MORE INCOME? IT CAN BE

It was a huge transition for me to have an income after two years of VISTA and realizing that I didn't have to count pennies to make it through the month—I had private college loans to pay and other bills to worry about. Related to the workplace, during the initial period of getting to know coworkers and adjusting my relationship to money, I felt the competing pressure of socializing with coworkers (eating or going out) to get to know them and to “belong”, with that of not yet feeling comfortable with the spending of money that often comes with hanging out. Other ways this affected me was in gift-giving, buying accessories for the new job such as a wardrobe and luggage since travel is involved...

—Jung Fitzpatrick, AmeriCorps VISTA alumna and Graduate Education Communications Coordinator, Idealist.org



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

#### Chapter Seven of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*

(free PDF) offers insights on how to determine if your workplace suits your personality and preferences.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch7.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch7.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch7.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch7.html)



accomplishments, and to set goals for the rest of the year. The three-month review is also a good time to formally track and share skill development, accomplishments, and tasks you've been working on.

- **Manager madness.** Most people leave their bosses, not their jobs or their organizations. If you aren't getting what you need from your boss, make sure to ask for it clearly. Keep reading for self-assessment questions that may help you gauge where your relationship with your boss may need improvement.

## Time to move on?

Always take seriously the decision to quit a job very soon after you've started. Give the new job a chance to prove itself to you. But what are some red flags that suggest this may not be the right job for you? *First Break All the Rules*, a book that summarizes results of a survey conducted with millions of employees at organizations and companies around the world, lists the 12 keys to staff satisfaction that managers have some power to control.<sup>1</sup> According to authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, people who offer a no, or a lukewarm yes, to the following questions are the ones most motivated to leave their jobs:

- Do I know what is expected of me at work?
- Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
- At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
- In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
- Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
- Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
- At work, do my opinions seem to count?
- Does the mission of my [organization] make me feel my job is important?
- Are my coworkers committed to doing quality work?
- Do I have a best friend at work?
- In the last six months, has someone talked with me about my progress?
- This last year, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?

The first few months at a new job are rarely the smoothest of times. The learning curve is steep, you're meeting new people with whom you'll spend a good part of your day, and you're adjusting to the new requirements of your position. This is a period when it pays to persevere. Take more time to understand your role, gain ownership over your projects, understand the organizational culture, and bond with others on staff.

<sup>1</sup> Buckingham, Marcus and Curt Coffman. *First Break All the Rules: What the World's Great Managers Do Differently* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999

## THE FIRST 100 DAYS: TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL START

- Don't be unprepared for your first day; go back and review all of the research you did on the organization during the application process.
- 90 percent listen, 10 percent talk is a good initial rule of thumb.
- Ask which of your new colleagues will be particularly beneficial to speak with early on—people who know your work area well or have specific institutional knowledge to share—then make a point to chat with them.
- Seek out a mentor within the organization.
- Have a frank discussion with your manager about any unwritten rules or expectations. Let them know you're open to revisiting the topic as new situations crop up. Also feel free to seek clarification of performance metrics and expectations.
- Be aware of (but avoid getting caught up in) the always-present office politics. Again, listen much more than you speak.
- Don't go in thinking you'll "fix" everything. If you want to change the way something's always been done, be modest, patient, and polite with your ideas.
- (In the beginning), it's okay to not know where the bathroom is. Or the kitchen. Or the fax machine. Or...
- Pay attention to office conventions and abide by them, at least until you understand the environment. Even relatively informal offices may still have some taboos about dress codes or the manner in which staff address one another—give yourself a chance to learn these often unwritten "rules."
- Taking vacation during your first few months may not be allowed, and is probably not a good idea if you can avoid it.
- Be conscious of potentially annoying habits like gum-chewing, mobile phone ring tones, long or loud phone calls, humming, singing, and pen-tapping.





