

The Stepping Stone

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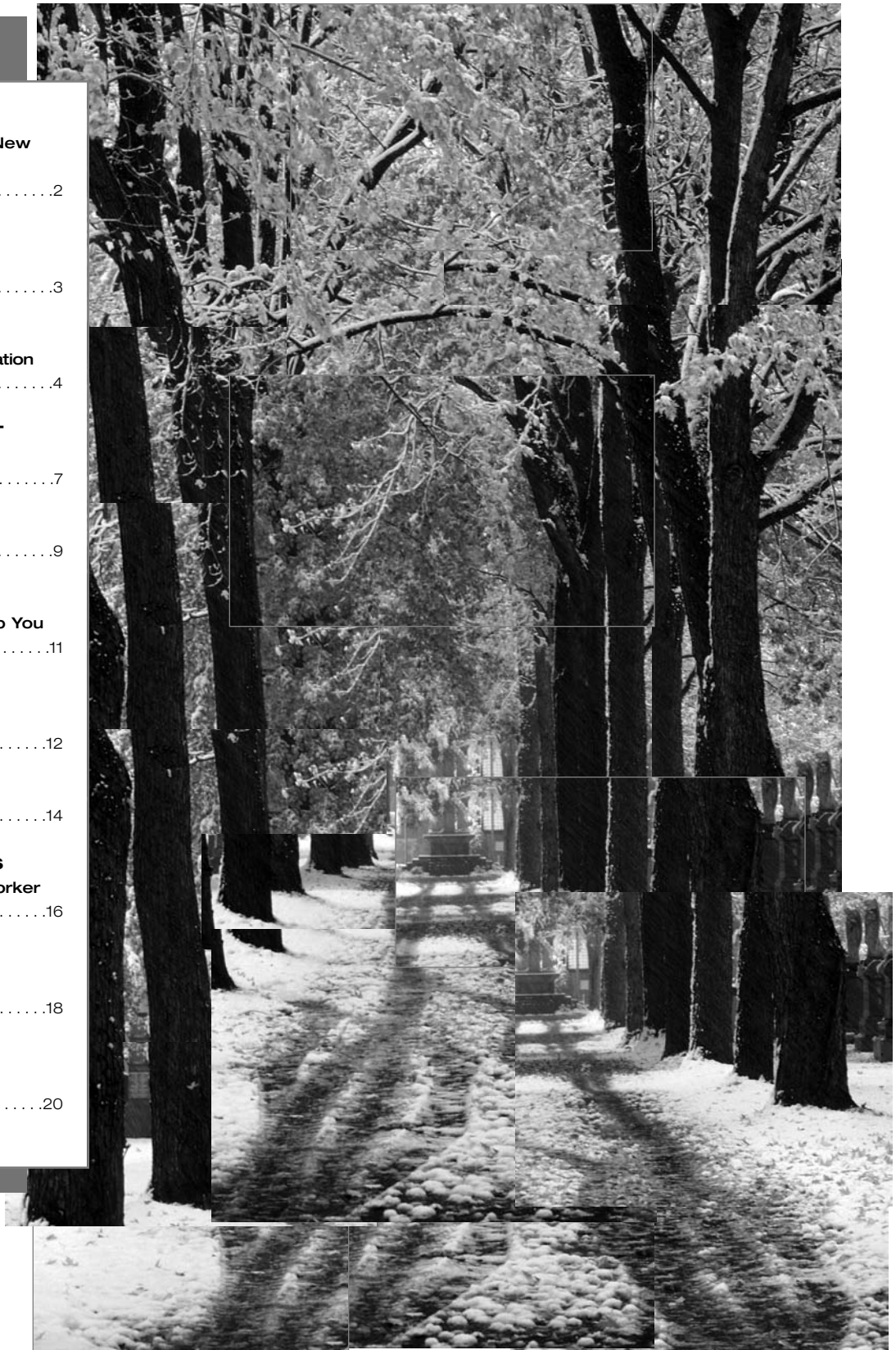
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The Stepping Stone

Issue Number 25 • January 2007

Published quarterly by the Management & Personal Development Section of the Society of Actuaries

475 N. Martingale Road, Suite 600
Schaumburg, IL 60173
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fax: 847.706.3599

World Wide Web: www.soa.org

This newsletter is free to section members.
A subscription is \$25.00 for nonmembers.

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Printed in the United States of America.

From the Editor

Important New Stepping Stone Features

by John West Hadley

It's my pleasure to take over as editor, and I would like to thank my predecessor, David C. Miller of Miller & Associates Business and Sales Coaching (www.BusinessGrowthNow.com) for all of the energy and enthusiasm he brought to the role over the past few years.

We tried an experiment in electronic publishing with the last two issues of *The Stepping Stone*. We are considering whether or not to move further in that direction, and need your feedback. Drop me an e-mail at SteppingStone@JHACareers.com to let me know what you think. And in case you might have missed those two electronic issues, just go to the SOA library at the Internet address shown below to get these terrific articles:

October, 2006 (<http://library.soa.org/library-pdf/SSN0610.pdf>)

- The Paradox of Effective Influence
- Developing Management & Business Skills
- Ken Lay's Legacy
- The Dilbert Principle
- The Management Experience Gap
- Are Cover Letters a Waste of Time?
- You Haven't Changed a Bit!
- Office Politics: A Little Savvy Goes A Long Way
- Look Like You Mean Business In Europe

July, 2006 (<http://library.soa.org/library-pdf/SSN0607.pdf>)

- Five Secrets to Success
- Get Involved!
- Are You at Risk of Becoming an Accidental Criminal?
- The Value of Coaching
- The EXCEL Model: Excellence in Teaching and Coaching
- Using a Retained Executive Search Firm
- Try This Game Plan: Play to Your Strengths
- Speak Your Way To Success
- Avoiding the Hidden Pitfalls of Executive Dining

Finally, this issue introduces a new *Stepping Stone* feature: an Advice Column. Submit your questions and challenges in any of the areas below, and your own comments on any of the articles we publish, to SteppingStone@JHACareers.com, and in upcoming issues we will give you expert advice on:

- People Management
- Business Management
- Career Development
- Communication Skills
- Interpersonal Skills

I look forward to making *The Stepping Stone* a more interactive forum that directly addresses your issues! I'd love to hear from you—drop me a note at any time to let us know how we are doing. □



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DISC Personality Styles

by Donna K. Weninger



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I'm convinced understanding personalities is vital to getting the best out of a team. Knowing your own personality style helps you understand what makes you tick. Knowing the personality styles of your colleagues helps you understand how best to communicate with them. Acknowledging and appreciating each person's characteristics creates a more positive work environment that will ultimately lead to greater team success. Without this understanding, a breakdown in workplace relationships is bound to occur.

