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IT Careers Tips

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Golden Rules for Career Success

Research has indicated that there's no appreciable difference in intelligence or social, psychological or environmental elements that distinguish an outstanding performer, or a "star," from the average worker. Superior intelligence alone is not the key to a successful career. How you use your skills and abilities and the level of awareness you develop is what differentiates you from your co-workers. Let the following set of guidelines form the basis of your plan of achievement. They will help you meet the challenges you face in today's "brainpowered" work environment, where your ability to constantly increase your knowledge base to deal with an increasing variety of responsibilities is the key to career progress.

Begin each day's work with a smile and a positive attitude. Do everything you can to maintain good physical health and an attractive appearance.

- Begin each day in a manner that conveys enthusiasm for your work, co-workers and the organization.
- Commit yourself to a healthy lifestyle so you'll have the energy you need to tackle your assignments and pursue your goals.
- Project a professional image. If you want a promotion, you have to look promotable. If you want respect, you have to dress as well or better than the industry standard.

Exercise initiative to tackle projects above and beyond the requirements of your position.

- Know how initiative is defined in your own workplace, by both managers and peers.
- Do you current assignment well.
- Make sure your initiative has a payoff for someone other than you.
- Stay close to the critical path - what produces a happy customer and adds to profitability.
- Start with small things that benefit your co-workers, then move on to things at a system level.
- Determine probability of success and cost of failure; consider all aspects of both outcomes before you take action.

Know your company's goals and purposes and align your efforts with those of your employer.

- Make sure that you know your boss's goals and view him/her as your primary customer.
- Learn the corporate culture of your organization: attitude toward money and equipment; mode of communication, approach to change.
- Understand the "big picture" through the views of experts familiar with, but not part of, your work group, customer needs and motivation, the competition's perspective, the company management's perspective.
- Take the broad strategic view of things; notice how one thing affects many others.

"Study" the successful people in your organization. Seek their advice.

- Learn from the best. Ask who is the sharpest person in the organization. From whom can you learn the most? Who is most respected? Who is good at what they do? Create opportunities to get to know these people and observe how they work.
- Being around successful people tends to rub off!

Suggest constructive solutions for each problem you present. Take time to consider problems before taking action. Avoid instant emotional reactions.

- Use problems as opportunities to shine.
- Be sure you have a thorough understanding of the problem.
- Look at all the issues involved and the ramifications of various options.
- If you're unsure about what to do, back off and take time to think about it before you give an answer.
- Consult people who will be affected by your solution - your boss, teammates and, sometimes, even your family!

Communicate your contributions and accomplishments to your employer. Don't forget to recognize the contributions of others.

- Don't take your skills and accomplishments for granted.

- Document your performance in a notebook containing copies of every important memo, idea, presentation, contract or statistic and any special activities. Record days you stayed late or came in early. Use this data for performance reviews and new resumes.
- Keep your boss informed about what you're doing.
- Inform people around the organization about what you're doing. They can validate you're activities.
- Give credit to others when they deserve it. The best way to gain supporters is to be one.

Establish a reputation for doing your assignments well, and on time.

- Make yourself a resource for your department as a subject matter or technical expert.
- Dedicate yourself to giving your best effort to each assigned task. Consider its impact on both the organization and your reputation.
- If you're disorganized, start learning time management skills. In today's downsized workplace, you'll have to juggle a variety of responsibilities all at the same time.

Take the initiative to add new responsibilities (with your manager's approval).

- Taking initiative is one of the most powerful means of distinguishing yourself from the average employee. It's the first work strategy that managers and co-workers look for in new hires.
- Seize opportunities to do things that will affect the good of co-workers, the department or company.
- Stick tenaciously to a project or idea and follow it through to successful implementation.
- Assume some personal risk with new responsibilities, such as dealing with conflicting political agendas or going into areas not connected with your job.

Plan the "next step" in your career. Never be without achievable goals. Continue your formal or informal education; never stop learning and growing.

- Organizations constantly re-evaluate direction and structure to focus on core activities.
- Work constantly to increase the value-added skills you have to offer.
- Decide what you want to accomplish in this position. What do you want to learn from it? Where do you want to be in one year, three years?
- If there's no clear career path provided, create one for yourself.
- Take advantage of all training opportunities your company offers.
- Take it upon yourself to research professional information and seek outside training or classes if what you need is not available within the organization.

Seek advice from knowledgeable peers in your organization and from professional associations.

- Networking can have a dramatic effect on the speed, quality and quantity of your output.
- Create a network that includes people who are known for their knowledge, competence and potential and who can provide the fastest and best information.
- Join and participate in professional organizations and add members to your network. They can be valuable sources of information and good contacts when it's time to make a career move.

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