## BEA'S STORY: THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

Bea has been hired by the nonprofit Farm Adventure to implement the expansion of its Kids2Farm program, introducing children to local organic farms through summer camps and field trip tours and cooking classes. Bea has felt very lucky in finding her dream job before her term of service ended. She's been excited to leverage her relationships with organic farmers in the region to teach kids and create a new generation of consumers for the organic food movement.

However, until recently she has had no idea how many serious adjustments she would need to make in her new role. For starters, she didn't realize that while farmers are ecstatic to sell their produce to public schools (to them, it means a reliable source of income), it is much harder for them to commit the money and time to opening up their farms to an after-school program and the responsibility of supervising the kids. The "pilot" program that Bea read about was somewhat successful, but Farm Adventure only partnered with a single farm, and that farm recently decided to stop hosting the project.

She learns very fast that the fundamental business model of Kids2Farm is flawed. It offers too little to the farms. Worse, Bea doesn't have the clout at her organization to change the way the system is supposed to work.

Her manager, Sophie, tells her, "We've hired you because we have confidence that you can get this done." On the surface it sounds like a vote of confidence, but underneath—and against her better judgment—Bea hears a threat: "If you cannot get this done, we shouldn't have hired you to begin with." Bea is almost certain she's going to lose her job.

Another troubling aspect of her new role is Bea no longer has a team leader to coach her through the difficult times. Jim, her team leader from her service corps, is very busy with his own new job in an academic library; he's been uncharacteristically formal on their recent phone calls.

Bea's mentor, Julia, encourages Bea to call some farmers she knows well to see if they have some insights.

Bea decides to call Lianne, a farmer who was a mentor to Bea during her term of service last year. Together they come up with a plan. If it is successful, Lianne will spread the word to other farmers herself. The idea is to initially focus on developing an internship program for a limited number of high schoolers. They could learn how to *run* a farm—how to build structures the farm needs to grow crops year-round; how to propagate, plant, and harvest the crops; how to work in a greenhouse. Then the high schoolers would be *contributing* to the farm, and this eventually would free up some time for the farm workers who would be able to



### BEA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

guide them and coordinate other aspects of the program. If successful, the high schoolers could become volunteer leaders during the second semester of the program, and with support, they could lead elementary-aged kids on the tours.

Bea still would have to figure out the liability issues, but she knows a lawyer from her term of service who might be able to help her. And at least she now has a farm willing to try the partnership. With some convincing, Sophie signs on to the idea.

Bea's first months on the job have been rocky but in the end, validating. She is glad she wasn't fired and didn't have to quit. She is pleased **she has been able to persevere**. And although she needed to adjust to life without a team leader and other close supporters, she is really glad **she has the relationships from her service year** with Julia, Lianne, and others.

## Section two: Career growth beyond your service term

As you start your new career, you'll want to stay on top of trends and job opportunities in your field, and to continue building skills and networks. Chapter Eleven of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* offers strategies for staying "job-search-ready," including:

- Updating your "master" resume (the resume that is multiple pages in length, listing everything you've done, which you tailor to one or two pages each time you apply for a job)
- Documenting your accomplishments (see [Part One](#) of this *Companion*)
- Keeping your options open
- Continuing to assess yourself

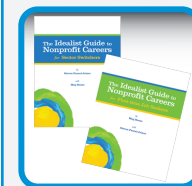
In addition, other ways to keep yourself in shape professionally include ongoing self assessment and evaluation, networking, keeping your skills current, and building your skills. All of these are discussed below.

### Ongoing self assessment and evaluation

As you get settled in a new career, take the time to reflect on your satisfaction with your work, and whether the role you're playing, the organization you've joined, and the issue you are tackling all still move you in the direction you want to go.



Stay on top of trends and job opportunities in your field, and continue building skills and networks."



#### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

##### Chapter Eleven of *The*

*Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) focuses on simple ways to keep yourself primed for the possibility of future transitions.

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch11.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html](http://www.idealism.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch11.html)



Beyond evaluating your current job and organization, think about the field you are working in, the role you are playing. Are you excited about the key tasks in your position description, or do you procrastinate on them by tackling minor activities? Are you curious to learn more and improve your skills? Does recapping your day with friends usually make you happy—or do you find yourself avoiding mention of your work life as much as possible?

