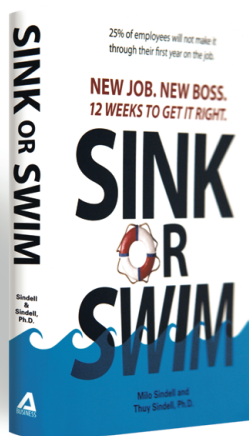


SOUNDVIEW Executive Book Summaries®



by Milo Sindell and
Thuy Sindell, Ph.D.

New Job. New Boss. 12 Weeks to Get It Right.

SINK OR SWIM

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Today, the concept of lifetime employment in the same job or even with a single employer is unimaginable and probably undesirable. The fact is that over time, most people get bored and benefit from a change. Even worse, if you are reporting to a boss who does not treat you particularly well, years of employment in the same situation can be profoundly demoralizing.

What's important for you to understand is that you own your career. You are responsible for setting professional goals, identifying and developing the right skills, and building your resume. Every time you develop new skills, you become even more valuable in the job market.

According to Milo Sindell and Thuy Sindell, Ph.D., the first 12 weeks in a new job are an important time in your life. You worked hard to find the right company, did all the right things to make your resume rise to the top of the pile and aced the interview. Now you've got the job. It's time to establish yourself as a valuable and valued member of your new company.

Your mission is to get up to speed as quickly as possible in your first 12 weeks on the job. Why 12 weeks? In most companies, there is a period of approximately 90 days in which you and the company decide if this new arrangement will work out. That's why first impressions matter. Ninety days is not a long time. Therefore, it is critical that you swim with the current and keep your head above water. Remember, people are watching and paying attention to you; use this positively to your advantage.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The five Sink or Swim skills that will help you make the most of your new opportunity.
- The characteristics of effective casual conversation in the workplace.
- The why, what, who, when and where of creating and delivering your own personal PR message.
- How to define the resources you need for a project through a knowledge-gap analysis.
- How to clarify a company's culture so that you can be more in sync with your corporate environment.
- What steps you need to take to expand your network.

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: SINK OR SWIM

by Milo Sindell and Thuy Sindell, Ph.D.

User Instructions

Companies understand that times have changed: Employees aren't married to the company anymore. To retain their employees, companies must offer a range of benefits. Smart companies understand that it not only takes a competitive salary to attract and retain good employees, but it also takes programs that support employees' needs and interests.

Smart companies, however, also know that all these benefits are not enough to keep the top talent from going to the competition. Therefore, they strive to provide opportunities for employees to learn new skills or change jobs within the company in order to keep people engaged and motivated.

However smart companies may be, you as an employee must also be smart and make the most of your job. You have two responsibilities:

1. A responsibility to your company to do what you were hired to do.
2. A responsibility to yourself to develop your skills, create and identify opportunities, and manage your career.

Your company should be clear about what it expects of you; however, you must also take charge and be clear about your expectations of your employer. What do you want in exchange for contributing your skills, abilities and experience? Besides your salary and health insurance benefits, what else do you want? What about learning opportunities so you can have more skills and be more marketable? What about career advancement? What about a positive work environment?

You won't get what you want if you don't know what you want. When both sets of expectations are clearly defined (i.e., for your company and yourself), you will be able to provide the maximum value to your company and in return have your own needs met.

The Five Sink or Swim Skills

Your first 12 weeks in a new job are crucial. During these initial weeks, there are five Sink or Swim skills that, when applied at the right time, can ensure that you make the most of your new opportunity.

The five Sink or Swim skills are:

- **Goals:** Get clear on your role, responsibilities, projects and where you want to be in your new company and career. Set goals to get you where you want to be.
- **Time:** Learn the most important elements of effective time management and fine-tune how to apply them for maximum results. Be productive and focused.
- **Knowledge:** Get the right knowledge to do your job, develop your network of resources, identify ways to develop your own skills and share what you know with others. Have the right information when you need it and demonstrate your value to others.
- **Team:** Learn what it means to be a team player and how to be one even if you are not part of a team. Work well with others and build a lasting network of partnerships.
- **Image:** Focus on the skills of identifying and crafting the right professional image. Clearly communicate who you are and what you stand for. ■

Week 1: Case the Joint

It's amazing how much excitement and attention you put into your first day of work. The goal is to keep just as excited and motivated throughout the next 12 weeks and beyond. In this first week, focus on gathering information to better understand your work environment. Case the joint and figure out the lay of the land.

