
Advancing On the Job

You're now employed. What can you do to get ahead? The same principles that make a business successful in the free enterprise system will also make you successful in your career: working to please the customer and working to be productive.

But there's a big problem. You're inexperienced. How should you act on your new job? If you want to rapidly advance, follow these principles.

Elephant Ears, Eagle Eyes, and a Pinhole Mouth

Having elephant ears, eagle eyes, and a pinhole mouth is the secret to rapidly advancing. Listen, look, and learn. Have big ears, eager eyes, and keep your mouth shut and learn. Don't be a smart aleck—Mr. or Miss know-it-all.

Listening Ears

I was seeking a publicist for my new book, *Character Under Attack and What You Can Do About It*. At the Book Expo in McCormick Center in Chicago, I happened to meet the president of a publicity firm. He showed extreme interest in my book and in what I was doing. I was very much inclined to use his firm.

He assigned me to one of his staff members. The staff member told me over the phone he wanted to have a four-

month commitment that would cost \$10,000. As I began to share my story about what I was doing, he cut me off. Instead of listening to me share my vision, I sensed he wasn't interested. Then I said, "Let me tell you in a nutshell," and proceeded to give a very short version of my story.

Here I was going to spend a sizable amount of money, and he wasn't interested in what I had to say. The president was very much interested, but the staff member who would be working with me wasn't. I knew what to do. I sought another firm.

It gave me a powerful lesson in sales and the importance of putting the right kind of person in sales. What makes a good sales person? Put yourself into your customer's shoes. Learn to listen. Show a sincere interest in what your customer wants. Let your customers know in no uncertain terms that you're interested in helping them succeed.

Seek advice and be an eager learner. I often quote this Chinese proverb: "He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes, but he who doesn't ask a question remains a fool forever." Seeking advice is something you should do your entire life. In fact, the more you learn, the more you learn how ignorant you are.

I'm constantly reading trade magazines and going to trade shows to learn and get advice. I've written the book, *Non-Traditional Machining Handbook*, which examines all the non-traditional machining methods that are currently available. To write this book I went to many exhibits at the International Manufacturing Technology Show (IMTS), one of the largest industrial trade shows in the world, and

obtained information and sought counsel. I searched through various trade magazines. I also had numerous experts in non-traditional machining read chapters dealing with their specialty. In other words, I sought advice. I wanted to listen to what they had to say.

Readers Digest in “Getting Along With Your Boss,” quotes George Berkley, professor of management at the University of Massachusetts. The number one guideline is: “*Listen*. Much of the time we only pretend to listen. We are so busy looking for signs of approval or disapproval or framing our response that we fail to hear what is being said. Good listening means hearing not only what the boss says, but also what he or she implies. It means being able to summarize and to respond intelligently.”

Then Berkley suggests, “Create eye contact without staring. Take notes. When your boss has finished, pause to show that you are letting the words sink in. Ask a question or two to clarify a few points, or briefly summarize what has been said. Remember: bosses like people who don’t have to be told things twice.”¹

Imagine you’re the boss and you’re speaking to an employee. How would you want that employee to react? It is this principle of visualization of others that is so important for those wanting to become successful.

Eagle Eyes

In the tool and die making trade, there are many secrets. I worked with many tool and die makers, and few were willing to share. The way to learn is to have eagle eyes and duplicate

their methods. I've learned many things repairing dies and seeing how they were built. I also observed tool and die makers as they worked.

Just the other day I had the company that installed our sprinkler system repair three sprinklers that were damaged when a hurricane broke our fence and tore off these sprinkler heads. I could have repaired the sprinklers. I would have dug up to the pipe and repaired the damaged fittings. But this experienced owner had a much simpler solution. He put on the water to locate the damaged sprinkler fittings. Then with a tool he removed the broken threads, and then rethreaded the three sprinklers and put them back. Within 15 minutes he had repaired the damage. If I would have done it, I probably would have spent hours. I'm always amazed at the "tricks of the trade" that skilled workers use.

Never be so smart that you can't learn from others. At one company I was instructed to train an employee on the surface grinder. I had been working many years on surface grinders, but after a few days of training, this employee wanted to teach me instead of looking and learning how to grind. I detected he was unteachable, so I asked to train another worker because he was teachable.