As part of ongoing self assessment and evaluation, it's wise to continue to look at job openings from time to time—what else is out there, who is hiring, and how much money are people with your skills making? Do other jobs seem like a better fit? What strategic networks, new skills, and trends should you be adopting to keep up with current demands in the market?

If you completed the Career Tracks Exercise—described in [Part One](#) of this *Companion* and in more detail in Chapter Three of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers*—you came up with a few career tracks for yourself. Choosing several career tracks helps you focus your job search and articulate your career goals. As you consider your options moving forward, you can keep in mind the career tracks you created, and add new ones as you develop new passions and skill sets.

Evaluating your experience, continuing to make your qualifications relevant, and keeping an eye on the job market will help you determine when the next move might be necessary.



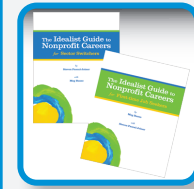
### CESAR'S STORY: ONGOING SELF ASSESSMENT

Cesar ends his service at the community center for immigrants and continues the part-time job he started during his term, working the front desk at the YMCA. All of his savings have gone to make car payments and he worries that without a financial safety net he might have to sell his car. Fortunately, he has been able to enroll in the Massachusetts health plan.

Within a few weeks, his former supervisor Karen calls him. Karen explains that the community center where Cesar has recently ended his service has funding for a new corps member who wouldn't be a classroom teacher. Cesar asks if she can email him more information about the opportunity.

Cesar looks at the information she sends. The new position focuses on building the capacity of the host site, to increase the community center's ability to offer GED test preparation support to refugees with limited English skills. His role would be to help establish a new adult basic education program, and to find funding to help launch the program the following year.

The more Cesar reads, the more he feels that another term of service would give



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

You can find  
the complete

Career Tracks Exercise in **Chapter Three** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch3.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch3.html)





### CESAR'S STORY (CONTINUED)

him the training he needs to continue serving immigrants and refugees—his few weeks away from this community has helped him realize how important they've been to him. The new role would also help him make the switch from direct service to program management—definitely the direction he wants to go in his career.

Cesar is happy at the thought that he wouldn't have to teach in the classroom, but could still be involved in the lives and education of the people he's come to care about at the center. He considers the possibility over a long weekend, praying to make the right decision. Monday, he applies for the non-teaching corps member position. Karen hires him.

While the position suits him, there are a few downsides: the health plan for the service corps is very limited, and the pay is such that he can no longer afford his monthly car payments. Cesar decides to stick with his state health plan and sell his car, putting the money into his savings account in case he needs it this year. He resigns himself to using public transportation for most trips, and to carpool if he needs to, especially when it's crucial to be on time.

As his second term of service progresses, Cesar finds himself continuing to engage in the discernment process he began last year. Because so much of his work involves building community partnerships and meeting new people who can help him build his program, he finds that networking is both easier and more valuable to him this year in his non-teaching role. He develops deeper relationships with a few of the community center's students, because they're serving on his advisory board—helping him shape the new program. The new term also gives him the chance to ask a wide array of people about their career paths, thereby getting advice about his own next steps.

He learns a great deal about the field of adult basic education, and about grant-writing. He realizes that his skills as a salesman can actually come in handy for “selling” his program to potential partners and funders. He is excited about his new role and relieved as the disparate experiences he's had all come together to help him serve the community better. He had faith that things would come together, and he is thankful that they have.



**Giving back to your network is one form of service that can carry you through the rest of your life.”**

## Networking after your service program

Giving back to your networks—by sharing time, resources, and energy—is one form of service that can carry you through the rest of your life, no matter what you choose to do for a career. Likewise, networks are naturally helpful to you as you advance your career. Just as you collaborated with organizations and leaders as a corps member, as a professional you can draw on the strength of your networks to meet new people,



learn about news and trends in your field, and work together to build a better future for your community.