Behavioral instruments can be useful tools to help leaders gain insight into different personalities, assessing their own personality style and determining the personality styles of their coworkers. One such instrument is DISC. The DISC model classifies behaviors into four personality types: Dominant, Influencing, Steadiness and Conscientious.

Dominant Style

People with the dominant style tend to make quick decisions, are very results-oriented, are direct and straightforward, are confident and competitive, don't want a lot of details, and often display a high level of initiative and energy. Additionally, they tend to prefer an environment that allows them to be in control. However, dominant style individuals can cause conflict by being too blunt, restless and impatient. When dealing with this personality style it is best to be direct and responsive and to not make excuses.

Approximately 10 percent to 15 percent of the population display a dominant style and include such individuals as George Washington, Margaret Thatcher, Barbara Walters and Michael Jordan.

Influencing Style

Influencers are outgoing, persuasive, gregarious, impulsive and tend to be good at delegating. Their style is collaborative and entertaining. Additionally, they tend to prefer an environment that allows social interaction. However, the influencer's strength at building friendships can be exploited easily when they have to make unpleasant decisions. Instead of doing what is best for the job, influencers procrastinate on decisions so as not to rock the boat. When dealing with this personality style it is best to let them take credit, show support and respond with enthusiasm.

Approximately 25 percent to 30 percent of the population display an influencing style and include such individuals as Ronald Reagan, Kathie Lee Gifford, Joan Rivers and John Madden.

Steadiness Style

People with the steadiness style are dependable, easygoing and friendly. Their emphasis is on cooperating with others to carry out a task. The supreme motivators for people with this personality type are stability and security. Thus, repetitive tasks, established work patterns and routine work are ideal. When working with this personality type it is best to spend time listening, show personal interest and be friendly.

Approximately 30 percent to 35 percent of the population display a steadiness style and include such individuals as Abraham Lincoln, Jackie Kennedy and Mother Teresa.

Conscientious Style

People with the conscientious personality type are thorough, attentive perfectionists who can think ahead and prevent problems. They are typically very serious, decisive and logical. They work within existing circumstances to ensure quality and accuracy. Additionally, people with the conscientious style tend to prefer little or no people contact. They tend to prefer an environment that places a high value on being right and safe. However, people with a conscientious style can be viewed as being rigid and overly detailed. Instead of talking about a problem, the conscientious person will write long memos and avoid personal communications. When dealing with this personality type you need to stick to the facts, do your homework and give plenty of lead time for a decision.

Approximately 20 percent to 25 percent of the population display a conscientious style and include such individuals as Thomas Jefferson, Dr. Joyce Brothers and Albert Einstein. However, **the actuarial profession is comprised of a very high percentage of individuals with the conscientious style.**

I've provided a very quick overview of the DISC personality styles (I'm a D—why would anyone need all of the details?). The next time something isn't clicking with a colleague, consider the impact personality styles is having on the situation. And then consider how you can modify your own personal style to deal with them more effectively. □



The Art of Awkward Conversation

by Maureen Costello

I have awkward conversations nearly every day. In my line of work, it's a given. As a professional image management consultant, I am often hired to work with executives or high-potential employees who have been identified by their bosses as needing to change or upgrade their professional image. Typical issues that I deal with include:

- Newly promoted executives who dress too casually.
- "Cerebral introverts"—engineers or technology geniuses who haven't had to work with the public until recently.
- Male executives with unruly facial hair.
- Younger, high-potential employees who dress like they're still in college.
- People from other cultures who aren't sure how to dress for this culture.
- People from our culture who need to learn how to blend in appropriately abroad.
- Women who wear clothes that are too revealing.
- People who've recently gone through a physical transition.
- Executives who have recently gained or lost a significant amount of weight.

Telling someone that their boss thinks they look sloppy, unprofessional or inappropriate can be difficult. While it's never easy to have these conversations, I've learned how to make it as pleasant as possible. If you need to have this type of conversation, here are some tips.

1) Don't make the awkward topic the major focus.

If you have a sensitive topic to discuss with a colleague, bring it up as part of a meeting with another focus. Calling a meeting especially to

address a difficult issue may increase the embarrassment factor by giving it too much attention. Making it one item on the agenda makes the statement that the topic is one of several issues on your mind.

For example, have a meeting to discuss the person's overall career development. Alternately, you could set up a meeting to discuss a new project that will require more interaction with the public or executives, and use that as a segue to deal with image issues.

2) Be empathetic.

Consider what the other person may be going through. One awkward conversation I sometimes have is guiding a new mother with ways she can look the part while in transition. Recently, I was asked to work with a new mother who often showed up to work with baby food on her ultracasual clothes. Having been there myself helps this discussion, but maintaining a professional image is key to your employer having confidence in your work, especially after a long maternity leave. First of all, it's important to remember her body has gone through major changes, and she probably isn't as comfortable in her skin as she was before. She may look different and feel worse about herself, and her old work clothes may not fit. The clothes she is wearing may be temporary as she is in the process of reaching a new equilibrium after childbirth. Life may feel totally out of control as she gets used to working and raising a new baby.

Making an assumption is a nice way to bridge the conversation. You could start with, "Sue, I assume that since you've had your baby, your life is very full and busy. It's a hard time, and I

I have awkward conversations nearly every day. In my line of work, it's a given.

know the last thing on your mind is your wardrobe.”

3) Use “I” statements.

Always avoid judging or criticizing a person. All comments should focus on your observation of the person’s actions or behaviors. For example, when speaking with a young person who is dressing too casually, I might say, “I’ve noticed that there seems to be a trend these days toward tighter fitting tops and casual pants which I know are popular with the college kids. Now that you are starting at ABC company, I would suggest wearing more classics that are more suitable for developing a professional image.”

4) Be direct.

