



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Catch Yourself Doing a Good Job

by John West Hadley

The best managers make a point of catching employees doing a good job, and being sure to praise them on the spot. Management training classes teach us to document what our employees have done, good and bad, and to save those notes in our files to be well-prepared at performance appraisal time. Otherwise, we are likely to remember best only what's been done in the last month or two, and get hazy about the details of what was accomplished six months ago, nine months ago, last year.

Have you ever applied that advice to yourself? Have you made a point of regularly catching *yourself* doing a good job and then praising *yourself* for what you accomplished?

In any fast-paced environment, it's easy to jump straight from finishing one milestone into tackling the next task, without much pause to reflect. I regularly work with people on accomplishment stories for networking, resumes, consulting engagement bios, strong conversations with their bosses, etc. Some clients struggle to express their accomplishments, or even feel they have none of consequence. Often this is because they just never got into the habit of catching themselves doing a good job.

This is particularly challenging when it's the first time they try to develop an "accomplishment story" for projects completed years earlier. In such cases, I often end up brainstorming with them in a more or less "stream of consciousness" manner, developing a long set of bullet points on every aspect of the project before ever trying to turn it into a coherent story. After all the information has been gathered, we can decide what's important, weaving those points into a concise, compelling story.

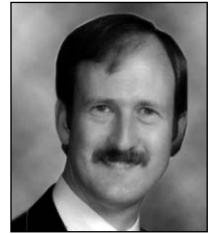
Let's assume you are just finishing an important phase of a project, and are prepared to move on to your next most critical task. Stop! Pull out a sheet of paper and take fifteen minutes to record some thoughts about what you just finished. Give it a title at the top of the page that you will remember it by — something simple. Then,

record everything important you remember about it, not worrying about making it grammatical or in any particular order. These are just notes for your own purposes, not a polished essay. Be sure to make particular note of any challenges that were presented along the way, and what you did to overcome them — these are the core of any compelling, accomplishment story. Attach any important documents — thank you notes, memos outlining the original assignment, commentary on aspects of the project, etc. Now put this all away in a file for future accomplishment stories.

TIP: Don't wait until a project is complete to start the documentation process! As soon as something worth noting occurs, create a page for that project in your stories file, even if all you are writing down is a title and one sentence. Then save the page and come back to add more to it every time something important happens. Finish adding to it when the project is complete.

And make a point to pause and reward yourself for a job well done on a regular basis, even if it's just a mental pat on the back. You could set a goal ahead of time, e.g., finish milestone one by February 15th, and decide in advance on a reward that will help keep you motivated. This could be as simple as treating yourself to a trip across the street for a cappuccino and fifteen minutes of quiet time, buying a CD, reading a book for fun or going to the movies. And be sure to share your successes with others — a friend, co-worker or spouse.

If you get into the habit of doing this, you will be well prepared to write-up or express your accomplishments in a compelling manner whenever needed. And you won't be caught off guard and miss one of those golden opportunities to create visibility when you run into the CEO at the annual company picnic and are asked, "What do you do?" □



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