

Steps to Drive Your Career Forward

At a recent speaking engagement at Citizens Bank in Boston, I addressed an impressive group of risk management professionals on the importance of career management. After, I attended my first Red Sox game at Fenway Park!

The seminar was very well received and I thought I'd share some of the highlights with you.

I've spent many years coaching and listening to people talk about their careers and businesses. My clients have included all levels of professionals, including executive managers, partners, engineers and staff level people. They've shared their challenges, successes and areas that needed improvement. They've also provided me with useful insight into their corporate politics and cultures.

My 22 years as a career expert can be summarized with the following key points:

1. Achieving business success requires sacrifice (late hours, travel, difficult internal conditions, etc.).
2. Even though you may work for a company, you are essentially your own business manager and "corporation". Many companies offer career paths, training, higher educational opportunities and teambuilding. If you haven't yet taken advantage of these "perks", do so now!
3. The workplace can be enjoyable, competitive and challenging. It rewards hard work and dedication, but it has no tolerance for average effort. Those who are not proactive driving their careers forward, who just let things happen, often end up in unfulfilling situations and perhaps may be replaced. No one will ever care more about your career than you do.
4. Because people are very different, there are particular careers which match up well with certain personalities and aptitudes. We all have certain gifts that fit for some jobs and disqualify from others. In order to learn where you'll be happiest, get to know yourself better by assessing your skills, temperament, aptitudes and natural gifts. There's no reason you can't enjoy your work more.
5. Think of your career as a public relations campaign. Therefore, treat everyone with respect, from the lowest level positions to the highest level managers. Treating others with kindness and respect will make life happier for those around you and your career will benefit.
6. "People skills" are just as important as "technical skills," because even in highly technical jobs, you have to work with others. I know many highly skilled technical superstars who are now unemployed. They knew their jobs, but couldn't get along well enough with others. Average performers with strong people skills often last longer. It's better to be a "people

- person" with average skills than to be an arrogant person who doesn't get along well with others.
7. Be careful expressing strong emotions in business, especially anger and disappointment. Communicate your feelings quietly and diplomatically. Take a step back, calm down then proceed. Burning bridges could damage the reputation & credibility you've so worked hard to establish.
 8. Success is contagious! Spend time with or go to lunch with people you admire. Ask how they manage their career and success. They will be flattered and will usually share their "secrets".
 9. Whether you are a staff employee or a CEO, a warm and positive attitude can be your single biggest career asset.
 10. On any given day, your present job may end, even if you own a company like me! Therefore don't take your present opportunity for granted. Don't get complacent.
 11. Your accomplishments are your selling point for the future and will help to determine your marketability. In selling yourself, it's results that count. Try to contribute something substantial and measurable every day.
 12. Confront challenges head on and don't make excuses when things go wrong. Ultimately, you are your own "business manager" and dictate and control your own strategic career moves.

Our economy is finally beginning to show signs of improvement and slight growth. If you've maintained your job during one of the worst economic downturns in our nation's history, it obviously says something about you. If you haven't, don't despair, you are not alone and don't "beat yourself up". Your loss of job probably had nothing to do with you and everything to do with our economic conditions. "Dust yourself off" and move forward! This is no time to get complacent and being average is simply not good enough in this economic environment. Incorporate some of the items above and I assure you that they will not only enhance your career but your personal situations as well, enabling you to be a more well rounded person.

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