Once you are engaged in the difficult conversation, try to avoid beating around the bush; that just makes it more awkward. The best approach is to be respectfully direct. If you act nervous or use euphemisms, the person receiving the awkward feedback may feel even more uncomfortable or embarrassed. Also, make eye contact. However, even as you’re being direct, try to use mild, softening words as illustrated in examples throughout this article.

5) Adopt a conversational tone.

If you keep your tone light and conversational, you send the message that you are comfortable, relating one person to another, maintaining a tone of matter of fact.

6) Use the “sandwich technique.”

Couch the difficult issue within positive statements. Start with what someone is doing well, then go into the critique, and finish up with another positive statement. For example, I might say to a newly promoted director who dresses too casually, “Congratulations on your promotion. You’ve been identified as a high potential to lead the new sector of business in marketing. As part of your new role you’ll be asked to represent the company in many public functions. That might mean wearing more

jackets and suits—we’d like you to upgrade your wardrobe going forward so you are prepared for the events coming up in the next quarter. You need to be looking at the whole package now, as a high-profile member of this company. I know you’ll be a standout in your new role.”

7) Keep the focus on professional development.

It’s good to discuss the issue in terms of professional development and credibility.

8) Invoke a 3rd party.

“I’ve gotten some feedback from some senior managers—that in several meetings in the last quarter, you’ve been dressing a bit casually for client-based events.”

9) Close out with a positive, inclusive statement.

“Let’s set up a plan,” or “let’s get out our calendars,” or “let’s check in again in four weeks to see how things are progressing.” “We’re looking to expand your professional development plan to include xxx and xxx and look forward to your future success.”

Here are some examples of how a difficult conversation about image might go:

Example 1: A “cerebral introvert”—an engineer—who has recently moved into a sales position.

“You’ve done a super job developing the new xxx product line. We know you’ll be out at conferences delivering papers on this new process, and we want to increase your visual credibility, so we recommend you work with a

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professional image management consultant to prepare for your new role. This will include investing in your wardrobe and updating your professional image. We're so excited you'll be working on rolling out this new process in the global community. Enjoy the coaching sessions with xxx company and let's circle back in six weeks to see how everything is going for you."

Example 2: A person just out of college who dresses unprofessionally.

"We're so happy you've joined us, and I look forward to working with you on several projects. As part of the introduction to our department, we hold a series of lunch-n-learns about various aspects of transitioning from college to professional. The fastest way to look the part of a professional is through your wardrobe selections. That means wearing a few more jackets and less revealing clothing items so that you can build your professional and personal credibility here. We're really looking forward to seeing you flourish here."

Example 3: A new mother comes to work with baby food on her shirt.

"We're so glad to have you back from maternity leave. We really missed you, and we're thrilled you've come back. I assume that since you've had your baby, your life is very full and busy. I might suggest that you make an extra effort to pull together a professional looking wardrobe while you are transitioning to maintain your professional credibility."

Example 4: A manager with an unruly beard.

"You've been doing a great job on the new project. Looking ahead to getting the word out—it seems you will have more client contact. I notice you're wearing a beard now—and I just want you to be aware that it's looking a little bit

scruffy and since we don't have a policy either way, I suggest you keep it neatly trimmed."

Example 5: A man from another culture has body odor.

"You've done a great job on ABC project. You work very well with people, and build effective networks. In addition, I wanted to call to your attention—a grooming matter. You may or may not be aware but in the western culture, there's a high value placed on personal hygiene and pleasant smells. I've noticed that you have some body odor—it may be for a variety of factors, but want to recommend some products that I have heard are successful. I would suggest that you change shirts frequently, and send the items to the cleaners more frequently. I know that this a sensitive subject and I appreciate that you were open to discussing it with me." □



Maureen Costello, MA, CIP, is principal of Image Launch, one of the top corporate image management consulting practices in Chicago. Ms. Costello works internationally with organizations on developing positive visual appearance strategies in the areas of professional presence, business etiquette and personal branding. She can be reached at www.imagelaunch.com.

You've done a great job on ABC project. You work well with people, and build effective networks.

Are You in Ship Shape?

Commentary on *It's Your Ship* by Captain D. Michael Abrashoff, U.S. Navy

by David M. Walczak

Looking for engaging books on management techniques that apply to our industry has been a quest and a challenge for me in the last few years. I have gravitated toward the practical versus the theoretical and so the opportunity to learn from a military commander trying to improve the capabilities of a guided missile destroyer, the USS *Benfold*, used in the Persian Gulf sounded promising. The Navy, in general, has dismal failure rates for new recruits and very low reenlistment rates. Morale on the *Benfold* was at rock bottom when Captain Abrashoff took over in 1997. His personal mission was to make it “the best damn ship in the navy” by improving morale and performance in measurable ways. The tactics used and explanations for choosing them were not only credible, they were applicable to situations in any life or business context.

One of the first key thoughts imparted by Captain Abrashoff is the concept of *Leading by Example*. Sounds like a trite no-brainer, right? Maybe so, but is it easy to practice? One of the keys to leadership is realizing that your staff and other followers notice everything. You have a major impact on them even when you don't see an explicit reaction or hear comments. Can you accept this and act on it in all situations? Can you pass ‘the *Washington Post* test’? Would it bother you if anything you did or said around a subordinate was on the front page of the paper tomorrow? A supporting plank is the key concept that a certain percentage of the time, the problem is you, the leader—probably a greater percentage of the time than we choose to admit. Denial over the need for self-examination is one of the largest barriers to success as a leader. If you can show others that you can be open to criticism, react well and even change, you will earn respect and credibility. The author

provides some great examples in the structure of the military pecking order, but as actuaries, we run across situations crying out for humility every week.

Another high impact tactic rolled out in this book is *Listen Aggressively*. This chapter resonates particularly well with a consultant who is constantly being told by senior partners and human resources that we are nothing without superb listening skills. How can you be effective if you don't have all the facts? How often do we tune people out because we aren't expecting them to have particular information that's helpful to us? How often do we abuse the opportunity to multitask? Use of a better listening strategy will ultimately provide you with more information. In addition, if you repeat the key message you've just heard back to the speaker (one of the author's tips), the listener will feel flattered and you will build critical rapport.

