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# How to be a Star Performer in Your Company

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**Increasing your own productivity can make the difference between getting a promotion, being stuck in a dead-end job or having no job at all.**

**W**e all know the job market has been challenging the last few years. Downsizings, consolidations, mergers and acquisitions have added to the anxiety. So you need to ask yourself, what can I do to protect myself during times like these? How can I stand out among my co-workers, get that promotion, and most importantly, what strategies will help differentiate me from my peers, and insure my marketability and advancement within my own company?

Think about your fellow employees. Who are the superstars, the young rising stars and the more seasoned actuaries? They are not necessarily brighter than you, but they may be working differently. Are they setting themselves apart by being more productive than others and adding more value to the company's bottom line? Increasing your own productivity can make the difference between getting a promotion, being stuck in a dead-end job or having no job at all.

And adding value to the company also adds value to your community of co-workers. This will help

insure your marketability and mobility within your own organization.

Workers with lower productivity are not necessarily less capable, they just may not have the tools and work strategies that lead to higher productivity. Being more productive doesn't necessarily mean more hours of work, but instead, getting more out of the hours you work. Superstars often work fewer hours than average performers, but get more critical work done in less time. How do they do it?

Mastering "star performer" skills and work strategies is simply a matter of learning and practicing these techniques.

## TAKING INITIATIVE

The first, and most important, is taking initiative. This is one of the most powerful tools, and also the one most easily misunderstood.

Average performers, who account for 60-80 percent of the work force, view taking initiative as going beyond their job description, learning something extra so that they are seen as very smart technically or taking on work not part of their job description. Star performers also seek out responsibility above and beyond their expected job description, but the difference is that their extra efforts are for the benefit of their company and co-workers, and not self-serving. True initiative, as practiced by star performers, always ends up benefiting someone else: co-workers, the department or the entire company. While exemplary performance does indeed benefit the star, the primary emphasis is always on the greater group, and not on individual recognition.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The next step is implementation. Initiative is meaningless if it is not implemented. Star performers stick tenaciously to an idea or project and follow it through to its successful completion. Don't just send your boss a memo about your great idea and think that you are taking initiative. Too often average performers assume their responsibility ends with presenting the idea and it is up to others to make

it happen. Implementation is the acid test of any initiative, whether it is ultimately successful or not.

An important element of taking initiative involves choosing the right initiatives to undertake. To minimize risk, make sure you take the following steps:

1. Do your current assignments well. Your first obligation is to do your assigned job. Avoid over-committing.
2. Make sure the initiative has some payoff for someone other than yourself.
3. Initiatives that can be related to the bottom line in terms of increased profitability or decreased costs are more significant than, for example, improving the company's food service.

In becoming adept at taking initiative, one learns quickly that efforts don't need to be brilliant to have impact. Taking the first step and then finding a solution will most assuredly increase your value within your company.

## NETWORKING

Another important skill exhibited by star performers is the ability to increase productivity through networking. The average performer thinks that building a communications grapevine insures that they are "in the loop" on the latest office gossip, and socializing with other people in their field can help in future job hunting. While this may be true, real networking is a tool to increase your value within your own company.

Star performers know that in this age of knowledge-intensive jobs, a good network is invaluable. What percentage of knowledge is stored in your own mind? Can you quantify how much information you need to know to perform your job? In the 1980s, most technical people would have said 75 percent is stored in their brain. Today that figure has dropped 20 points or more.

Knowledge-based networks are one way that star performers overcome their deficiencies. Networks

are high-speed infrastructures upon which knowledge is sent and received by those who need it. Without these networks, professionals cannot do their jobs properly. Star producers proactively develop dependable pathways to knowledgeable experts who can assist them with critical business tasks. When called upon, these "experts" share their knowledge with those who need it. The goal is to minimize the knowledge deficiencies that are inherent in every brain-powered job.

Let's look at the benefits of networking from another angle. When given an assignment which is beyond the scope of your experience, you have two choices:

1. The do-it-yourself approach to get up to speed by taking a quick study course and cramming the information you need to get the job done yourself.
2. Work your network, gather the best ideas from your network and combine that information with your own knowledge base to get the job done.

The first option is frequently the path of choice for average performers, but it is the worst option for maximizing productivity, even though it follows the educational patterns ingrained in us from our school years. By working an established network you can close your knowledge deficit quickly, which clearly beats out the "do-it-yourself" option in both effectiveness and efficiency.

## SOCIAL NETWORKING

You can't talk about networking without considering social networking. The internet has given us countless options to connect on a professional level. We now have the ability to join various professional networking websites in addition to professional organizations and online forums. These have some terrific capabilities for searching current job openings and staying on top of what is new in the marketplace, in addition to developing a network of professional contacts.

