

# Top Tips for New Graduates Starting Work

## **SPEAKERS**

Intro, Susan Heaton-Wright, Nicholas Simon

### **Intro 00:00**

Welcome to the superstar communicator podcast. Our aim is to ensure you speak and communicate with confidence, clarity, credibility, and impact so that you present the best version of yourself in all business conversations. Welcome to our host, Susan Heaton-Wright.

### **Susan Heaton-Wright 00:18**

Hello, everybody, this is Susan Heaton-Wright. And I'm absolutely delighted to be interviewing Nicholas Simon. Now, for anybody who doesn't know this, Nick is actually my son now, and I'm not biased in any way. He is an incredibly talented musician, and composer. And graduated from Cardiff University last year in music, and he's just about to start at Bristol University to do an MSc in composition for film, TV and gaming. I thought this was an ideal time to pick his brains, and also to give him a task, which was to ask his friends who are starting at their new graduate jobs, what they needed from older people like me, or leaders or team leaders, what they would need in the way of information to make sure that they were ready to start their their career. So welcome, Nick.

### **Nicholas Simon 01:36**

Hello, thanks for having me.

### **Susan Heaton-Wright 01:38**

That's okay. So what how did you get this information? What were you asking? Your friends?

### **Nicholas Simon 01:48**

Basically, I got the set of questions you asked me to send off, and I sent them off to a few friends. So I got some answers back.

### **Susan Heaton-Wright 02:00**

And were you surprised by the answers? We will ask the questions a little bit later. Were you surprised by the answers?

### **Nicholas Simon 02:08**

And not so much. I wasn't sure what to expect, but it seems very in line with the jobs they're doing. So for instance, at the on the more online oriented jobs, one of my mates was doing, he learned through an online social media. Whereas to two other mates, who are doing more company, going into work oriented jobs, they found it from word of mouth and through university schemes.

### **Susan Heaton-Wright 02:48**

Okay, so you're saying about how they found their jobs, how they found the the actual jobs? And I think this is a really, really good point, isn't it that when you're graduating, I know back in the day, when I was at university there was all of the big companies did what was called the milk round, they still do a little bit. But they would interview graduates who were interested and going to the career department and asking if there were jobs there. But from a departmental level, that is really important because it's specific. And I know two of your friends, they have done degrees and MSCs that are specific for a particular industry. So in fact, going to the department was the best thing to do, wasn't it. But the way of work and getting jobs, and I'm sure other people that are on this will agree with me, everything has changed. There is a lot more online, and you mentioned that your friend had actually seen an advert on LinkedIn. And he applied to it. And this is what's happening more and more. And another thing is that a significant number of positions are filled by people, they already know whether that's an internal, somebody internally fills that job, or it's within their network. So from a point of view of trying to get a job, it's quite important to build a network, isn't it so that you can get those things going. But this particular discussion is really about how to prepare before you start on the first day or the first few days. Because it's like going to a new school, isn't it in a way, it's a new start. And can you remember what back to when you started at university?

**Nicholas Simon** 05:07

Yes. All the way back to school. I remember starting there as well.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 05:11

And I'm sure there are questions you would say information you would have liked to have known?

**Nicholas Simon** 05:18

Yeah, I think the first priority, while for especially school was meeting, who was going to be in classes with and in the houses. But with university, we kind of had this idea of more freedom and doing what we like doing in our subjects. So there was a lot of intrigue in terms of looking at the course we're doing as well.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 05:50

But of course, now, graduates are going into their first graduate role, hopefully, that they will be pursuing a career and using the skills that they have learnt as an undergraduate and particularly the courses that they've done. And it becomes more specific, doesn't it? So it's no longer thinking, "Well, I'm going to choose this module, because that's really what I liked doing", you might actually have to do some things that you don't really want to do.

**Nicholas Simon** 06:03

Yep, I did a lot of essay stuff within my music degree and are not so good at essays. But it's all in good exercise, you're always going to have to write that kind of information to a long essay format. So even if you don't like it, it's good setup. So even back to school, Maths was liked by everyone, but it teaches you reasoning. And it's important, even if you don't like it. So I think that kind of stuff is important.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 07:05

And do you think therefore having that positive mindset for when you start work, when there might be some things that you don't want to do, is it worthwhile thinking of it in that way?