Though there are several other key categories of management expertise included in *It's Your Ship*, the last I will touch on is a chapter called *Results, Not Salutes*. The concept here is *not* to join a military unit or business organization for the end result of personal ego stroking. That is, if you want to wildly succeed. Innovation knows no rank and the officer who listens to the troops in the trenches will be able to implement ideas like switching from iron to stainless steel bolts preventing the need to

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repaint the ship's hull quarterly due to rust stains. Listening to and acting only on ideas from the top brass will be much less effective in the long run. Results are what will most impress the admiral in the long run, no matter where the idea originated. By bucking the tradition of the officers going to the front of the chow line on the *Benfold* (the Captain went to the back of the line when food was running low), he turned the tables and saluted the men.

By using the dozen or so key ideas in the book, which were drastic for the Navy, the author was able to turn the *Benfold* into the prototype for performance and morale ... it really

worked! Captain Abrashoff doesn't list a coauthor, no apparent ghost writing efforts in this book. As a result, his style is his own which is simply this: anecdotal examples of his broad ideas in a basic and believable laboratory environment. No overused clichés about animals, black belts or cheese. Just a neophyte, self-made management expert explaining common sense concepts that he discovered by first-hand experience in a new role. □



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Maximize Your Meetings

by Mark E. Green

Meetings, like death and taxes, are an inevitable fact of life. Many, unfortunately, turn out to be a huge waste of time. Some companies schedule them so automatically that staff members' energy is completely zapped, replaced by apathy and boredom.

Meetings are used counterproductively in organizations as a device for diluting authority, diffusing responsibility and delaying decisions. Referring a matter to committee may satisfy those who are cautious and analytical, but it's a source of frustration for action-oriented risk takers.

Human beings are a social species, and meetings fulfill a deep need. In every organization and culture, people come together in small groups at regular intervals. Attachment to the organization increases when they participate in teams and meetings. This need for gathering is clearly something more positive than just a legacy from our primitive hunting ancestry.

So, what can you do to ensure your meetings are productive and useful—not just socially satisfying?

Functions of Meetings

1. A meeting defines the team, group or work unit. Members gain a sense of identity and belonging when they gather.
2. In a meeting, group members share knowledge, add to each other's experiences, and combine strengths to produce better collective ideas and plans.
3. A meeting reconfirms members' commitment to decisions and objectives. Your membership in a group obliges you to accept its decisions, even if you personally disagree.
4. In some organizations, a meeting is often an occasion for team members and the

team leader to demonstrate their strengths and talents when working collaboratively.

5. A meeting is also a status arena. Not only can members show their cooperation, but they can also use a meeting to demonstrate their power and influence. A meeting is often the only time when members have a chance to determine their relative standing in the arena.

Avoid Meeting Failure

Meetings go off track and fail to achieve their desired objectives for many reasons: difficult interpersonal dynamics, office politics, power struggles, stonewalling and competitive drives that override the collective good.

Unless you are very clear about what you want to achieve in a meeting, you run the risk of wasting everyone's time. There are four types of objectives for meetings:

1. **A meeting can be informative.** If it is purely factual, consider other means of disseminating the information.
2. **It can be constructive and creative.**
3. **It can involve defining responsibilities, collaboration and commitments.**
4. **It can be legislative,** establishing frameworks for rules, routines and procedures.



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Preparing for Meetings

A well-prepared agenda helps clarify expectations and highlights purpose and objectives. It has the power to speed up a meeting—unless, of course, it's too brief or vague.

Before you call a meeting, delineate whether it's for information, for discussion or for decision so everyone understands the goal.

The following tips will help you with agenda planning:

- The early part of a meeting tends to have more energy and can be the most creative. Put items requiring more mental energy and ideas at the top of the agenda.
- Some items will unite committee members, while others may divide them into factions with conflicting opinions. It's often smart to end on an item that will be unifying.
- Dwelling too long on trivial items is a common error. Deal with the more urgent long-term issues at the beginning of a meeting.
- Limit the meeting's length, and state the stop time on the agenda. Start and end on time. If you schedule your meeting right before lunch or quitting time, people may be more motivated to stick to the agenda.
- Whenever possible, circulate background information on key issues beforehand. This helps ensure people are well informed. Keep these papers brief, or people won't read them.
- Identify all agenda items before the meeting. If you allow individuals to add other business, you've essentially issued an invitation to waste time. You can, however, structure time for discussion before the close of the meeting.

The Leader's Job

Some people believe their role as meeting leader gives them a license to dominate, while others approach the job as schoolteacher or scout mas-

ter. The former is intent on getting others to do what they determine to be best; the latter is focused on group satisfaction, without appropriate emphasis on action or results.

The meeting chair should be more servant than master, with two simultaneous requirements for success: dealing with subjects and dealing with people.

Dealing with Subjects

Leaders must listen carefully to keep meetings pointed toward the objective. From the start, they must make it clear what the meeting must accomplish before everyone leaves. It's the leader's job to ensure members stick to the topics, have the required information and understand the issues. Be on the lookout for points on which an interim summary will help.

Leaders should know when to close a discussion and move on. Perhaps a topic cannot be resolved because more facts are required, other people need to be present, more time is needed or individual members can settle things outside the meeting. But a decision's difficulty, likelihood of being disputed or chances of being unpopular is no reason to postpone making it.

Finally, the leader must give a clear, brief summary, reiterating action steps and members' specific commitments.

Dealing with People

There will always be people who dominate meetings, while others will be passive and silent. Encourage a clash of ideas, but not a clash of personalities.

Reframe complaints into challenges or problems to be solved. When discussion veers into whining, suggest a solution and ask others for new ideas. Use humor appropriately. Always keep the discussion moving toward its objectives.

Above all, don't allow energy to fizzle. There are plenty of opportunities to wake people up with questions and challenges. Don't waste people's time in meetings that go nowhere, where everybody is in agreement. Stir things up a bit. You can't achieve meeting objectives without engaging members' full participation. □

Some people believe their role as meeting leader gives them a license to dominate, while others approach the job as schoolteacher or scout master. The meeting chair should be more servant than master.

Dear Stepping Stone

Welcome to our new Advice Column! To prime the pump, in this issue we've reprinted with permission from John Hadley a question posed by an actuary to his *Career Tips* newsletter. (See www.JHACareers.com/Newsletter.htm for more information or to subscribe.)