## Existing relationships

Before you lose track of all of the people who helped you get to the starting line of your new job, take time to update everyone with your current contact information, and thank the people who helped you reach your new position. For the most part, it's okay to send a mass email to update people with your new contact information. Similarly, a Facebook update or a Twitter message is a wonderful way for your casual connections to learn your news. You might, however, seriously consider writing individual thank you notes or emails to people who were key to your job search. Don't be stingy about thanking people—even if someone's job lead didn't work out for you, they tried and will want to know that you landed on your feet.

As you start in your new role, also consider reaching out to people in your existing networks to brainstorm ways to continue working together in meaningful collaborations—especially if you are in the same community where you served in the corps.

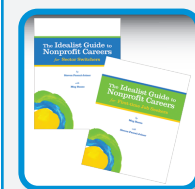
## Building new relationships

When you were a corps member, you may have had to start from scratch establishing an entirely new network of partners, mentors, and allies in your community. Look back on what helped you succeed in building those ties as you move on in your new role. Are there any specific people, groups, or networking events that got you started? Anything that can help you now, again, as you rebuild? Take some time to look back to page 32 in [Part One](#) of this *Companion* at the discussion about building new community partners.

## How your service corps network is unique

Chapter Four of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* covers a wide range of groups you should consider as part of your network, including social clubs, alumni of your school, and people in your faith community. As an alum of a service corps, you have additional networks—allies from the service corps community, people who may be more willing to open their door to you. These allies may include:

**Alumni of your own service program**—people who shared your term, who came along before or after you, and people who served in your city, state, or host country, as well as people who served in other places. If it exists, your service corps staff probably bragged about its alumni group from the moment you expressed an interest in applying for the corps. If one doesn't exist—or is not active locally—consider being part of the movement to create an alumni group for your corps. Your service network may extend far and wide, and can help you take the ongoing pulse of national and international trends in public service.



### TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

Learn more about groups

you can network with in **Chapter Four** of *The Idealist Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF).

**First-time Job Seekers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch4.html)

**Sector Switchers version**  
[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch4.html)



**Alumni of other service corps**—related to yours or not. Service corps participation is humbling—little pay, long hours, giant learning curve, cross-cultural challenges. You may find you have a lot in common with former participants of other service corps, and appreciate the diverse experience others bring to projects on which you partner. Find out if there is an alumni group in your community and learn how to get involved. See a list of alumni groups at [www.idealists.org/service](http://www.idealists.org/service).

**Host site staff and other community members you worked with as a corps member**—stay in touch with the people you worked with during your term of service. The staff of your host site and other organizations will find you a valuable member of their network as you progress in your career, and you should feel comfortable to call on them for assistance, connections, and advice. They will want to hear from you. You can keep them in the loop with your new job by sending emails occasionally, asking for an insight here or there, or remembering them on their birthday.

**Your service corps program staff and currently serving corps members**—alone or with other alumni, you can be a source of support for your program as an advocate, donor, and mentor for current members. If you live nearby, volunteer to speak on a panel discussion, join the board of directors or ambassadors, or host a potluck for the incoming group. Join a service project that current corps members organize. Volunteer to recruit new corps members, and serve as a community reader for host site proposals. If your corps has no formal alumni group, listserv, or Facebook page, consider organizing one, starting with your peers, and gradually reaching out to current and past corps members. Stay in touch with your own team.

Finally, as you embark on a new job in public service, you may not have to try hard to stay in touch with some former corps members. Among your colleagues in your new job may be many graduates of service corps. A recent study has shown that eight years out, two-thirds of AmeriCorps alums are still engaged in nonprofit and government careers.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, two-thirds of Teach For America corps members stay in the education field after their term ends; in other teaching corps whose express mission is to create new teachers, the statistics are often even higher.