**Nicholas Simon** 07:20

Yeah, definitely, especially as a younger person going into a job, you don't know what to expect. But the stuff you learn from things you don't particularly like doing, you later realise how important they are, and how that actually helps you in the future stuff. So for instance, I was doing a six month placement with a writer developing an app, and every day we had to spend time writing our hours in and what we learned from the day into Excel spreadsheets, it was boring stuff, but I realised now that that's necessary in terms of work, and also kind of reflecting on what you learned from the day. And it's very useful in the long term.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 08:16

That's really interesting, isn't it? It's almost habit creating, isn't it so that this becomes a habit, when you, well, I'm sure that you will do exactly the same thing when you are doing your MSC, that at the end of the day, reflect on what you have studied?

**Nicholas Simon** 08:35

Definitely, yeah. And in terms of networking, I think the MSC will be extremely useful in the learning on how to actually connect to other people that you're working with, potentially in the future.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 08:54

That's really, really important, isn't it? Because I know I know your profession. I know your industry and and quite a lot of it is about who you know, so building that networks is absolutely crucial. But let's think to those first days just before you start your job. I don't know if you're aware of my my first graduate job, because I got a job in Kenya to teach in a prep school. And it was unusual because it was very difficult to get in contact with the school that the phone hardly ever worked. It was right in the bush. It was summer holidays. There was no internet at the time. And I had this job offer and I asked to have a contract act on confirmation sent. And once or twice, I had a phone call from the headmaster saying, "Well, is she coming? Is she going to come over the summer?" And I would say, well, until I've had the confirmation letter, and the contract, no. But then a lot of pressure was put on me at the end of August. And "oh, you'll lose your job", And so I bought a ticket to go to Kenya without having seen the contract, and I said, but "I understand that you need to have a work permit to work in Kenya", "Oh, don't worry about that. You just walk through and, George will be picking you up at the other end, he will take you for breakfast and then drive up". What on earth could happen? I was a 21 year old, white, blond haired, blue eyed woman, what on earth could happen. Of course, I was stopped, I was put into a little jail in in the airport, and told that I would be on the next flight home because I didn't have a work permit. Me being me, I actually had a book with me. And I just carried on reading it, which was probably the best thing to do, because it wound them, they didn't know what to do. But by sheer chance, after four or five hours, I was out, because and they kept coming in saying "we're putting you on the next flight". And it turns out that a pupil at the school, his father was in the government for Kenya, and got me out. But there was a lack of duty of care from the headmaster, who had told told me I didn't need a work permit, when in fact, it put me in genuine danger. There was a lack of duty of care professionalism on that part, plus the fact I never saw a contract the entire time I was there even though I did ask. And obviously, we

live in different times, now. You can check up on things, communication is easier, because it was very, very difficult. You know, a letter would take 10 days to arrive. But that's the first thing I would say make sure that you do have a contract that you read through it, you know exactly what's expected. You know exactly what the terms are. The you know, how many days a week, how many days holiday? Are there any particular behaviour that you need to have? You know, what is the behaviour expected in the office? If you don't know, ask, but also it might be if you're in a professional organisation, you might need to have professional indemnity your own to cover yourself. Or it might mean that you need to have a professional qualification. Can you think of anything else?

**Nicholas Simon** 13:23

I'd have to say yes, a contract would be the starting thing. It's more of a thing you wish you had down the road. But yeah, just a written notes saying, this is what I'm here for. And we've confirmation from the other person you're you're working for?

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 13:45

Absolutely. And yeah, you could say that I made a mistake, but I was waiting for this particular document, which never came. And he was putting quite a lot of pressure on me, phoning up at odd times. So I thought I'll take the risk. But as I said, there was a different times because now a contract would be sent by email, it would be easy to do and to keep in contact with people. And and there was very little information about the school and things like that only that what had been made available from the application. And the again, the internet, you can go on to Google or whatever and find out about the company. And I would say that's really important. Now I asked you to ask your friends about what information would you like they like to know before they join the company. So what sort of things would you say?

**Nicholas Simon** 14:54

So from my point of view, the first thing I would think of is work time and workspace. How many hours am I working a day? And where am I working? So am I going in? Or am I working from home? And it seems that's usually ready information. But my friend, Nick, who works for a programming company, said it the information he got was working hours, location, salary. Hybrids, is it in and out of office and responsibilities and progression track. And he got most of that information, but they didn't list anything about working hours, or whether it's in or out of the office, and he would have liked to have a progression track, and the amount of hours he was working also available online as well.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 16:19

Yeah, I think those are really good points, aren't they? Because if they are not put in the contract, it could be misinterpreted, and somebody could say, well, you know, you just have to work the hours that you're asked to do. And then then you could be working many, many hours and not have a life outside. And and also, more and more jobs are hybrid now, aren't they? You might be expected to go in two days a week or five days a month or every Tuesday and Thursday. But it does need to be specified, doesn't it?