What does it mean to "case the joint"? It means that you
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Summary: SINK OR SWIM

Week 1: Case the Joint

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need to figure out how your new company operates. While this may sound like an easy thing to do, it does take some time to figure out the details of how your company works. In the first few days of the job, this information may not be readily available, or fellow employees may be too busy to give you a full rundown on operations.

As you go through your first week, keep in mind the old adage: Knowledge and information are powerful, but having the right knowledge and information is power. If you have the right information at the start of your job, you have the power to make the best decisions during your first critical days at work.

Goals: Why Am I Here?

This is a good question to ask and answer in the first week. As you will find through the first 12 weeks on the job and beyond, there are employees who have become separated from their original career paths and float around the corporate hallways. This is not you. A top priority for this week is to understand your job responsibilities, roles and projects.

Part of the responsibility for answering “Why am I here?” lies with your manager. Meet with him or her sometime during your first week. This will enable you to understand what’s expected of you in terms of projects as well as expectations for the first few weeks on the job.

You may have just entered a situation in which you are thrown directly into the fire and are expected to jump in and get started on a project immediately. Or, you may have the luxury of having a manager who wants you to spend the first few weeks getting to know your new environment, the company and your co-workers.

The Art of Casual Conversation

The way you talk and the kind of conversations you have in your first week are also important components of the initial impression you leave. Notice how employees in your company talk to and greet one another. These are important things to keep in mind before you are overly demonstrative on your few first days on the job. Greet co-workers appropriately.

In this first week, keep your introductory conversations to surface-level information, such as your experience and a few personal facts. Keep your conversations warm, cordial and professional. The goal is to build relationships with co-workers, not scare them away. Also remember that the world does not revolve around you. In this first week, your focus is to case the joint

and gather information. Be sure to ask others about their background, history with the company and current projects on which they are working.

The goal of the first week is to make introductions and have casual conversations. This means that your conversations may last anywhere from one minute to 10 minutes in the hallway to a one-hour lunch. The length of the conversation should be appropriate to the setting. Do not make others hostages of your conversations. Keep them to the appropriate length. Look for telltale signs that others are itching to leave and gracefully allow them to exit.

Your ability to start off with a strong impression in both your appearance and conversational skills will provide a foundation for others to want to build relationships with you. ■

Week 2: Get a Firm Grip

During these first weeks on the job you will be hard at work ensuring that you have what you need to make a positive impact. In order to set the right direction and demonstrate results, you will need to understand how your work correlates to your team’s and company’s goals.

Defining these links will give you direction and motivation because it will enable you to understand how your job directly relates to your company’s success. Your objective in week two is to get a firm grip on the details of your job and how your role relates to the products and services the company delivers to its customers.

Gap Analysis

As you get a clearer understanding about the various components that relate to your project and goals, it should become apparent which resources you need to get work completed. The first step is to define what you need by way of a knowledge-gap analysis. What is a gap analysis? In the context of your goals, it is a method to define where you are, where you need to be and what it will take to get there. A gap analysis identifies the skills, information and knowledge you will need.

To perform a knowledge-gap analysis, define your overall job responsibilities and the projects you’ve been given. For each project, define the following:

- What information do you need to successfully complete the job?
- What information do you currently have?
- What information will you need to acquire?

Once you have a gap analysis completed for a project, review it and pursue the information you need to accomplish the project. ■

Week 3: Buckle Down

Your broader objective for this week is to buckle down. This means you will get going on your projects and confirm your progress with your manager. You will continue to assess and practice your time-management skills and team skills and to polish your image skills by practicing when to ask questions, inform others and stay silent. You are on track to your destination.