If you are living in a new place now, don't forget to build a personal network, too. It's easy to feel lonely in a new place at first, even if you have a handful of friends there. But after the first few months you'll start to feel more adjusted. Take the time to pursue your hobbies and talk to people you meet. Volunteering is a good way to contribute to your new town, meet interesting and smart people who are volunteering alongside you, and learn what's happening in your area.

<sup>2</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service and Abt Associates Inc., "Still Serving: Measuring the Eight-Year Impact of AmeriCorps on Alumni" May 2008. Available at: [www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/08\\_0513\\_longstudy\\_report.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/08_0513_longstudy_report.pdf)

## ADVOCATING FOR YOUR SERVICE CORPS

If you are eager to advocate for national and international service now that you are an alum, here are some places to get started:

**AmeriCorps Alums**, the independent group of former AmeriCorps members, includes in its mission national service advocacy. [www.americorpsalums.org](http://www.americorpsalums.org)

**National Peace Corps Association**, the independent organization of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, offers support to returning volunteers and also advocates for Peace Corps. [www.peacecorpsconnect.org](http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org)

**Service Nation**, a campaign of Be the Change, Inc., is a coalition of hundreds of nonprofits that has worked to expand service opportunities and increase volunteerism and citizenship in the United States. [www.servicenation.org](http://www.servicenation.org)

**Voices For National Service** works to advocate for the growth and strengthening of national service, while educating the public and elected leaders about the impact of national service. It links to legislation summaries and texts, and sponsors an annual Capitol Hill Day to bring service corps alumni to meet their elected officials and talk about their service experiences. [www.voicesforservice.org](http://www.voicesforservice.org)

## LISTEN TO A PODCAST

Check out the Idealists.org Careers podcast interview with Bob Grimm from The Corporation for National and Community Service, about the what former AmeriCorps members are doing eight years out:

<http://thenewservice.wordpress.com/2008/08/15/eightyearsoutpodcast/>





### ACE'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Ace apprentices at Solar NOLA, installing solar panels to increase the energy efficiency of recently rebuilt homes in New Orleans. He gets along with his mentor Rod and enjoys making a decent pay check. But he's not sure that installing solar panels will be his life's work. Once he learns the fundamentals and moves beyond his apprenticeship, he finds the work repetitive. He loves the others on his crew, though, and he respects Rod's leadership and the opportunity to learn a trade.

He has remained friends with his old teammates from his service corps. One day his friends Mike and Todd approach him about a business idea they have. They want to start a company that deconstructs old buildings and houses and resells the salvageable materials in a retail store. Mike and Todd anticipate needing deconstruction specialists and a business manager to run the store and market the business. Because they all took apart buildings when they were in the corps together, they hope that Ace could lead the deconstruction team.

Ace loves the idea. He acknowledges that he still has a lot to learn, but he looks forward to taking apart buildings in a way that preserves their component parts, and learning to tell the difference between materials that will go for resale and the materials that will have to be recycled or trashed. He accepts the job offer, though he stays on part-time with Solar NOLA until the new business picks up speed and offers him a steady income so he can support himself and his daughter.

## Keeping your knowledge and skills current

You can stay up to date with your field by following industry journals, online newsletters, and blogs.

To find out what the journals are in your field, look online, or ask a librarian, colleagues, or counterparts at other organizations. If you can't afford your own subscription to journals, try finding these publications at a library. Many professional associations have their own journals with the latest trends and research affecting the field.

Blogs are a good source of free, current information with links to other relevant news sources. One way to search for relevant journals and blogs is to type keywords into a web search window. Alternately, you can create a Google Alert ([www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) using your keywords. Anytime new content appears on the web using your

### THE NEW SERVICE: A BLOG FOR SERVICE FOLKS

The *New Service* blog from Idealist.org and partners covers career and education topics for service corps members, staff, and alumni. Amy Potthast, the author of this *Companion*, is the editor of The New Service.

[www.idealistservice.com](http://www.idealistservice.com)



same keywords, you'll get an email about it. Google Alerts saves you time by sending search results to you regularly. Reading through these search results and following their links can help you identify the leading people and organizations in your field, learn the vocabulary useful for talking about your work, and understand the controversies and opportunities of the day.

