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Create Exactly The Type Of Career You Want

by Dan Coughlin

Editor's Note: Dan Coughlin will be a guest presenter at the Society of Actuaries 2002 Annual Meeting in Boston. His presentation, sponsored by the Management & Personal Development Section, will focus on developing the "Image" to enhance your value-added effectiveness.

How can a person create exactly the type of career he or she wants?

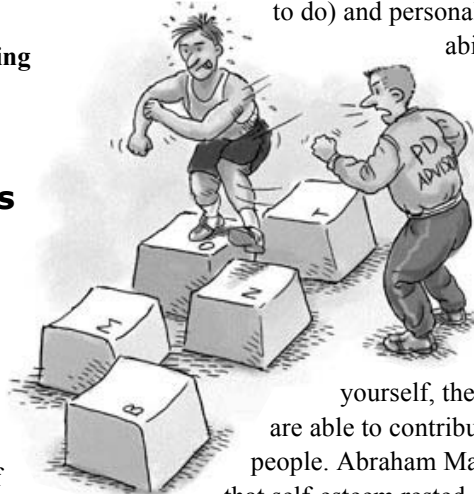
This question challenges high school students, senior citizens and everyone in between. While there are several keys to career success, I will focus on just four of them in this article:

Four Keys To Career Success:

1. Identify Your Desired Outcomes
2. Strengthen Your Internal Foundation
3. Be A Value-Adder
4. Build Effective Working Relationships

Identify Your Desired Outcomes

I don't think the big issue is whether or not you are willing to take on risks. Everything you do or don't do involves risks. If you choose to do something, there will be risk involved. However, if you don't choose to do it, there



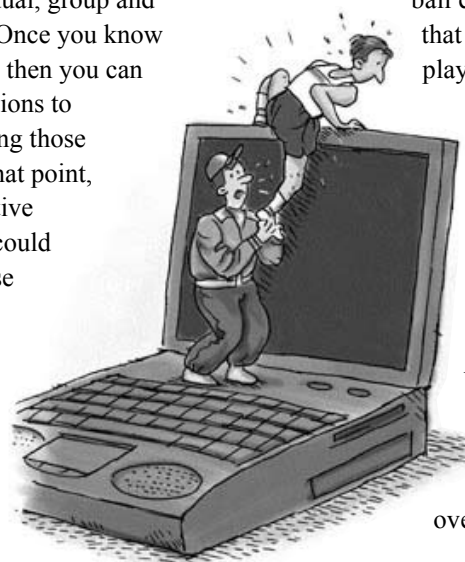
will be risk involved as well. The bigger question is, "What are your desired outcomes on an individual, group and organizational basis?" Once you know your desired outcomes, then you can identify the various options to implement for generating those desired outcomes. At that point, you can weigh the relative risks and rewards that could come from each of these options.

Strengthen Your Internal Foundation

Your internal foundation consists of your self-esteem (the value you see within yourself), self-confidence (your expectation of success in any situation), self-discipline (your capacity to do what you say you will do), personal integrity (your ability to do what you believe is the right thing to do) and personal initiative (your ability to act on an idea).

The most important of these is your self-esteem. The stronger your self-esteem, the more value you see within yourself, the more value you are able to contribute to other people. Abraham Maslow once wrote that self-esteem rested on our sense of personal dignity, the feeling that we are

in control of our lives and our destiny. John Wooden, the former great basketball coach, used to say that when a basketball player is out of balance on the court he or she is out of control and they become less effective. Then he said that the same thing is true in our personal lives. When we are out of balance, then we lower our sense of control over our lives and we



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lower our personal dignity, which reduces our self-esteem.

When I hear executives tell me they are working 75 hours a week, answering 50 e-mails a day and responding to 80 voicemails a day, I always challenge them to take back control of their lives. In virtually every Executive Coaching relationship, I encourage the other person to narrow their focus and define their boundaries as to what they are going to give their career, personal life, family life, friendships, community and so on. Almost every time the person defines their boundaries, they tell me they have significantly increased their effectiveness and self-esteem.

Another aspect of strengthening self-esteem is to always be willing to walk away from your current job. If you ever lose the ability to walk away from an organization, then you have lost some of your personal dignity. Many times executives have told me they don't know what they would do if they lost their current job. Essentially, they are saying they don't see the value they have within themselves.

Be A Value-Adder

Whatever your title is, I suggest you write it down and then cross it out. Your true title and job description is "Value-Adder." Value is anything that increases the chances that another person will achieve what they want to achieve. I

don't see myself as a consultant, executive coach or professional speaker. I see myself as a value-adder. My job is to increase the chances that other people will achieve what they want to achieve. I suggest the same is true for you. Your role is to identify what other people are trying to achieve and then decide how you can best assist them in achieving those objectives. This is true for both

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internal and external customers. Of course, the more you are able to align the organization's highest priorities with the internal and external customer's objectives, the better your chances will be to drive the overall results forward.

Here is an important point to keep in mind:

The value you bring to your organization IS NOT directly related to the number of hours you work, e-mails you answer or voicemails you return.

The value you bring to your organization IS directly related to the degree that you increase the chances that individuals, groups and the organization as a whole will achieve the desired results.

Build Effective Working Relationships

An effective working relationship is NOT based on social activities (i.e. playing golf, going to a sporting event, etc.).

An effective working relationship is one where individuals collaborate, learn from each other, challenge each other and implement ideas that drive better results in the organization's highest priorities.

One critical message is to avoid playing politics at all times. Playing politics is when a person says or does something that they don't believe in, but they do it because they think other people want them to do it. While politics can generate a successful short-term result, it will ruin your career over the long-term. The reason is because it will lower your personal integrity, which lowers your self-esteem. Consequently, you will see less value that you have to offer in the future. I encourage you to always be honest and say and do what you believe is the right thing to say and do. Be professional, do it with tact, say it behind closed doors, but by all means tell the truth as you perceive it.

Career success requires far more than just technical expertise. It requires healthy self-esteem, the ability to continually add value and the courage to build effective working relationships.

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Don't Forget To Vote!

You can vote electronically until August 2. (You should have received your password via e-mail.) Be sure to cast your vote and support a strong Management & Personal Development Section Council!