

TEN WAYS TO BECOME INVALUABLE

As I finished my first 25 years of management consulting, my number one resolution was to create this advisory to help managers and leaders reach their potential and avoid the pitfalls that derail an otherwise exciting career. There are many management gurus who offer salient advice and deserve respect, including the Holy Father of Management, Peter Drucker. Jim Collins offers genius advice, as does Warren Bennis. I once demanded that the high potential charges under my tutelage read the book Bennis wrote with Bert Nanus - *Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge*, as a pre-requisite to my class because of my respect for the authors. However, I don't need to refer you to the work of any of these talented advisors now.

As a long-time management consultant, I have enough experience and insight to see who is going to be ousted from their leadership role and who is likely to move up. It has become easy to spot the losers. Those who will not make it have many things in common that are obvious to people who do what I do. When I see the signs, I want to grab them by the shoulders, shake them hard and say, "*Don't do that; you will get fired or you will lose your business*" but my experience tells me they often say something really stupid like, "*You don't understand; we are in the XXX business.*" Sure, I don't understand? I have only done this exact same job for 700 clients over 25 years; what do I know? I take no pleasure in watching them raise their gun and take aim at their feet – one at a time. I can assure you they will and they will blame someone else for their demise.

If you are interested in what I have seen that leads to success and failure in business, read this advisory.

1. FOLLOW YOUR PASSION

Those who are highly successful do not consider their work to be a job. It is their passion. It is their life. They wake up thinking about their work and they go to sleep thinking about it. They are always looking at success. None is concerned about failure. It is not part of their vocabulary. Mistakes? You bet they make mistakes, but they never fail and they never look for ways to avoid failure. They look for ways to increase the probability of success.

If you are hard at work doing something you don't like, quit. I remember well how many pharmacists I observed who were unsuccessful while I was still in my corporate life. Without exception they would tell me how much they hated their job. It was not uncommon for me to hear one of them say, "*I hate this job; I never wanted to be a pharmacist, but my Dad is a pharmacist and he said it is my duty to carry the family tradition.*" Obviously, Dad had no idea he had just set his kid up for failure. If you are doing what you love to do and you are not making the progress you think you deserve, keep the faith. Not many of us have instant success and most of those **Ninety-Day Wonders** do not last. Sooner or later, your persistence will pay off.

2. GET GOOD BEFORE YOU TRY TO LOOK GOOD

Competence breeds confidence and Subject Matter Experts are always in demand. Don't forget that. I don't care how good you are. I want you to be great. If you never read Jim Collins books, *Good to Great* or *Built to Last*, you may not know that being good is not good enough and stands in the way of being great. Being great will give you the confidence to take risks that pay off.

Being great will cause other people to think of you when they need advice from an expert. Mediocre people are everywhere but experts are few. Competency is job security unless you are a real jerk to work with. Competency will make you invaluable to your employer.

If you are the leader, you must have leadership skills. If you are hired to manage, you must have management skills. You cannot rely on your technical training to carry you when you move into a management role. With my client group I have an EVP of Sales. He is the very best sales person I ever met. But, he is also a skilled manager. He is careful when he selects staff and uses every tool available to be sure he hires the best. His retention rate is phenomenal. He spends as much time as he needs to spend to be sure his new Sales Reps are fully oriented. He knows that onboarding training is essential. He communicates regularly and continuously works at teambuilding. And, he does not leave problem-solving to chance. He addresses problems before they get out-of-control. Although he has no MBA, his more than twenty-years of experience is evident in everything he does. He is keenly aware he is not being paid to be a salesperson; he is paid to lead the sales growth of a huge division.

3. POLISH YOUR OWN DIAMOND

Each of us has natural aptitudes for something. Exploit that something. If you are mechanical, exploit that. Don't worry about your lack of creative skills. Do not work hard on the wrong stuff. There are plenty of creative types around. If you spend your time focused on trying to be excellent at something that is unnatural for you, you will have wasted it. Spend your time getting better and better at what you do well.

4. HIRE YOUR WEAKNESS

Surround yourself with people who can and will do those things you don't do well or you don't like to do. A talented EVP told me he was the worst time manager in the world and he spent a fortune on time management training just to become adequate. In desperation he hired a detail-oriented Assistant. The end result was a 20% increase in his productivity. She was able to help him be more organized and keep him focused. He had great insight into his own capabilities and found a way to address his weakness and keep it from interfering with his success.

This same executive willingly seeks advice from experts. He will be quick to tell you that he consults with his advisors before he makes major decisions. He surrounds himself with financial, legal and management advisors because he knows that he cannot do everything well. He is a sales and marketing guy and has the advisors on his speed dial. Smart!

If you feel you know "everything" I can assure you that attitude is fatal. Over the years I have seen executives who expressed a view that other functions within the company are useless. If they are in sales, they discount the value of Finance, Accounting, Production or Human Resources. They may even say something really stupid like, "*Anyone with common sense can do their job; it's no big deal.*" Failure to recognize the importance of those who do work that is different from yours will ensure that you will lose their respect and their support. Successful managers and leaders accept they are unlikely to get their way all of the time and other departments are just as important as theirs. They respect the views and needs of colleagues and

they recognize that compromise is essential to teamwork. The bottom line is to be certain you always partner with your peers. You need them more than they need you because they will still be there when you are gone! I learned that from employees.