As you find blogs that you want to read regularly, subscribe to them using a blog reader like Google Reader or Netvibes. A blog reader is similar to an extra email inbox just for new blog posts; they allow you to subscribe to any RSS feed. (Look for the RSS icon in your web browser's window—the icon is a blue or orange square with three diagonal stripes. After you've created an account in a blog reader and have logged in to it, click on the RSS icon to subscribe. You can also copy and paste the blog's URL into the reader.) Blog readers also allow you to share posts with others, and to email blog posts to friends.

Leaving blog comments is also a great networking tool to get to know the big players in the field and to get your name on their radar. Most bloggers—even the big ones—read comments and notice when someone is an active and ongoing participant on their sites. If you plan to leave a comment on a blog post, maintain a professional tone (you don't know who will read the comment); be thoughtful—assume your comment will remain visible to everyone forever; make sure you've read the blog post thoroughly; and offer your further thoughts and insights. It's fine to disagree and to offer counter-arguments. If you have questions for the blog post's author, be sure to leave your email address in case they want to follow up with you directly.

You might find you'd like to join the conversation and start your own blog. Writing regularly for your own blog (or sharing one with friends) is a big commitment to make, but it can inspire you to stay up-to-date on what is going on in your field more than reading blogs regularly does. Blogging about professional topics opens the door to new networks—people who are passionate about the same things you are, and who find you through your blog. Blogging also gives your prospective employers a chance to glimpse your writing style and your familiarity with the field.

Likewise, Twitter is a way to find and connect with people who care about issues you do, or play similar roles within their organizations. To hone in on these people, search keywords through Twitter's "Find People" function, or through the search tool on your preferred Twitter client. On some clients, such as Tweet Deck, you can keep several searches running all the time in their own window. See what people are talking about, what trends they point to, and how you can keep your organization's practices current.



RSS feed icon



Also stay current through regular conversations with your network (see above) and by attending events and relevant meetings and conferences for your field, when possible. Finally, if a local university offers classes or training in your field, request reading suggestions or a copy of course syllabi from professors or department administrators.



### DEENA'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Deena, the former bakery owner who came to volunteer in small business development in Ecuador, has prepared very well for her career transition during the last year of her term. Beyond building solid relationships with people who were well informed about opportunities, Deena has accomplished a great deal, helped elevate the incomes of dozens of families, and documented her work in numbers, writing, and photos. But as her service comes to a close, she senses she hasn't done enough for her own career transition—or perhaps, that more is out of her control than she'd previously thought.

She's applied for many jobs throughout the developing world that would build on her skills, and very few people have gotten back to her. Over beer with Lloyd, a fellow international volunteer, he suggests she isn't using her networks enough *now* to actually secure interviews with these organizations and catch their attention. He suggests she drop names more.

“So-and-so let me know about this opening,” Lloyd says. “Put yourself in their shoes. You are thousands of miles away from the office where your cover letter's being read. The farther you are, the more anonymous and possibly irrelevant you'll seem—unless they have programs on the ground in Ecuador. But even then, they'll want to know if their staff in Ecuador is acquainted with you and your work. Don't make them *ask*. Just *tell* them who you know.”

Taking Lloyd's advice, Deena starts to include the names of mutual contacts in her cover letters, and even asks people she knows to reach out to hiring organizations, and to vouch for her early in the application process—before hiring managers make decisions about whom to interview.

As part of this effort, Deena gets in touch with many of the people in her network again, including Veronica. Veronica works for the U.S. State Department and used to be stationed at the embassy in Quito, Ecuador. Before she left, Veronica was very helpful to Deena.

Veronica emails Deena right back. She tells Deena about a new micro-credit organization getting off the ground in Phoenix. “I know you want to work abroad, but this place might be a good fit for you right now.”