The key to becoming successful is to be eager to learn. Use your eyes to read books and to observe successful workers. A young man once came to Socrates, the Greek philosopher, and said he wanted knowledge. Socrates took the young man down to the sea and walked into the water until it came to their shoulders. Then Socrates put his hands on the young man's head and held him under water for 30 seconds.

When he came up, Socrates asked him what he wanted. “Knowledge, O great one.”

Socrates put his head into the water again, but this time a little longer. After repeated dunkings, the young man finally said, “Air. I want air.”

“Good,” exclaimed Socrates. “When you want knowledge as much as you wanted air, you will find it.”

Shut Up

You have two ears, two eyes, and one mouth. So be eager to hear, eager to see, and eager to keep your mouth shut and learn. Once you have experience, there’ll be plenty of opportunities to speak and share. But as a beginning employee, learn to listen, look, and learn. I can’t stress enough the importance of being an eager listener and learner if you want to be successful. Remember, an open mouth keeps the ears from listening

Let’s say the supervisor gave you the instructions to do a job as Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, and Step 4. But you in your wisdom thought you could do it faster by combining Steps 3 and 4. You did it your way, and the job was done wrong. Whose fault would it be? Obviously, it would be yours because you didn’t follow instructions. If you had followed the supervisor’s instructions carefully, and the job was done wrong, whose fault would it be? It would be the supervisor’s. It is critical for beginning employees to learn to keep quiet and follow instructions carefully. Of course if you see something you perceive as incorrect, then tell the supervisor.

We hired a high school dropout who earned his GED.

We gave him a math test, which he passed. He was an eager learner and listened to whatever we taught him. He became one of our most valuable employees. He even learned to do sophisticated programming on the computer for our NC (numerically controlled) machines that required him to know algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. Later on we learned he had been a member of a Mexican gang and served time in prison. What made him a success on the job was his eagerness to listen and learn. These are dream employees.

When Wrong, Admit It

Some people are so proud that they have the hardest time admitting when they do things wrong. They choke saying the words, “I am wrong.” Some refuse to ever admit they made a mistake; they’re always right. They’ll always try to dig up some excuse to justify what they did.

If you make a mistake, be humble and admit it. Steve Jobs of Apple fame said, “Sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes. It is best to admit them quickly, and get on with improving your other innovations.”²

Dale Carnegie tells an interesting story in *How to Win Friends and Influence People* about when he took his little Boston bulldog to the park and let him run free. A mounted police came and said, “What do you mean by letting that dog run loose in the park without a muzzle and leash? Don’t you know it’s against the law?”

“Yes, I know it is,” Carnegie replied softly, “but I didn’t think he would do any harm out here.”

“You didn’t think! You didn’t think!” the officer replied.

“That dog might kill a squirrel or bite a child. Now, I’m going to let you off this time, but if I catch this dog out here again without a muzzle and leash, you’ll have to tell it to the judge.”

Carnegie meekly promised the policeman he’d obey. He did obey for a few times, but the dog didn’t like the muzzle, so he took a chance and let his dog run free again. Then to his dismay, there was that officer again. I’ll let him tell what happened.

I was in for it. I knew it. So I didn’t wait until the policeman started talking. I beat him to it. I said: “Officer, you’ve caught me red-handed. I’m guilty. I have no alibis, no excuses. You warned me last week that if I brought this dog out here again without a muzzle you would fine me.”

“Well, now,” the policeman responded in a soft tone. “I know it’s a temptation to let a little dog like that have a run out here when nobody is around.”

“Sure it’s a temptation,” I replied, “but it is against the law.”

“Well, a little dog like that isn’t going to harm anybody,” the policeman remonstrated.

“No, but he may kill squirrels,” I said.

“Well, now, I think you are taking this a bit too seriously,” he told me. “I’ll tell you what you do. You just let him run over the hill there where I can’t see him—and we’ll forget all about it.”³

Carnegie was humble and admitted he was wrong, and the policeman let him go. It's human nature. It repulses common sense people when individuals know what they're doing is wrong, yet they defend themselves.

