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Do Your Best to Better Someone Else's

By Martin Avis

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If you do your best, you can't go far wrong.

So said out grandparents and our parents. Boy were they wrong!

Maybe in the jobs-for-life mentality of the era before the 1980's such attitudes were laudable. Keep your nose clean, put in a good day's work and retire after 40 years with a pension and a hacking cough.

The business world is very different today. Nowadays, your performance isn't measured against your own personal best, you are measured against your peers.

Who cares if you wrote the best report of your life, or just gave the best presentation of your career? Nobody. All that matters is the result. If Joe can write a better report or Sam can give a better presentation, they will pretty soon have your job.

Is that cut-throat? You bet it is. Since the Regan years in the U.S. and the Thatcher years in the U.K., business has changed from the corporate family to Darwinian evolution. Only the fittest survive.

Now, it isn't enough to just turn up and put in a good day's work. You have to make a 'positive contribution' as well.

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How can you do that without suffering the fate of so many rising stars: executive burnout?

Stress was the curse of the nineties and is getting worse in the noughts. But stress is just an inability to deal with a situation. It can be beaten. You just have to have the right tools in your armory to fight it back.

Here are five tools that you can use right now. They are not industry or job-specific. Anyone can use them, but you do have to put in the effort to learn.

Any tool, in any job, feels awkward and unwieldy when you first pick it up. These are no different. But practice and application will pretty soon make them all old friends. They will keep you sane and light your way to success.

1. Time and self management.

This is an old chestnut, but in truth, time management has never been so important. The person who can effectively complete six jobs in a day will always rise higher than the one who can only complete five.

Often time management is a misnomer. What needs managing is ourselves. Our attitudes are the time wasters, not time itself.

Read the books, learn the skills and make every second of your life count.

2. Positive mental attitude.

"Whether you believe you can, or believe you can't, you are right."

What is the point in self-doubt? It is a self-fulfilling prophesy. Far better to believe in yourself and push yourself to achieve higher and greater things, than to fail for lack of trying.

There are two words you should erase from your vocabulary: can't and might.

'I can't do it' and 'I might do it' both usually mean
'I won't do it.'

You can. you should and you will.

3. Insatiable curiosity.

The old way of cocooning yourself in a little world of your own and letting the rest of the office/company get on with their own tasks must become extinct in your life.

Open your eyes and your mind. If you see that a colleague is doing some great work, ask them questions. find out how they are doing the things they do and why. Flatter them with your sincere interest. And learn.

Your is rarely the only way, and almost never the best.

Let's be really cynical here, how can you hope to be better than the next person if you don't know what the next person is doing?

4. Honest self assessment

This is one of the hardest tools to learn, but one of the most powerful. Learn to recognize your faults and your successes.

Then build on them.

For example, if you come to realize that logical thinking and organization is a failing for you, make it a priority in your life to improve. Buy some books, attend courses and address the problem.

Don't do this passively, because it will not work. Instead, write yourself an action plan. Detail the stages you have to go through, the objectives you have set for yourself and the ultimate goals. Then continually monitor the problem until there is no longer a problem.

The same thing goes for your strengths. Unless you can identify them, you can't start to build on them. Be

proud of them, but not complacent. Today's top skill can be tomorrow's millstone.

5. Continual education.

The world is a wonderful university. There is knowledge all around just for the taking. But therein lies another problem: how to absorb all the information that you need to?

The problem is generally solved by a degree of selectivity. Today's executives are forced to become specialists in narrower and narrower fields.

There are many excellent courses available on speed reading, mega speed reading, photo reading and other methods. Pick one and learn to read – and absorb information faster. It will be the best new skill you can acquire. Even if you 'only' double your reading and comprehending speed, imagine how much extra information that could represent!

The key point in this 'education' tool is the absolute necessity to invest in yourself. Buy books and courses. Attend seminars. Learn from everyone you can.

If your company has a training program, all the better. Your self assessment skill will enable you to quickly identify areas that you need to work on. Tell your boss, or your human resources people. But don't do it idly. 'I think it would be nice' is a killer. Instead, write a memo or email detailing exactly what training you would like, why you want it, and what benefit the company will get from sending you. If they are serious about training staff, they will be glad of your positive input.

The world of business isn't going to change in a hurry. It is up to you to adapt yourself to this hard-edged environment or find yourself on the endangered list.

If you think that you are as good as you can be – think again! You just haven't thought big enough yet.

Martin Avis is a management and training consultant. His free weekly newsletter, BizE-zine, is packed

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Get Out of Your Comfort Zone in the Job Search

By Marilyn J. Tellez, M.A.

Most everyone these days knows what a comfort zone is. My definition is the place, environment and tasks that we have learned to do and feel comfortable with—a comfort zone.

Lots of people feel devastated when they have lost a job as their comfort zone no longer exists. In other words, the time, place, co-workers, tasks which have been performed on the job don't exist any more. It's an uncomfortable place to be in. There is no sense of direction.

However, if we as workers realize that a comfort zone can disappear at any time, it is important to get out of our comfort zone while working. It does not take lots of money to be adventurous in looking at what other people do.

When we establish a reason to find out about other's jobs, we can understand job roles and skills from someone else's perspective, thus enhancing our own. It means talking to people, volunteering for projects out of our own expertise, and being curious about what other people do.

These activities can help us to understand that the comfort zone of the past, may be a prison in disguise. Being more open to various experiences and people can help us to understand that the grass we may covet on the other side of the street, is really just grass; someone else's comfort zone. See your "zone" as something you can change constantly. That activity will keep you on your toes!

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