The organization, NativeEntrepreneurs.org, aims to use the internet to start



### DEENA'S STORY (CONTINUED)

connecting micro-philanthropists with start-up businesses on American Indian reservations. Veronica describes it as “a Kiva.org for Native American entrepreneurs.” And it needs people like Deena, trained in cultivating and training new entrepreneurs, and helping them through the micro-loan process.

Deena reads the position description on Idealist.org. She doesn't have the education background in business administration that the organization is looking for, but she agrees it's worth a shot. Before Deena has even sent in her resume and cover letter, Veronica sends a note to the founder of the new organization, letting him know to expect to hear from a winning candidate soon.

In the end, the hiring manager at NativeEntrepreneurs.org is willing to wait until Deena's term is up and to interview her in person. Within a month of the first interview, Deena accepts her new position and relocates to Phoenix—a city she's barely visited. But she had been willing to move anywhere for the right fit.

She really enjoys her new position, but begins to realize why a Masters in Business Administration would be helpful. One of her new colleagues is a recent graduate of an international business school in Glendale, not too far away. Deena starts doing her research on the school and discovers that it would be a great place for her to study because it has both an international perspective and a part-time MBA program for professionals.



Whatever the barriers, it's worth it to seek out professional development and education.”

## Continuing to build your skills

One challenge many recent corps members face is the sudden dearth of training. Those free, mandatory, in-service trainings you may have taken for granted last year may be starting to look awfully good to you in hindsight. Scholarships that flowed freely to you as a service corps participant may not be as easy to come by now that you are a permanent staff member of an organization. Whatever the barriers, it's still worth it to seek out professional development and education.

[Part One](#) of this *Companion* offers many suggestions for locating training opportunities in your community. If you're living someplace new, you may need to start researching professional development opportunities from scratch. Otherwise, you can seek support from the organizations you learned about as a service corps participant.

Besides formal professional development training, other avenues for building skills include:

**Volunteering, including board service.** Contributing your time to a nonprofit or school can offer you a chance to give back to your local community, build new



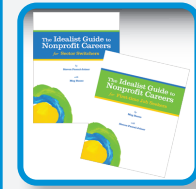
skills, and even receive (free!) training. You may have a chance to take leadership on a project, and raise your profile within the organization you're serving. By doing your best job—as you did during your term of service—you'll develop fans and build relationships that may be key to getting your “day job” done well. Board service comes with some strings attached—often a minimum financial commitment, regular meetings, and legal responsibilities.

**Going to school part-time, or taking one class at a time.** Going back to school is often perceived as an all-encompassing proposition, but increasingly it's possible to balance both work and study. Part-time programs, single classes, courses on evenings and weekends, and distance/online learning are all alternatives to the traditional full-time approach. Weigh the many advantages to you, such as the ability to continue earning an income while in school, against disadvantages like having little time for personal pursuits, friends, and family. And though it is possible, balancing study with work and family can also be exhausting—read more on Idealist's Public Service Graduate Education Resource Center ([www.idealists.org/gradschool](http://www.idealists.org/gradschool)).

Programs and individual courses geared towards working professionals are increasingly available at community colleges, universities, and grad schools. Schools may offer evening and weekend classes, online discussions, and other formats that facilitate student participation at a time and place convenient for them.

Individual courses can help you prepare for college or grad school, master material better and faster than simply reading, brush up on a subject you used to know well, and understand principles in a field more clearly. Courses may be offered by the relevant department, or through a department called Continuing Education or Community Education. Private, for-profit schools exist that can also help you. For example, Berlitz is a well known franchise of language schools.

**Certification.** A certification program is a set of courses in a particular field that leads to certificate status or a license to practice. Whether you need the skills to improve your current work or need a license to start practicing in your field, certification demonstrates to you and to potential employers that you have attained certain knowledge of and experience in your field. Field requirements often dictate both what certifications exist, and the means to obtain them. Therefore, prerequisites for certification can include any combination of the following: completing coursework, earning a degree, passing examinations, and/or successfully completing an internship or other experiential component. Sometimes certification is part of a degree program, while other times it's independent.