Reinventing the Wheel

In week three, your quest for knowledge will focus on the various resources you will need. Start with the resources that are available around you. Teammates and co-workers are good sources of information. As you begin to gather the necessary resources, it is important that you do a thorough job of identifying the people and information that impact your projects.

There is a good possibility that similar efforts might have been made by people within and outside of your company. It will be especially valuable to talk with people in your company about similar projects they've worked on, resources they can share with you, words of advice and pitfalls to avoid. You will notice as you are working on your project that there may be additional skills that it would be helpful for you to develop.

However, unless you like to do more work, what is the point of reinventing the wheel? The efficient and effective way of getting your projects completed is to figure out what has already been done. No matter what you are working on, odds are that others have walked a similar path. It will save you and your company time, money and effort if you identify and build upon existing

work and resources. This can even inspire new ideas and ways of approaching a problem.

Don't be too proud to ask. There are tons of lessons and great bits of knowledge to be gathered from co-workers and teammates. Get insight on the subtle nuances they have figured out about how things get done in your company. This kind of knowledge comes only from experience.

As you conclude each of your conversations, make sure to always ask the following: "Is there anybody else you would recommend I should talk to about this?" No matter how dry a well your initial contact might have been as a knowledge source, that person may have connections that will provide the information you seek.

Keep in mind, however, when building upon the existing work of your colleagues and company, obviously you should not plagiarize. Obey all patent, trademark and copyright laws. In addition, give your contributors credit. Publicly thank people for their knowledge and contributions. This is extremely important unless you want to quickly torch your bridges. You want to build trust and collaboration. ■

Week 4: Immerse Yourself

By now, you are making progress in your new work environment. In this week, you will draw upon what you have learned and move forward to immerse yourself in your projects. By now, you've been on the job for one month, and you're doing the work you were hired to do. But remember to continue taking in new information, keeping pace and making adjustments to stay on course toward success.

Scope Creep

Often you'll find yourself in the middle of a project that you thought had a clearly defined destination, goals and measures of success, only to realize you are now adrift in a sea of ambiguity. This is "scope creep." Things might have seemed so clear just days before, but now you have a queasy feeling that the project has changed. These changes can be subtle and sneaky or big and bold. Symptoms of scope creep include increasingly vague goals and additional objectives that don't relate to the project's initial desired result.

To avoid scope creep, do the following:

1. Ensure that you have clearly defined project goals.
2. When you get the sinking feeling that your project is off course or that co-workers are adding work, communicate your observations that the original

Managing Your Manager

Do you really get to manage your manager? Yes. As counterintuitive as that may sound, there is an underlying expectation that you will be one step ahead of your manager when it comes to your work. The goal for any manager is to have a direct report who is a mind reader.

Here are some examples of what it means to manage your manager: it means you are self-sufficient and do not need a lot of hand-holding. You anticipate your manager's every need by coming to the table prepared. For example, you come to meetings prepared with list of key items you want to discuss. You invest the five to 10 minutes to develop an agenda that keeps you and your manager on track and focused. Finally, managing your manager means you provide the right information at the right time.

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Week 4: Immerse Yourself

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objective appears to be changing.

3. Renegotiate when you notice that your project scope is changing.

An additional symptom of “scope creep” is when other projects get added to yours. These add-ons are often orphan initiatives that were abandoned, never quite got off the ground or were never formally terminated. As adorable as these orphan initiatives can be, once they attach themselves to your projects, they can become burdensome parasites. Keep your eyes open and stay clear on your project objectives. Knowing what your project needs will help you differentiate between valid additions and orphans looking for a home. ■

Week 5: Climb Onto the Observation Deck

In every job there are both formal and informal ways by which work gets accomplished. The formal stuff is all around you, such as the rules and regulations pertaining to your conduct, as well as other company policies. The formal ways by which work gets done are also dictated by policies and procedures, management styles, and specific products or services.

However, as you spend more time in your job and observing others, you will probably realize that perhaps there’s more than meets the eye. What you notice are the informal things — the unwritten rules and ways that work gets done.