You can develop your own professional networking database on a site like LinkedIn to keep in touch with

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current and past co-workers and other professionals in the industry, but there are some drawbacks. These sites can dig away at valuable time and divert your attention from tasks that will help you become a superstar. Check them only once or twice a day and limit the time you use them to after work hours. Remember, they are merely one of many tools.

Before you dive in, make sure you are knowledgeable about how these sites work and what is visible to others. A good rule of thumb is to avoid attaching to professionals on social sites like Facebook and use professional sites like LinkedIn for networking. Refrain from any negative comments to others, and remember everything you put in writing can be accessed by someone at a later date. Use these sites as an opportunity to connect with professionals in your field that have skill sets you can draw on.

Take the time to develop your own network of experts. Remember, the worst time to build a network is when you already need this network to work for you. Star performers identify these sought-after experts and get their networks in place before they need them. They are also proactive in offering to be helpful *to them* long before they need to be on the receiving end. They build bridges to these experts in advance, and use their network to get the job done effectively and efficiently.

## SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-management skills are the next area of concentration. Have you noticed that star performers enjoy what they are doing? They utilize self-management skills to put themselves into work that they enjoy and that complements their personalities. The result is that their careers are more satisfying. Star self-managers exhibit a sense of meaning, accomplishment and contribution, resulting in long-term job satisfaction.

The key to self-management is:

1. Know yourself well.
2. Know the kind of work you do best and identify the type of work you enjoy.
3. Take control of your career path by

developing a plan to connect yourself to the work you enjoy most with a job that increases productivity for your company.

## BIG PICTURE ORIENTATION

Another way in which star performers are delineated is their ability to see the “Big Picture”. A big picture perspective involves thinking outside the box and being creative. The average performer has a one-dimensional perspective of seeing work from their own point of view and making sure that their point of view on a project or assignment is the one that gets the most attention, protection and connection. Star performers know it is the multi-dimensional perspective that allows them to see a project or problem in the larger context, whether they are customers, competitors, co-workers or bosses.

Maintaining a broad perspective enables the star performer to evaluate various viewpoints so that they can improve on the product or develop better solutions to problems. Whereas initiative speaks volumes about your motivation, self-management and ability to get the job done, a big picture perspective goes a long way in establishing your reputation for brainpower. This perspective is a key work attitude which gives you the ability to recognize emerging patterns, to think creatively outside the box, to exercise expert judgment and to identify the changing games with their changing rules.

## BE AN EXEMPLARY FOLLOWER

The next characteristic, being an exemplary follower, is one of the most challenging for the star performer. This is not only because it is difficult to master, but because it is so hard to accept. We have been taught that being a leader is something to aspire to, and being a follower is something that we settle for. Average performers are always surprised that star producers, whom many people label as leaders, also are adept at following others. You will not always be the leader of a project. You need to develop skills that guide your successful interactions with the people who have organizational power and

authority over you. This is different from teamwork, which is about co-worker relationships, which are the horizontal, and not the vertical, top-down relationships associated with leadership.

Being an exemplary follower means being actively engaged in helping the organization succeed while exercising independent, critical assessment of goals, tasks, potential problems and methods. Star followers have the ability to work cooperatively with a leader to accomplish the organization's goals, even in the presence of personality and strategic differences. In some instances, you can get further along in your career if you are seen as a sharp, dynamic, follower working along with co-workers, rather than aspiring to be the leader.

## TEAM LEADERSHIP

Team leadership is also a very important work skill associated with the star performer. A successful team leader is less concerned with the power of the job title, and relates more to the power of expertise, credible reputation, influence and persuasive abilities to lead successfully. Today's marketplace requires leaders who can put their egos aside and work side by side with their co-workers. In this role, they do not need direct supervisory authority to be seen as leaders. Colleagues voluntarily cooperate with them because they trust them and believe that if they work together, projects will get done to the betterment of the organization. Star performers realize that being strong team members as well as effective team leaders is an essential strategy for increased productivity.

## ORGANIZATIONAL SAVVY

Star producers know organizational savvy to be a strategy that enables them to navigate the competing interests within an organization and to promote cooperation, address conflicts and get things done. This often involves expertise in managing individual or group dynamics, knowing when to avoid conflicts and when to meet them head on, and knowing how to make allies out of potential enemies. The average

performer thinks organizational savvy is the talent for getting noticed by the right people through an obsessive devotion to office politics, another corporate dead end.

These comparisons between the star and the average worker will hopefully give you the tools and strategies to stand out among your co-workers, increase your value in your own company, and protect yourself during challenging economic times. Mastering "star performer" skills is simply a matter of learning and practicing these techniques. Implementing these strategies can set you apart, while adding more value to the company's bottom line and helping to insure your marketability and mobility within the industry and your current company.

## REFERENCE:

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