Question:

I'm currently in a job I absolutely hate, but I already spent the signing bonus. I'm tempted to just walk away and pay back the bonus, but the "professional" part of me keeps telling myself that I can stick this out for a year. My old firm will take me back no problem, but I know I'd feel like a quitter if I left so soon. I've already spoken to HR and my boss's boss who has made some drastic changes, but I still really and truly hate this job! I am someone who is used to loving my job, and being in this situation just really kills me. Got any advice?

Advice:

This situation is very involved, and we can only touch on the surface based on what I know so far. First you need to reflect on the situation. Consider carefully questions like these:

- What were you looking for that caused you to change jobs? What was it that was missing before, or that you were hoping to find?
- If you didn't find that in the new company, what went wrong in your evaluation process? You will have to figure this out before making any quick decisions that might lead to another unhappy situation.
- If you did find it, why didn't that lead to a situation you like? Did you not really want it after all, or is there something else that is wrong with the new situation?
- Why exactly do you hate the new job?

- Is what you hate changeable (say, job responsibilities)? Or not (say, the company culture)?
- If it is changeable, what prevents you from laying that out on the table?
- What are your values regarding commitment? Would it violate your personal integrity to quit, especially after they've tried to work with you to improve the situation?

If you decide to leave, I would think long and hard about going back to the job you came from. There was a reason you left, and going back to a prior situation is usually a bad idea. This is a chance to really think hard about what you want from your career, and to instead find a third place that gets you what you were looking for from this move.

And if in the end you decide to stay, remember that emotions are often driven by actions, instead of the other way around. If you tell yourself you hate your job, you will. If you instead focus on what you can find to like about the job and your situation, you will hate it less.

If you then work on what you can do to create more of what you like, maybe you can actually change your situation to something you can begin to enjoy!

Submit your questions and challenges, and your own comments on any of the articles we publish to SteppingStone@JHACareers.com. We will give you expert advice in subsequent issues. □



A Winning Mindset

by John West Hadley

Since founding my career counseling practice three and a half years ago, I've worked with hundreds of actuaries and other professionals on how to market themselves effectively. Goals have varied:

- "To get a great new job that I can be excited about, and that pays me what I'm worth."
- "To get me out of a situation where I feel trapped and unmotivated."
- "To get me solidly on the radar screen of other critical players at my company, so that exciting new opportunities will open up for me."
- "To create the visibility that leads to sustainable growth for my consulting practice."

One common theme for success is confidence. Obviously, you need to have a clear goal—otherwise any path is as good as another. Once you've decided on that goal, you need to step out confidently and present a *Winning Mindset* to give yourself the best chance of success. Dipping your toes tentatively and testing the waters may be good advice for swimming in an unfamiliar area, but it rarely leads to real career or business success. Unless you can show me that you are really passionate about your goal and have confidence in your own ability to achieve it, why should I believe in you?

Here are three real-life examples of what a winning mindset can help you achieve:

1. Three years after being laid off by Lucent, "Jim" was deeply depressed, having succeeded only in getting a year of contract work in all that time. He had lost confidence in his abilities after hearing so many people tell him he was out of work too

long, his skills weren't up-to-date, his salary expectations were too high, etc. After working with him to draw out his accomplishments and get him back in touch with the measurable results he had been able to achieve for past employers, Jim began to regain his confidence. **Within three months, he had landed exactly the sort of job he wanted.** And Jim had the confidence to push back on the initial salary offer, getting it bumped up \$10,000 to the level he deserved.

2. "Bruce" wanted to close down his consulting practice and seek a corporate role where he could get benefits. However, there was no excitement in his voice about the sorts of jobs he sought. It turned out that he was really passionate about his practice, but it had been stuck at \$75,000 in revenues for several years, which wasn't enough to support his family long-term. Within six months of getting out to a variety of contacts with a confident message focused on the value he could bring to his clients, **Bruce had the commitments for an additional \$75,000 in annual revenues.**

3. "Neal" had a chance to meet with the chair of his company via a "Skip" meeting, where the senior officers would have one-on-one sessions with people a few levels down in the organization. When asked what his goal for that session was, he replied, "To make sure the chair knows what my unit does." Once this was reframed to, "To make sure the chair knows exactly what value my unit and I add to the company," he was able to brainstorm on how to accomplish his goal, and walked

**One common theme
for success is
confidence.
Obviously, you need
to have a clear
goal—otherwise any
path is as good as
another.**

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into the meeting with a winning mindset. End result, on the way out, the chair said, “Neal, keep me informed on your upcoming trip to Costa Rica. I might want to travel with you to pursue business opportunities.”

Many actuaries are supremely confident in their technical skills (and rightly so), yet hesitate to take action in important ways to build their careers. I believe this comes down in large part to a lack of that winning mindset. We’ve been trained up through our FSAs that the way to get ahead is by passing exams and by mastering a wide variety of materials. A self-selection process has crept in that attracts those most comfortable with that approach. Then we enter a new realm out of our normal comfort zone that relies on our ability to clearly articulate what we want, why we should get it (and the answer isn’t “because we work hard and we’re smart!”), to be good at networking and building our visibility in positive ways without seeming to brag.

It is possible to create that winning mindset, to fight against our natural inclination to over-analyze every situation. **The key is passion and confidence, and sometimes just forcing yourself to act more confidently than you feel and then letting the emotion follow.** Before I started my current practice, I had helped job-seekers as a hobby on the side of my successful systems consulting practice. My own comfort zone was to avoid jumping right in, and I instead thought about ways I could test the waters. I decided to do a resume workshop for the Actuarial Society of Greater New York and gauge if people might have an interest in working with me.