Importance of Time

As you probably noticed, your new company has a distinct way of valuing time. Understanding the value that is placed on deadlines and schedules and differentiating between what people say they want and what actually happens will help you plan, prioritize and successfully navigate the logistical irregularities in your company.

Time is treated differently by each organization. You may find that meetings are set to begin at the top of the hour. Yet everyone knows that if they arrive on time they will be sitting alone for five minutes, so everyone purposely shows up at the meeting five minutes late. The same goes for behaviors related to deadlines. Are they steadfast or flexible? What are the effects of this? Be aware of these practices since they will help you follow rules and guidelines. They will also provide you with the opportunity to influence and model more professional behaviors. ■

Week 6: Ignite Your Star Power

Up to this point, you will have been observing, applying what you’ve learned and working on developing your skills. In week six, focus on the unique skills, knowledge and abilities that you bring to your job. Identify what distinguishes you. Defining what makes you unique will enable you to better utilize your skills, share more effectively with your team and others in your organization, and identify opportunities for further professional development. This will also help you to zero in on the specific skills, traits and other abilities that you want to be known for.

Professional Legacy

Coinciding with your consideration of what makes you unique, think about the following: What is the professional legacy you want to build? A professional legacy is the intentional impact and contribution that you want to make in each of your jobs and the experience and learning you want to take with you.

When you know what you want to create in your new company, you will have focused direction and motivation. Your work will have a fundamentally deeper meaning because you are clear on how your work relates to what you want to create during your time in your current position. Defining and creating your professional legacy reflects what is unique about who you are, what you know, what you want to be known for and how you want to be remembered.

Feedback

As you work toward becoming a star at work, you will want to ensure that you are heading in the right direction. The last thing you want is to go off in one direction, only to realize you may need to make a U-turn. An excellent way to ensure that you are on the right track is to gather feedback about how you are performing and compare what you think you are doing well with how others, particularly your manager and team, perceive you. While the importance of gathering feedback may be common sense, few people do it because of apprehension or not knowing how to ask.

Here are some guidelines for effectively asking for and receiving feedback:

- Be specific when asking for feedback. Identify a specific behavior, event or project.
- If you receive a general or vague answer, try to probe deeper, for example, “Will you elaborate what you mean by ‘fine’?” If your additional query fails to elicit further comment, let it rest.

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Week 6: Ignite Your Star Power

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- Always thank people for their feedback no matter how reassuring or surprising your new bits of information are.

Your PR Message

As you get clear on what skills and traits make up your star power and add value to your team and company, it is important that your image be consistent with what you want to be known for. Your intentional professional image is based on your personal public relations plan. Why? With any product, we have a perception of what the product delivers and stands for based on the message that comes across in the marketing campaign. It is equally important that you have your own marketing campaign.

It's time to create your PR message. What do you want to be known for? What do you want the association to be when people think of you? When you think about how to craft and deliver your message, always consider the five Ws: *why, what, who, when* and *where*.

Why: The intent of your PR message is to communicate your values and what you want to be known for.

What: As you think about your professional legacy and strengths, what are some key words that best capture your values? Find three key words that represent what you want to be known for. Once you have determined them, deliver this message to others, not only through conversation, but also through your actions and physical appearance.

Who: Deliver your message to everyone. Just know your audience. If you are having a difficult time with a co-worker, it may be important that the person understand you better. You may have to state your PR message on a regular basis and at every interaction.

When: Keep in mind when delivering your PR message that it must be relevant to the topic being discussed. While you want to state your message with frequency, you do not want to put your co-workers to sleep with your broken record. State each item of your PR message in one concise sentence. Rotate your message depending on the situation.

Where: Choose the appropriate venue to deliver your message. After you define and articulate your values in your PR message, use e-mail as your initial method of communication. In that way, you can draft your message, read it and reread it so that it makes sense and is in your own words. After a few practice e-mail drafts, you will be ready to deliver your message in face-to-face and phone conversations. ■

Week 7: Do Lunch

By this point, you should have created a network — the culmination of relationships and connections that you have available through the people you know. Your network is critical for helping you work more effectively, gather the right information, accomplish your objectives and create a comfortable work environment.

