If you have never had an internship, or any job more professional than student assistant, you might not be aware of what most employers will expect. You may be seen as an adequate employee, or you can set yourself apart as the “go to” person. Here are some tips to becoming a savvy new employee and making powerful career moves.

EXHIBIT A “CAN-DO” ATTITUDE
Attitude speaks loud and clear and makes a lasting impression, so make sure that yours is one of your greatest assets. Take on any task assigned—no matter how small—with enthusiasm. Take the initiative to acquire new skills. Accept criticism graciously and maintain a sense of humor.

LEARN THE UNWRITTEN RULES
Get to know your co-workers early in your new job. They will quickly help you figure out the culture in which you will be working. You will need to adapt, observe, learn and process a large volume of information. Watch closely how things get done. Ask questions and pay attention to how people interact with each other.

TAKE YOUR ASSIGNMENTS SERIOUSLY
Build a reputation for being dependable. Be diligent and accurate in your work. As an entry-level employee, your supervisor knows that there will be an initial learning curve for you and will make allowances for mistakes. Learn from your errors. Your responsibilities and the expectations of others will grow.

MEET DEADLINES
Always assume the responsibility to ask when an assignment is due. This will help you to understand your supervisor’s priorities and to manage your time accordingly. Alert your boss in advance if you will be unable to meet expectations. This will show respect and professional maturity.

BE PROFESSIONAL
Professional behavior includes being at work on time every day, not five minutes late, and staying until the customary closing time. Never gossip—it will come back to hurt you. Don’t have long or frequent conversations with co-workers about non-work topics. Don’t use profanity or tell off-color jokes. Stay away from talking about religion or politics—you might unnecessarily alienate some people. Dress conservatively and be sure you know the organization’s dress code.

COMMUNICATE RESPECTFULLY
Assume that everyone else knows more than you do. However, don’t be afraid to present useful ideas that may save time or money or solve problems. Make sure, however, that your style does not come across as cocky. Employers value assertiveness but not aggressiveness. Find out the proper way to address individuals, including customers. Maintain a pleasant and respectful demeanor with every person, regardless of his or her rank.

BE FLEXIBLE
Accept a wide variety of tasks, even those that may not relate directly to your assignments or those that may seem like grunt work. Your willingness to go the extra mile, especially during “crunch time,” will help you carve the way to assuming greater responsibilities.

BE A TEAM PLAYER
Learn how your position fits into the grand scheme of things and keep a keen eye on getting the job done. In today’s work environment, success is often defined along the lines of your ability to get along with and interact with others. You’re a winner only if your team wins.

GET A MENTOR
Identify at least one individual to serve as your mentor or professional guardian. It should be someone who is willing to take a personal interest in your career development and success. Once you know your way around, begin to network wisely and get “plugged in” by associating with seasoned employees who may share their knowledge, perspectives and insights.

Adapted from How to Turn Your Internship into a Full-Time Job, written by Lina Melkonian, Director of Development at San Jose State University, College of Engineering.