A group of employees once told me they never worry about an arrogant executive. They said that they were on the “B” team. I asked them to explain and understood completely when they said, *“We will be here when he will be gone.”* I got it.

5. BE SELFLESS

Do you think those at the top of their game think they got there by themselves? No chance. Always take time to give credit to others and you will get a wonderful surprise. It will come back to you. Credit is like a boomerang. It is almost impossible to give away. Many of the most successful leaders I work with are respected by their employees who say, *“He gives us far more credit than we deserve.”* The selfless leader says, *“It is not about me; it is about our employees, because without them I cannot make this work.”*

6. DITCH “I” AND “MY”

The most successful leaders I know say “we” and “our.” It is not contrived. The words “our” and “we” just tumble out of their mouths as a routine part of the conversation. They do not claim to “own” the staff. But, they own the result of the employees work. They see themselves as the leader of a team. They see each employee as player on their team. They help their employees learn they are members of a team and how to be a team player. When you hear a colleague say, *“I told my Assistant to tell my Vice President of Sales that I need results to keep my division from being criticized,”* take a mental picture of your colleague. He (or she) will be gone soon unless the family owns the company.

7. DON’T CHASE SUCCESS

If you are looking for success, you won’t find it. For more than 40 years I have been interviewing job candidates. I ask this question, *“What is your ultimate goal?”* To those who tell me their goal is to find success, I always want to know how they plan to do that? Just like happiness, you cannot find success. Success finds you. It finds you when you are doing what you do so well that people want you to do it again and again and they want other people to see you do it, too. Think about it. Speakers, writers, singers, actors and business executives, are successful when they are excellent at what they do. Their work is always in demand. They can’t hide no matter how hard they try. We hunt them down and ask for more.

Success is recognition for what has already happened, not what is going to happen. Most of my clients are key executives. They are results-oriented people. They don’t look at what you are doing; they look at what you have done. They use systems, such as Management by Objectives (MBO) to measure results. Sales, profits, and customer satisfaction are indicators of success in business. They are quick to tell you that you need to make something happen if you want to be seen as successful. That is good advice. In addition, you need to make something happen again and again. Your success last year and the year before will not take you to the top and keep you there. You must consistently produce a desired outcome.

8. UNDER PROMISE AND OVER DELIVER

You can be sure the manager/leader, who is overly eager to get what they want, may promise impossible results. They misread the environment or forget their words will be remembered later when the results are not delivered. There will be a day of reckoning as managers/leaders are in roles with accountability. When the company resources have been expended and the results are not there, the outcome will include the ouster of those who created the loss. It is far better to promise only what is reasonable or what can be accomplished with a little stretch than to promise the impossible. If you over deliver, the result will be an added bonus and you will be seen as a winner.

9. HAVE MORAL COURAGE

Somewhere within your inner core, is the ethical system that drives you. There are a million clichés that apply here. *“The person who falls for everything stands for nothing”* stands out. There is a time to stand firm for the right thing to do. If you are not willing to speak up and try to right a wrong you will speak volumes about your character. If you are willing to allow employees to be bullied, disparaged or ridiculed, you make a statement about how you value people. Your staff is watching to see if you have moral courage. When Edward Kennedy eulogized his brother, Presidential candidate, Robert Kennedy, he said, *“He was a man who saw a wrong and tried to right it.”* Your self-image grows when you have the moral courage to right what is wrong within your workplace. A successful executive is not a racist or a bigot, and always insists on equality for every employee.

10. FUEL YOUR TANK

Be good to yourself. Your success depends on the package that is carrying you around. The human body is a fascinating machine and needs good care to run at optimum speed. Don't smoke too much, drink too much, or do anything else that will steal your energy and good health. Sick people don't feel good and it takes energy to be in charge. You need physical strength and mental peace. If you are doing nothing to take care of your health, start right now. Make sure you get a check-up to avoid long-term problems. Develop at least one outside interest to distract you from work now and then. Do something that pays back for your success or pays forward to your community that will be grateful for your charity. Commit to getting restful sleep as there is no question that lack of sleep is a key contributor to pre-mature aging. Your employees need you at your personal best. Commit to it.

Success is not an accident nor is it a carefully crafted plan. There is no blueprint or prescription that guarantees the desirable outcome. Some of it is based on faith; some of it is based on self-confidence. Most if it is based on commitment to lifelong learning, to do the right thing and do it right. I admit that I believe that a tiny bit is fate and there is not guarantee because fate is indeed fickle.

I wish you more success than you ever dreamed possible, the time to enjoy it, and someone you love to share it with you.

This management advisory was prepared by Executive Consultant Nancye Combs. It was not created to replace the services of a competent legal advisor and is not specific to the laws of any specific state. Nancye Combs is also the endorsed Human Resources consultant for the Specialty Tools and Fasteners Distributors Association – The Petroleum Equipment Institute (PEI) and more than 100 member companies of FISA – Distributors serving the food equipment manufacturing industry. Nancye is a nationally respected authority in human resources and organizational management. She speaks, writes, serves as an expert witness on sex harassment issues, and consults worldwide on management issues. She is a University instructor for human resources professionals seeking to become nationally certified by the Human Resources Certification Institute.

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