First Things First

Revitalizing and expanding your network may seem like a big deal and potentially a lot of work. It doesn't have to be. Remember, on the surface, larger goals are quickly made bite-size by creating a task list. You realize it really just involves calling back two people to make sure they have all the information they need from you for their projects or sending out five e-mails with information you promised to pass along.

Once you identify tasks, ensure that you have specific action items you can tackle. If your task is to get input for your project, create action items on your task list. Once an action item gets placed on your task list, it's one less thing you have to worry about. Start using your task list by prioritizing who you need to follow up with, who you need to contact regarding a project or other work-related inquiry, and who you can share resources with. Remember, it is never too late to follow up with people. ■

Week 8: Map Your Coordinates

You are far along in the process of exploring your new workplace, and it's important to stop and map your coordinates to ensure that the course you are on takes you in the right direction. Look toward the horizon and define goals for the next six months. Scan the business environment for potential trends and practice balancing the objectives of today with opportunities for the future.

What Do You Want?

Now that you have been on the job for two months, think about where you want to be in six months. Think about what projects you want to be involved in or initiate, new skills you want to develop and other interests that you have. First, clearly define what you want before taking steps toward your future. While this may sound simple, you'd be surprised to discover that there are many people who do not identify what they want. Your future should not be a random series of events but a manifestation of setting a clear direction and achieving what you want.

Based on your observations of your new company,

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Week 8: Map Your Coordinates

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determine what you would like to accomplish six months down the road. Begin by asking the following questions:

- Are there any emerging trends or events that might influence your industry, company, department or profession?
- On what kind of projects do you want to be working?
- What new responsibilities would you like to have?
- What new skills or knowledge would you like to develop?
- What new relationships would you like to establish?

After you identify your goal, you will need to answer one important question: Why do you want it? When you know the answer to this question, you will stay motivated, and when things get challenging, it will be easy to remind yourself why you are working so hard. ■

Week 9: Look in Your Rearview Mirror

Your main objective during week nine is to review how you are developing and applying your new skills. This week provides a great opportunity to review your progress and ensure that you are headed for success. Identify what is working well and any areas that need more attention.

Planning and Delivery

By now you have realized that successful, on-time delivery of your projects takes more than luck — it takes planning. Planning is critical unless you are an adrenaline junkie who thrives on the rush of a suddenly remembered deadline.

As you continue through your 12 weeks, review your projects and how you are delivering on them. First, review your project deadlines; if your deadlines are up to date in your calendar, then you're in the clear. Your calendar is the most valuable time-management resource you have.

Next, take a look at how well you are creating a timeline in which to achieve your goals. Good detailed planning is one thing, but if your timeline and milestones are unrealistic, you are setting yourself up for suboptimal achievement. If your timeline is too aggressive, you might be reaching too far too fast.

The importance of the first weeks on the job is to make sure you are pacing yourself and delivering

results. Remember, you are being measured on how well you execute. ■

Week 10: Perform a Reality Check

Now that you have been on the job for over two months, you are getting a better sense of what your company, team and co-workers are really like. The honeymoon is by no means over; it is still love. However, you are getting the hang of the quirks and idiosyncrasies that make your workplace unique.

After spending a couple of months in a company, you will find that your initial understanding of your company's culture, pace, knowledge-sharing practices, teams and communication has deepened or even changed completely. The perspective you have now is closer to reality. In week 10, you will look at your new workplace through eyes that have more experience and insight than when you started your job. When you define the real work environment, you will be able to anticipate potential obstacles, focus your resources and make the right choices.

Clarifying the "C" Word: Culture

Management professor and organization-culture guru Edgar Schein suggests that in order to better define and understand organization culture, you should look at it as having three levels.

Level 1 – Artifacts: Artifacts are generally visible and readily identifiable. Artifacts in your company might include the structures, work processes and awards.

Level 2 – Values: These are a company's espoused values, such as its goals, strategies and philosophies.

Level 3 – Underlying Assumptions: The basic underlying assumptions a company has, such as its beliefs. A company's underlying assumptions are often taken for granted or unconscious.

