



10 Things I Wish I Had Known My First Year Out of School

Lauren E. Schaubert

10 Know the area you want to live in and what the commute is realistically going to be. A job in Pasadena is great, but when you live in the West Valley, the commute will be 2.5 hours at times, depending on accidents and weather conditions.

9 Know that you have mentorship and a colleague to question. My first job out of school I took because it made financial sense to pay for my OTD degree; however, there was no other OT there, and this made my first year as a professional a challenging and emotional journey.

8 Know your learning style. It is great to find out the job offers mentorship, but ask those questions about how the mentoring is provided. Is it through a website of PowerPoints or videos on file? Is it a person that you directly click with and feel comfortable with asking questions any time, or someone who prefers to be watched and then asked questions later?

7 Trust your gut. Yes, you are new, but you have been trained in right and wrong. Know when a situation is not right for you, whether it be a company, a job, or a particular case. Your instincts and your style help make you the practitioner you are, and you have these instincts for a reason. If a job site doesn't feel right, please don't try and convince yourself that it will get better. I made that choice, and I paid a price.

6 Always have an answer for clients. That answer may be, "You know, I want to do a little more research and really look into what will work best for you." This is a valid answer and means more to your client than stuttering and saying you have to look it up. Confidence means a lot to the client relationship.

5 Know what job sites offer scholarship programs to help with loan debt. In some cases, sites have offered up to \$5,000 toward loan debt when you agree to work for 2 years for the company. Every little bit makes a difference.

4 Know the ins and outs of your salary and benefits. One job may present a higher salary, but it may not be annualized. What are your health benefit and retirement options? A job can be temporary, but you are setting up your future.

3 Everyone has challenging cases, and nobody has all the answers. I know that, even 4 years later, I'm still working on accepting this truth.

2 Look into loan repayment plans that are right for you. Don't just consolidate because all your friends are. That may be best for them, but how would it benefit you?

Most importantly, as you move on with your career and your life, look into the different means of loan forgiveness (for resources related to this and much more, visit www.aota.org/Education-Careers/). Yes, we occupational therapists can even qualify for teacher loan forgiveness!

1 Have fun, smile, and breathe! Occupational therapy is an amazing career, with so many opportunities and experiences. You have so much ahead of you—don't feel like you have to conquer it all at once.