A great virtue is to be humble. Great minds are humble and teachable. They readily admit their faults. Such minds are even willing to alter their views when confronted with facts even in the midst of a heated debate. But some people are so proud in their ignorance that no one can help them. I've met individuals like that. You would love to help them, but you know they'll refuse to listen. They are the source of all wisdom. When they speak they never say words like, "I think so," or "Maybe." Oh no, when they recall situations, they have perfect memories. These proud individuals show no interest in others and never take advice. The fruit of their behavior is they have few friends and live an unhappy and defeated lives.

Don't be so proud that you can't give credit where credit is due. It's like the story of the flea and the elephant crossing a swinging bridge. While they were crossing the bridge, the flea said to the elephant, "Let's swing the bridge."

The bridge began to sway. When they reached the other side, the flea said, "We really shook that bridge."

Enthusiasm

One of the most important characteristics of those who are successful is enthusiasm. Andrew Carnegie said, "A man can succeed at almost anything for which he has unlimited enthusiasm."

Zig Ziglar quotes Lonnie Shealey on the subject of

enthusiasm. “Whatever we call it—enthusiasm, motivation, ambition, drive, desire, or energy—it’s a quality which plays a major role in success. *People who are unable to motivate themselves must be content with mediocrity, no matter how impressive their other talents.*”⁴ [Italics in the original.]

There’s much truth in that statement. I’ve seen youth with great talents and gifts, but they never achieve. Why? They fail to have the enthusiasm or drive to make something out of themselves.

A number of years ago, I was teaching an American Junior Achievement course to English speaking Czechoslovakian high school and university students at Prague University. The class project was for students to make 100 T-shirts with silk-screen designs and sell them. After a few days of selling on their own, they were extremely depressed.

I decided to help the students. I met them and told them to follow me. I took them to a place I thought would be good, but after 15 minutes of seeing few tourists and no sales, I said, “Let’s go.” Then I took them to an area I knew had many tourists. It was a narrow street between two famous tourist places.

They began their selling pitch, “Quality T-shirts. One hundred percent cotton. Made by Junior Achievement. Made by student company.” After a short time a man, his wife, and three children came by and were looking at them selling the T-shirts. I nudged one of the girls and said, “Go to them.”

She walked over and began her sales pitch. Other students joined her. The man decided to buy T-shirts for his children. I walked by and told another student, “Try to sell T-shirts for the

man and his wife.” They sold five T-shirts to this one family. And while they were selling this family T-shirts, they sold another T-shirt to a couple. Within that short time they sold six T-shirts.

After these two sales, there was a dramatic transformation. The students were now energized and enthused. They were so enthusiastic, that I told one of the girls not to yell so loud so she could save her voice for the next day. When I suggested they should leave, they wanted to keep on selling. The next day they sold even more T-shirts than the day before.

What happened? What changed was the attitude of the students. At first they were extremely depressed, but when they began to sell, they became enthusiastic. There’s a lesson for all of us. Don’t let your failures drag you down. Be enthusiastic in what you’re doing. Yes, you’ll encounter many depressing situations, but those who become successful refuse to dwell on these situations. They seek to find ways to overcome them.

The Attire

If you want to advance in your company, the way you dress is important. Samantha Thompson Smith, in “Is What You Wear Hanging Up Your Promotion?” said:

“You definitely have to put forward your best image,” said Cynthia Nellis, a style expert at the About.com women’s fashion Web site. “Even if you’re allowed to wear jeans and T-shirts to the office, it’s not going to project an image to get you promoted. You need to take it a notch above the company policy.”

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Just look around the office on a Monday morning. You can easily spot the office slob, with his coffee-stained tie and wrinkled shirts, or the workplace flasher, the woman who thinks it's OK to show ample cleavage or plenty of leg.

They are the obvious rule breakers who will have trouble getting ahead.

Smith also pointed out, "How someone is dressed was the third most important attribute in getting a new job, according to a study by Syracuse University and Total Executive of 300 executive recruiters, chief executives and directors of personnel. That's behind communication and presentation skills."⁵

It seems rather strange that the way someone dresses is so important to those doing the hiring. Image consultant, Carolyn Gustafson, owner of Image Strategy for Men & Women, said on this issue, "It shows you know the rules. It says, 'I play by the rules.'" Then she pointed out, "The decision is almost always made in the first few minutes. If you look the part, you'll likely get the part."⁶

Deborah Fernandez, vice president of career transition consulting at Right Management presses the point further. "People need to dress appropriately for the position they're aspiring to." Then she added, "So they need to take cues from the people they're aspiring to be."⁷

Many places have casual dress. Casual dress, however, doesn't mean sloppy dress. Then there's the opposite position of someone being the only one with a dark suit and white shirt.