I had lunch with another actuary who had recently started his own coaching practice, and by the end of lunch my workshop idea had morphed into to a four-hour joint seminar with follow-up one-on-one workshops. I left lunch with a real fire in my belly about starting my practice, and decided to immediately put out my first marketing e-mail to a large business networking listserv. I wrote my first draft, at

which point my analytic side began to kick in. What’s the best message, the most compelling offer, the best way to send it out that’s not too self-serving? I recognized the trap, decided there were no answers to these questions, and limited myself to one hour to refine my message and send out a confident offer. **Within 48 hours, I had 100 requests for the free resume assessment offer I settled on!**

You may be thinking, “This Winning Mindset is all well and good, but I don’t want to be pushy. I don’t want to be telling everyone I’m the best thing since sliced bread!” That’s the beauty of it—You don’t have to! **The Winning Mindset is internal. It’s about getting really clear on what you bring to the table, and generating your own internal confidence in that.** Yes, you do need to present what you can do well, but this doesn’t need to be an in-your-face approach. If you have that clear confidence in yourself, and let people know in a simple, clear, confident way what value you are capable of adding, they will get it. **You will exude that quiet confidence that gets you new opportunities!** □



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Review of Recent Literature

by Donna K. Weninger

Faisal Siddiqi and I gave the “Review of Recent Executive Books” at the 2006 Annual Meeting. Since the meeting was held in Chicago and it was a book review we naturally wanted to have an Oprah theme. Thus, the book titles started with the letters O, P, R, A and H. Following is a brief synopsis of the books covered.

One Phone Call Away: Secrets of a Master Networker—According to the author, Jeffery Meshel, the key to creating an effective network is to approach each situation asking, “What can I do for you?” rather than, “What’s in it for me?” That is, networking is more than gathering business cards. Rather, it is about building goodwill. Meshel peppers his advice with interesting stories and interviews with professional networkers. However, be forewarned that one of these professional networkers writes, “It has been said that public speaking ranks second on the food chain of what people fear most (the first may involve being locked in a room with an actuary; I am not entirely sure).”

Presentation S.O.S.: From Perspiration to Persuasion in 9 Easy Steps—The author, Mark Wiskup, discusses several common public speaking myths including: the best way to start a presentation is with a joke, to get the most out of PowerPoint you have to really know the program, and a presentation shouldn’t have “sound bites.” In the past year the Management & Personal Development was charged with the task of finding a book on presentations to be used at future Fellowship Admissions Course. This book was selected because it is very modern, hip and an extremely quick read.

Retrain Your Business Brain: Outsmart the Corporate Competition—In today’s world, the source of power is no longer information itself, but rather how individuals organize information. In an era of knowledge workers, victory will go to the smartest and most innovative, and that is where companies will gain a competitive edge. More than just a “puzzle book,” *Retrain Your Business Brain* will help readers: become better decision makers, innovators and strategists, learn how to see emerging trends others miss, and identify hidden flaws and avoid making the same mistakes over and over.

And Dignity for All: Unlocking Greatness with Values-Based Leadership—This is the story of how one street-smart boy without a college education, James Despain, became a seasoned leader of Caterpillar, Inc. Despain’s honesty and ability to rise from the ashes of his mistakes are inspirational. His respect for the common worker and personal search for dignity and self-worth lead him to a new kind of leadership. And his transformation of a struggling organization provides a powerful blueprint for transforming your own organization.

How to Talk so People Listen: Connecting in Today’s Workplace—Our super-speed, electronically driven workplace has begun eroding our ability to talk and, what’s more, to listen. Thus, the author, Sonya Hamlin, delivers groundbreaking insights and solutions to some of today’s major communication issues at work: negotiating the generation gaps, integrating a multicultural workforce, organizing your message and making it visual, and understanding what motivates today’s audiences. She provides unique, innovative tools in an informal, practical style that can

... the best way to start a presentation is with a joke, to get the most out of PowerPoint you have to really know the program, and a presentation shouldn’t have “soundbites.”

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be used by entry-level employees all the way to the top executives.

One Customer, Divisible: Linking Customer Insight to Loyalty and Advocacy Behavior—Are you getting the most from your customers? This book teaches you how to optimize your customer relationships. In fact, it goes significantly beyond traditional thinking and approaches to building customer loyalty to emphasize a key leveraging factor largely missed by most marketers thus far: using individual customer data, on a purchasing situation or venue-specific basis, to provide the highest level of perceived value.

Primal Leadership: Learning to Lead with Emotional Intelligence—*Primal Leadership* is written by Daniel Goleman, Annie McKee, and Richard Boyatzis, the same team that wrote *Emotional Intelligence*. The goal of the book is to help leaders become better leaders by improving their emotional intelligence. The book gives insight into the collective feeling of an organization, or its emotional climate, and how this is influenced by the people at the top of the organization and the leadership methods adopted by the organization. Also covered are different leadership styles, including: visionary, coaching, pacesetter, democratic and commanding. This book is chock-full of statistics and details of how the brain functions.

Radical Change, Radical Results: 7 Actions to Become the Force for Change in Your Organization—Change is coming. Are you ready to make split-second decisions that get big results? Develop a workforce that runs on self renewal, passion and productivity and delivers results to both customers and investors throughout time. Dell, Motorola, Pharmacia and other leading organizations have used this proven program to enable company-wide change and compete more effectively. The authors, Kate Ludeman and Eddie Erlandson, explain their seven-step program for achieving a successful corporate transformation.

A Survival Guide for Working with Bad Bosses: Dealing with Bullies, Idiots, Back-Stabbers, and Other Managers from Hell—Author Gini Graham Scott provides scenarios that illustrate 34 categories of bad bosses. Scott describes each classification and provides a case study and list of possible solutions—although many of the solutions include just tolerating the situation rather than resolving the problems. Thus, I think this book would be ideal for a group of inexperienced new hires to discuss case by case so when confronted with such issues they have some potential solutions.

Hope is Not a Strategy: The 6 Keys to Winning the Complex Sale—Author Rick Page has taught his breakthrough selling strategies to thousands of people in 150 companies across 50 countries. This book details a six-step process for making the sale—no matter how complex the deal or how many people are involved in the buying decision. Page shows readers how to: identify and sell to a prospect's business "pain," qualify a prospect, build competitive preference, define a prospect's decision-making process, sell to power by finding the key to buyer politics and communicate your strategy throughout your team.

With today's busy lifestyles and ever increasing workplace demands, it is difficult to find the time for reading. However, numerous research projects have proven reading is one of the determining factors for success in life. Thus, it is my hope that the list above will inspire you to begin or increase your reading of executive books, leading to greater professional success. □



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Consoling a Divorcing Co-Worker: Five Tips to Remain Sane, Tactful and Professional

by Maureen Wild

With a divorce rate approaching more than 50 percent, it is very likely that someone working with you is experiencing this unfortunate event. Maybe she is riding on the elevator with you, working in the next cubicle or gulping down a cup of coffee across the table from you in the employee lounge. It could be that he is booking your corporate travel plans or leading the next department meeting. Perhaps you, yourself, are divorced and you remember your concern over finances, the child custody battles and the never ending flurry of correspondence from attorneys. You may have suffered feelings of grief or rejection and loss of familiar identity. Fortunately, over time, most of us begin to heal and rebuild new lives, but the majority of people who have divorced would not want to revisit it ever again.