As you start to look at your company's culture and the ways the business operates, what are the things you notice on the surface? What values does the company espouse, and what do they really say about the company? Use Schein's model to focus and organize your observations.

It will be valuable to see the interrelationships or disconnections between your company's artifacts, espoused values and underlying assumptions. Completely figuring out your company's culture will take time. However, by knowing what to look for, you can very easily start putting the pieces together. Decoding the culture of your company will help you tremendously to be in sync and thrive. ■

Week 11: Declare Victory

At this point, you are getting close to completing your first 12 weeks. You are becoming a full-fledged member of your team and organization, you have connections and you are deep into your projects. This is an exciting time as you are approaching your third month on the job. It's important to review how your projects are coming along and, on a larger level, your technique and methods for success.

Week 12: Raise Your Sails

It is time to set your sights on your future. Consider where you are now, what you have learned and where you want to be one year from now. Envision your future and set direction.

The Big Picture

What does it mean to think “big picture,” and how is it relevant to setting your one-year goal? To sum it up, your life is the “big picture,” and a one-year goal is about progress in your life. You have the potential to achieve everything you set your mind on attaining. It will take focus, dedication and even a bit of hard work. The exciting and wonderful thing is that you have the ability to set a goal and reach it. A very powerful way to think about what you want to achieve is in terms of what you want to create and share with your workplace: your professional legacy.

In every work setting, you have an opportunity to create something that will live on after you leave your team, group, division or company. Like a fingerprint, the professional legacy you create reflects your unique skills and abilities. Your professional legacy can take many forms, including introducing new ways to get work done, a new product or service, or relationships and changes to how teammates and co-workers work together. Your professional legacy is also something that you take with you. It is part of who you are, your professional experience and your identity.

Your one-year goal is a big deal. You will spend your time and effort driving toward a result. You want that result to be fulfilling for you as a person and also exciting enough that you will keep working toward it despite possible setbacks. To begin identifying your one-year goal, consider the following questions: Where do you see yourself one year from now? What would you find rewarding to accomplish in one year's time? What do you want to be responsible for creating in your job?

Set yourself up for success by considering the realities

of your work environment and what you've been able to accomplish in three months. As you think about what you want to achieve, recognize the reality of what is possible and at the same time push the boundaries. Don't just make it an easy goal to achieve. It must have meaning to you and push you to bring out the best of your talents.

Changes

As you look toward your one-year goal, determine what changes to your image will need to take place. Identify areas of development for your communication, PR and networking skills. In order to reach your one-year goal, it will be important over the next year to continue to diligently pay attention to how your image is supporting your goal. Remember that you are a professional at all times. Say it, show it and do it.

In order for you to be that superstar one year from now, make sure your verbal and nonverbal communication skills are consistent with the professional image that you want.

- What will you have to start or continue to do in order to look and act the part of a superstar?
- How will you want to talk to people? What's the tone of voice you want to use?
- How important are your active listening, rapport-building and ask/inform skills?
- What PR message do you want others to hear?

Put It All Together

As you continue to practice and hone your Sink or Swim skills, your role is to build a strong relationship between yourself and your employer. As you continue on beyond week 12, keep in mind the following:

- Always look for opportunities in every situation.
- Know your strengths and where you contribute value.
- Know when and how to ask for help.

You will continue to use your Sink or Swim skills throughout the rest of your career, but for now, congratulations on completing the 12th week on the job. Be your own champion and keep on swimming. ■



If you liked *Sink or Swim*, you'll also like:

1. ***Words That Work* by Dr. Frank Luntz.** Luntz offers sound advice on how to tactically use words and phrases to get what you want in life.
2. ***Mastering Business Negotiation* by Roy J. Lewicki & Alexander Hiam.** This is a valuable resource — grounded in solid research — for any leader or manager who needs practical strategies when conducting business negotiations.
3. ***What Got You Here Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith with Mark Reiter.** The corporate world is full of skilled executives, but few will ever reach the top; according to Goldsmith, subtle nuances make the difference.