**Nicholas Simon** 16:58

Definitely, if you are working overtime, is that is that paid overtime? Or you're gonna find out about that on your first paycheck that you've just been working an extra few hours and not getting to get paid.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 17:15**

So I think that it's worthwhile asking those questions before you sign the contract, and if they get funny about it. Ask why it could be an indication that they could be exploiting you. Couldn't it up a little bit about the career progression? What do you mean by that?

**Nicholas Simon 17:43**

So I'm gonna have to guess - this was Nick's answer. And it progression track would be where you start and where you end up in a year or five years within the company work. And how long that takes or how short that is, and what are the benefits of working with the same company. For the next five years, rather than changing company with your new expertise and CV.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 18:21**

Yeah. Because from a company point of view, it costs a lot of money to recruit. So in fact, it's in their interest, if they're able to, to develop somebody like Nick, your friend Nick, and to use their expertise and give them more opportunities. But then you've got your other friends that are doing professional jobs where there's a professional qualification with that. What did they have to say?

**Nicholas Simon 19:00**

But I think he's got the qualification as well, it's sort of different in that way.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 19:08**

They're actually working towards their chartership they want.

**Nicholas Simon 19:12**

Yeah, James is he's got a BSc in Quantity Surveying from Reading University.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 19:36**

So really thinking about if you are joining a firm that excuse me is a professional services quite often as a graduate, you are going to be trained in that profession in that profession with a qualification at the end of it?

**Nicholas Simon 19:57**

Yeah. So James has given a very professional answer sheet to this, you can tell he's very used to giving stuff in that format. So James is now working towards actually getting his qualification, he's been working since September last year. So he's explaining that he's got an exam in two or four weeks. And then once he gets that he's now fully into the job. And he's got as much time as he wants to actually take the exam. But yeah, you had to pass it first.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 20:55**

So have they funded that? Or did he have to self fund the training for that?

**Nicholas Simon 21:01**

I don't think there was any training or anything. It's simply just a exam textbook. And yeah, and do past papers.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 21:12**

Okay, so I know that there are some, say accountants, lawyers, where there is professional training. So your friend, Barney, for example, he will have been he is training to be a solicitor, and he is getting that funded by the firm that he's joined. And that's another question really to ask, isn't it - who is funding the training? What are the prospects at the end? When I qualify? Will I have a job here? Do I need to look elsewhere?

**Nicholas Simon 21:48**

Yeah. And James for that answer, he gave his there a clear path of progression. Yes, business. So that would be coming out of doing that first exam.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 22:01**

And quite often, there are organisations that have graduate trainees, and they might be a trainee for a year. And again, I think it's worthwhile asking, "Will I be guaranteed a job at the end of it?" Or, you know, do they just pick 20%? So having in the back of your mind that, first of all, you need to make a good impression. But also, what are my other options? Because this isn't going to be long term. Now, I know that I asked as well, if you were the manager or leader, what would you be telling your new graduate intake?

**Nicholas Simon 22:50**

James says, welcoming them to the business and grad graduate scheme explaining how these things operate, and what the expectations are. So that would be coming from the first question. And giving some context to the projects they'll be working on, welcoming them to their project teams. And that give them advice about good habits to start now, so that they can continue these throughout their careers. So setting people up for the job, and also the progression set and their entire careers.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 23:38**

So do you think, therefore, that having role models in the office is useful?

**Nicholas Simon 23:46**

Definitely. And I know Scott was saying he's working at that he's going to be working at the same place as James. He was saying that when he went to his first interview, where he had the interview, and then he had a few exercises, like an exam that you have to do, and the first thing when he was there was speaking to a couple of Scottish guys who were managers there. And they just put him at ease by that they were talking about whiskey and that kind of thing before they even brought up the interview. So they put him at ease, thinking about that. And I think setting up role models that it's basically setting up a good work, relationship between the new graduates and the more expert workers.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 24:55**

Do you think therefore it would be useful to have a mentor, maybe somebody who's a year or so further on?