Of course, there are always exceptions, people who embrace a divorce after years of unhappiness as an emancipation; a celebration of a fresh start. But, for most, it's no day at the beach. Which brings us again to the question of a divorcing colleague; how can we be compassionate and maintain a professional relationship simultaneously? What is a prudent amount of time to excuse less than stellar performance? What is appropriate to say and what is best left unsaid? Here are a few suggestions from people who have slogged through these murky and, sometimes, awkward waters:

- **Should we pop the champagne?**

Upon learning of a colleague's impending divorce, it is often quite wise to ask the question: "Should I be offering condolences or congratulations?" This is a particularly handy phrase if you are not well acquaint-

ed with your colleague's personal life. Some people bristle at the notion of having others pitying them, so do not assume that everyone will want the "Oh, you poor baby" treatment.

- **Things aren't always what they seem; skim milk masquerades as cream!**

Don't ever make assumptions about the reasons for the split. It's easy to jump to the wrong conclusion, thus causing a divorcing person additional suffering. The year before her husband filed papers against her, one woman had lost over 100 pounds. Everyone assumed that she was having an affair (or multiple affairs) as a consequence of her stunning new figure. Without knowing anything about her circumstances, many associates began "siding" with her estranged husband and engaging in cruel gossip. Ultimately, it was revealed that her husband was gay. As his wife resumed her youthful good looks and sought more intimacy with him, he was forced to confront his sexual identity head on and he left the marriage to seek the companionship of other men. In this particular instance, the "victim" not only had to cope with her spouse's shocking revelations but with the judgmental conduct of people not fully acquainted with her dilemma.

- **Don't ask intrusive questions, instead, offer affirmation.**

It is never appropriate to ask personal questions of colleagues under any circumstances. For example, it is extremely insensitive to ask a co-worker what her alimony payments may be, how much her lawyer is

Don't ever make assumptions about the reasons for the split. It's easy to jump to the wrong conclusion, thus causing a divorcing person additional suffering.

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charging her, if his wife had an affair, or if he is going to have to sell his house to pay his legal bills.

A good friend will offer affirmation along the lines of, *"I know this has been a stressful time for you, but you'd never know it from looking at you, you look great or I hope you realize how important you are to our department; the work you do here is very meaningful."* This is also an appropriate time to offer words of hope such as *"this too shall pass"* or *"I'm sure something joyful will be on the other side of this passage."*

- **Don't share divorce "war stories" with your peers.**

Sometimes in an effort to comfort someone, we play the silly game of, "If you think that's bad, listen to this..." When someone is coping with a broken heart, betrayal, financial stress or concern for his/her child's well-being, it matters not what your sister's husband did during her divorce, or how many times your ex-spouse cheated, drank or acted out before you called it quits.

- **Suggest counseling if job performance continues to decline month in and month out.**

Often people will throw themselves into their work to escape their upset and anxiety, but sometimes a grieving or bitter colleague will behave unprofessionally and use his/her divorce to excuse shoddy performance, unpleasant behavior or frequent tardiness or absences. If this is the case, it is best to gently remind your colleague that you are relying on her professionalism and it may be best for her to seek some good outside counseling. Divorce isn't a like a cold where the symptoms vanish within a week or two, it is an ongoing emotional state that can take years to heal. Nevertheless, it is only by actively marching through it that we can get to a place of

healing. Most employers offer mental health counseling and access to trained psychologists or psychiatrists.

Kindness and compassion on the job can go a long way toward helping a person going through a divorce to recover his/her dignity and purpose. All of us have sorrows or burdens, perhaps the care of an aging parent, a frightening medical diagnosis or troubled teenager. Our work can actually be a therapeutic haven. It engages our minds so that our sorrows are not always uppermost in our thoughts. Our interactions with other people can boost confidence and give us an opportunity to put our talents to use. The high divorce rate in the United States doesn't seem to be declining, and if we can demonstrate some tact in the workplace, divorce doesn't need to sabotage our professional integrity or productivity. ▣



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Getting in Your Own Way?

by David C. Miller

I've heard it said that human beings have billions of thoughts each and every day ... and 99 percent of those thoughts are the same ones they had yesterday!!

If those thoughts are not supporting you, you will no doubt have trouble getting the results you want and overcoming the challenges along the way. Being able to manage your psychology is at least 80 percent of the battle in being successful.

The following is a list of Ten Forms of Twisted Thinking as defined by David D. Burns, M.D., author of *The Feeling Good Handbook*. Most of us live with these thoughts day-in and day-out. Discover which one permeates your mind and steals your motivation! Just being aware of it will weaken its hold over you and you can begin to "untwist" your thinking!

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking

You see things in black-or-white categories. Anything short of perfection is seen as a total failure. You make one mistake and the whole deal is blown! You have a spoonful of ice cream, and think "I've blown my whole diet" and gobble down a half-gallon. In business you might find yourself analyzing a situation and looking at only two options—usually the two extremes. "I can stay in this job I hate or I could quit tomorrow." There are probably over a hundred other options you can consider. When this "binomial-type" analysis occurs, it's usually because of all-or-nothing thinking.

2. Overgeneralization

You know this is happening when words like "always" or "never" cross your mind. You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. A consultant hears "no" from a prospect and thinks, "I'll never get a sale."

3. Mental Filter

You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively. As a result, your vision of reality becomes darkened, like putting a drop of ink in a glass of water. For example, you receive many positive comments about a presentation you made, but one person says something mildly critical. You obsess about his reaction for days and ignore all the positive feedback.

4. Discounting the Positive

You reject positive experiences by saying they "don't count." You do a good job and minimize it by thinking you could have done better or that anyone could have done as well. This takes the joy out of life and makes you feel inadequate and unrewarded.

5. Jumping to Conclusions

You interpret things negatively when there are no facts to support your conclusion. There are two forms of jumping to conclusions: (A) Mind reading: without checking it out, you arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you. (B) Fortune-telling: You predict things will turn out badly. For example, before a presentation, you think "What if I freeze up?" or "They're going to hate our recommendation."