## TIE-IN WITH THE IDEALIST GUIDES

### Chapter Five of *The Idealist*

*Guides to Nonprofit Careers* (free PDF) contains short discussions of volunteering, board service, further education, and other ways to strengthen your skills and enhance your knowledge.

#### First-time Job Seekers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/firsttime/ch5.html)

#### Sector Switchers version

[www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html](http://www.idealists.org/en/career/guide/sectorswitcher/ch5.html)





### ED'S STORY: CONTINUED CAREER GROWTH

Ed relocates to Portland, OR after serving two years as a volunteer English teacher at a college in China. He moves in with his daughter's family, with the plan to move out and find his own apartment after a month. But since he's such a help around the house, his daughter and her husband invite him to stay indefinitely, which also helps him save on rent.

He divides his time between taking care of his grandkids and the part-time job tutoring adult job seekers at a nonprofit computer lab that he secured before he left China. Very soon after starting his new job, another instructor who teaches basic accounting and spreadsheet skills announces she is quitting. Ed isn't looking for more hours, but he is willing to step up to help out in a pinch. Fortunately, the computer lab finds a permanent replacement after three weeks, but Ed realizes that he would be a stronger teacher if he knew the accounting and spreadsheet software better.

He begins looking for his own classes to take and finds a community college that offers a certification program in accounting software; the price is manageable so he enrolls. After many decades as a teacher, he is tickled to be on the other side of the classroom again. He finds that being a computer student really improves his ability to be an effective computer teacher, because it puts him in the position of beginner, and he is reminded of how foreign a new concept can seem.

After two terms at the community college, Ed earns his certification. He uses it to ask for a pay raise at the lab. His boss offers him a modest raise, but also invites him to take over the accounting class, because the "permanent replacement" has already moved on. Ed accepts, and enjoys practicing his new skills with the students. He feels proud of what he's accomplished. Not bad for an old coot, he thinks.

## Conclusion

If you took advantage of your term of service opportunity to its fullest potential—by engaging with others in your community and field, collaborating, exercising new skill sets, and figuring out how well it all suited you—then you already know best practices for furthering your career as a new professional.

Starting out as a new professional has some great perks—a salary, for starters. But you may at first find yourself missing some of the advantages of the old corps, like the training and support you probably took for granted. With time you'll adjust and learn to lean on your manager, colleagues, and network for continued learning and growth.



## SUMMARY

Even after successfully transitioning into your post-service position, you may still have some adjusting to do. Getting the job isn't so much the end of the transition, as a new beginning.

**New employees often experience a few shocks** (pages 92-102) as they get settled into their new job. Sometimes it takes time to get acclimated to the office culture or feel comfortable interacting with your coworkers. Even seemingly mundane matters like new norms for clothing can impact your adjustment. Other issues have to do with the new levels of responsibility in your role, the open-ended nature of many jobs (they don't have a pre-determined end date like many service corps), and—yes—even the question of how to handle the income that accompanies your work. You may also wonder if you've made the right decision in accepting this job. Continuing self assessment and patience can go a long way toward smoothing out these potential bumps in the road.

Now that you've got a job, you may also be tempted to abandon (or at least pack away) some of the good habits that got you through your transition—that would be a mistake! In order to stay ready for the opportunities and challenges that await you, **continue to focus on your career growth** (pages 102-112). Ways to do this include regular self assessment and evaluation of your present situation and goals, continuing to nurture and contribute to your network, and maintaining the skills and knowledge you already have while also seeking opportunities to acquire new skills and abilities.

## You are here

- This is **Part Three**. The entire book is available free of charge at [www.idealists.org/servicecompanion](http://www.idealists.org/servicecompanion).

### About Action Without Borders, Idealist.org, and this book

**Action Without Borders** is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 with offices in the United States and Argentina. [Idealist.org](http://www.idealists.org), a project of Action Without Borders, is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, find opportunities and supporters, and turn their good intentions into action.

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