**Nicholas Simon** 25:04

Yeah, I can definitely remember from university that was the case as well, where they had the older music society, people who basically set up socials, and you'd sit with first or second years, and they'd explained stuff whilst you had the dead time between the pub quiz or something, they'd explain what life was like in Cardiff and that kind of thing. So I know that James had a lot of socials, he bought me on one to a cinema. And they basically just had time to hang out with all the guys that worked at the same place. And they have time to talk to everyone.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 25:56

And build up trust, really, because they are a team, aren't they? Yeah. And, you know, one of the real challenges over the last few years is the fact that there's been the pandemic and lock downs. And now the norm is not for people to be in the office five days a week, but perhaps come in a couple of days a week. So what there are additional challenges if you are sitting, watching your more experienced colleagues how they deal with meetings and clients and things, having mentor is even more important, isn't it?

**Nicholas Simon** 26:39

Yeah, definitely. And I think, especially in the case of COVID, even the expert people would have gone into the same situation as you, not knowing what they're going to do under lockdown they're traversing into a new fresh workspace the same as you. So them figuring out what they're going to do for the job will also pick you up and help you as well, in terms of how to work, depending on the on the job, how to do the work that you're expecting, but at home.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 27:25

Really, really good points, because this has been a completely new thing, hasn't it? Everybody's having to be working it out. Now, I know that Nick said, if you had questions to ask the person who hired you, what would you ask? And he I know he said, "What made me stand out from the other candidates?" You might not want to know the answer, because it might be that three other people refuse the the opportunity, and you're the last choice. So you have to be prepared for your answer there. What does the daily routine look like? But coming across all of this is that we need to be braver about asking these questions. Do you agree Nick?

**Nicholas Simon** 28:17

Yeah, definitely. Even if if you didn't get the job, that kind of thing can be extremely constructive. And if you did get the job again, it's still very constructive. But if you're looking for that kind of perfectionistic, what can I do better? That's always helpful.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 28:43

Yes, it is. So it may be another good question is, how often will I get feedback from my manager? Or how often do I have appraisals? Do we have them on a monthly basis? Is it annual, which is more difficult, because if there are challenges, you don't have the opportunity to speak them. Talk to your

manager about that. What I'm getting from this is that when you start your first graduate job, it can be quite scary, particularly when you get a job offer. You should ask questions before you start, because the leaders or managers might not have thought about those questions. What would you add to that neck?

**Nicholas Simon 29:40**

I definitely say depending on the job you're doing, the people you're working with will be effectively your classmates in a school that you'll be spending time with. So getting to know them and getting to know what they're good at and what they I already know is the job, what it's like to be in the job, you can get information from them as well. It's not, it wouldn't just be the boss that you're getting the information from, but also the work the people you're working with that sort of know more of the groundwork and the social life. And that, in the end helps you get a better understanding of what you're going to be doing when you're starting the work.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 30:32**

I think you made a really good point there. And remember that for any graduate, you are very, very talented you've been taken on, because people see the potential in you, you've already achieved a great deal by getting a degree. And this is the next stage for you to develop your skills further in a workplace. Any good leader wants to get the best out of their team. And if you ask questions, it might be they've not thought about these things before. But as long as you do it in a respectful way, and you're still working hard and doing your best you are going to do well.

**Nicholas Simon 31:22**

Yeah, definitely. And there's always the more eyes on something, the better. So a leader might not see something in you might fix or completely changed the way everyone else thinks because of the the question you asked, and that might make it much better, depending on what work you're doing.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 31:46**

Absolutely. So is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

**Nicholas Simon 31:53**

I think it's just sort of interesting how the expectation you you can have is basically built on different levels of information. So you get the CV, the job offer information. And then you can also go into more depth and ask the boss and also the, the people you'll be working with. And that can, if you have multiple options for work you're going to do that can be a really good help to help you decide what kind of job you want to do.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 32:36**

Yeah, really good point. As ever, it's all down to communication, isn't it?

**Nicholas Simon 32:42**

Definitely. Yeah.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 32:45**



Is there anything else you'd like to add to your graduate friends and colleagues?

**Nicholas Simon** 32:52

Oh, yeah. Thanks to my mates, you added that information. And I know that all of them enjoy what they're doing, so clearly information they're giving us all good.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 33:07

Brilliant. Well, thank you so much, Nick, for coming on. Before I finish, I wanted to say that superstar communicator has a package of soft skills, communication skills, training, and facilitating workshops for new graduates new talent. If you are interested for your company, please contact us. And we can arrange a call to see how we can develop the communication and efficiency of your new graduates when they're working. Thank you very much for listening. Thank you, Nick.

**Intro** 33:48

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