6. Magnification

You exaggerate the significance of your problems and shortcomings and you minimize the value of your desirable qualities. One time at a seminar, I was working with a participant about his fear of interviewing. I asked him to close his eyes and imagine himself in an interviewing situation. I could visibly tell that he was anxious, so I asked him what thoughts were going through his mind. He replied, "Millions of people are interviewing for this job." Millions of

Most of us live with these thoughts day-in and day-out. Discover which one permeates your mind and steals your motivation!

people? By the way, he wasn't interviewing for *The Apprentice*. This was a classic case of magnification.

7. Emotional Reasoning

You assume your emotions reflect the way things really are. "I feel uncomfortable asking for the sale, so it must be an inappropriate thing to do." Or "I feel inadequate so I must really be inferior." Our emotions are like the weather—they can change day-to-day and moment by moment for many different reasons. Our emotions are valuable because they point to our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us, yet they are often not reflective of what's really going on. So we need to be careful about how we respond to our emotions.

8. "Should" Statements

You tell yourself that things *should* be the way you hoped for or expected them to be. "Musts," "oughts" and "have tos" are similar offenders. These statements reflect rules that we have adopted either explicitly or implicitly. When these statements are directed against yourself, they lead to guilt and frustration. When directed toward others, they often lead to anger and frustration. They rarely put you in a resourceful state to change behavior. Instead they will often make you feel either rebellious (and give you the urge to do the opposite) or hopeless (and make you want to do nothing).

9. Labeling

This is an extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking. Instead of saying, "I made a mistake," you attach a negative label to yourself: "I'm a loser." You might also label yourself "a fool" or "a jerk." This is irrational because "you're not what you do." These labels are useless abstractions that lead to anger, anxiety, frustration and low self-esteem.

10. Personalization and Blame

Personalization occurs when you hold yourself personally responsible for an event that is not entirely under your control. A classic example is the person who regularly takes the blame for

others' unhappiness. Although we may be able to influence other people's feelings, we certainly are not responsible for them. Another example is when a mother finds out her child is having difficulties in school and thinks, "This shows what kind of mother I am." Personalization leads to guilt, shame and feelings of inadequacy.

Some people do the opposite. They blame other people or their circumstances for their problems, and they overlook ways that they may be contributing to the problem. "The reason my job does not work is because I have an unreasonable boss." Blame usually doesn't work very well because other people will resent being scapegoated and they will toss the blame right back in your lap. It's like a game of hot potato—no one wants to get stuck with it.

Becoming aware of this type of thinking is the first step to creating change. Once you're aware you can "shift" your thinking to engage more rational responses to the events you encounter. Then as you condition this new way of thinking, you'll notice a significant improvement in how you feel about and respond to these types of triggering events. □



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Networking: Master Key to Opportunity

by Mary Kilkeny



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Eighty-five percent of the job market is hidden. That's right—hidden. What exactly does that mean? Eight-five percent of openings never make it to the classifieds or the Internet. Instead, these roles are filled by someone who had an inside track through family, friends or a professional network. Yes—a professional network. We have all heard, "It's all about who you know." In today's competitive job market, that statement couldn't be truer.

It may seem unfair, but those professionals are not just lucky. They earned their positions by networking, essentially by forming the right connections. The main objective of networking is getting your name out in the marketplace. The more you do, the better the chance that your name will magically pop up the next time an opportunity is available.

The key to successful networking is realizing that it is a continuous process. However, keep in mind that networking for its own sake differs from networking with a specific purpose in mind. You must alter your approach to best align with your current goals.

Networking—When you are content in your current job

No one likes someone who just comes around when they need something. That is why successful networking is continuous. Network before you need to in order to strengthen your contact list and hone your relationships.

- **Get involved in your industry.** Become more involved in your industry or discipline by joining a professional association. Be an active member to gain exposure and increase your network: volunteer for committees, contribute to newsletters and share your knowledge at meetings or conferences.
- **Volunteer in your community.** You would be surprised how small the world really is.
- **Keep in touch.** Call, e-mail or write once a month to keep your name fresh in your contacts' minds.

Networking—To advance within your current organization

Your audience in this scenario is extremely targeted. You are, in theory, networking at least 40 hours a week with your co-workers and bosses. Though it seems like working with your targets is easier, realize that this puts you on stage everyday. You must never let your guard down.

- **Stand out.** Show up early and leave late, join committees and be confident in your work.

- **Show initiative.** Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo—innovative risk takers often open doors for themselves.
- **Become visible to senior management.** Show interest in your work and look to others for information on how the company is doing, the direction it is heading and how you can help. Seek out opportunities to make presentations or contributions directly to senior management.
- **Dress to impress.** If you want to be important, dress like it!

Networking—To find a job

Networking while in an active job search is the most structured form of networking. Be sure not to get networking confused with job searching; networking is meeting new people who are able to give you advice and guidance, not necessarily a job.

1. **Compile a list.** Make a list of everyone you know: business professionals, friends, family and clients. Don't restrict your list; you never know who could be a link to your dream employer. Additionally, include a list of approximately 20 dream organizations. In an ideal world, your contacts will provide links to your target companies, but don't be alarmed if this isn't the case.
2. **Write your commercial.** Prepare; write your sales pitch. This three-minute commercial should introduce your business self. Include your credentials and your objectives. Know this by heart—you must be able to recite it naturally when put on the spot.
3. **Schedule meetings.** Call your contacts to set up brief meetings. Before picking up the phone, jot down notes on what you want to say. Remember to be professional and polite.
4. **Plan your agenda.** Don't waste your contacts' time. You want to build bridges, not burn them. Know what it is you wish to accomplish when entering a meeting.
5. **Present your best.** Remember this is not a job interview; enjoy yourself. Walk into the meeting with confidence and a positive attitude. Build instant rapport by agreeing on a time allocation. Make it clear that you are there to learn; professionals love to share their industry knowledge and experiences.
6. **Follow up.** Send a note to let your contacts know how much you appreciated their time and insights.

Networking is the key to opening the hidden job market, whether it is an opportunity tomorrow or 10 years from now. Network anywhere and everywhere and one day you will become the epitome of "It's all about who you know." □