This makes him look rigid. The ideal is to look professional without being too formal.

Interpersonal Skills

If you want to advance in your employment, there's more than just having sufficient knowledge and technical abilities. An important issue is interpersonal skills. How do you get along with people? Are you sensitive to others? Do you possess empathy and friendship skills? Do you always act in a professional manner?

In an article at The National Honor Society in Psychology website it stated”

A number of recent studies (Appleby, 2000; Johanson & Fried, 2002; Yancey, 2001) have found that the most critical job skill a new employee needs to possess is good interpersonal skills. Drew Appleby asked 39 employers what job skills were most important in making hiring decisions. Social skills ranked first. George Yancey asked 76 recent BA psychology graduates and 44 recent master's psychology graduates what job skills were most useful to them in their current jobs. Interpersonal skills ranked first. John Johanson and Carrie Fried asked 144 psychology graduates what job skills were most useful to them in their current jobs. Again, interpersonal skills ranked first.⁸

The American Management Association stated in

“Interpersonal Skills for Managers”:

It’s a whole new world of work, and interpersonal skills are key! Organizational change, diversity and electronic communications have changed the face of the workplace. Today, more than ever, success depends upon the combined cooperation, commitment and action of people—both face-to-face and across electronic and cyber channels. That’s why your interpersonal skills are so critical to your own effectiveness as a manager.⁹

Interpersonal skills are important. For instance, you don’t go to a supervisor and interrupt him with a question when he is busy talking with someone. You’ll wait until there is an appropriate time. An angry customer comes to you with a complaint. Do you reply with angry words, or do you patiently listen and try to calm the individual with kind and understanding words? Here are ten tips to help you improve your interpersonal skills:

1. Smile. People don’t want to be around those who are in the dumps. Be friendly and cheerful. Learn to develop an optimistic spirit.

2. Show appreciation. When something kind is done to you, be thankful. Be generous with your praise, even with your coworkers.

3. Sensitive to other people’s feelings. You feel for other people when they have problems. You don’t

want to irritate others.

4. Proper etiquette. You have proper table manners, and you're not crude in your behavior.

5. Not intimidated by others. You know how to behave before others. You have a healthy self-esteem. When speaking to others you maintain eye contact.

6. Conflict resolver. You're able to bring opposing parties together. Your calm demeanor is able to see through problems and offer reasonable solutions. You're a problem solver.

7. Polite. You readily say "Thank you," and offer compliments to others.

8. Avoid gossip and complaining. If you don't have anything positive to say, you rather say nothing. If there is a legitimate complaint, you go to the proper authorities.

9. Listening skills. You actively listen to what others say. You sincerely try to fully understand the other person's position.

10. Sense of humor. You're able to laugh and make others laugh. You have a merry disposition. People like to be around you.

Management That's Fair, Firm, and Loving

The three principles for successful management are: be fair, firm, and loving. For successful management you must be willing to confront problems, but you should do it in a fair, firm, and loving manner.

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I decided to make one of our black employees a supervisor of the stamping department where I was operations manager. A Hispanic employee, who was one of our best workers, said he wouldn't listen to a black man telling him what to do. I told him if he didn't listen to him, he'd be fired. After a number of defiant incidents, I fired him.

I had another employee, I'll call him Bill, who worked many years in the company. Bill was a very slow worker and a trouble-maker. My aim as operations manager was to help employees, not get rid of them. Bill refused to change. I found out Bill said he was a donkey. His motto was, "I only work when I have to."

He certainly acted the part. I began to write Bill up for his lack of productivity and defiant attitude. The final straw came when I put another employee on the job Bill was doing, and this employee did the job nearly three times faster.

You may object that firing people isn't being kind and considerate. I live also by another principle, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat." If you're too lazy to work, don't expect me to support you.

Permissive Management

Some business owners take a permissive approach by refusing to correct their employees when they do wrong. While working as a tool and die maker in Long Island City, New York, I saw how this company went from a three-man shop to a twenty-four man shop, and then failed. One of the major reasons was the manager of the company never corrected the employees. He believed if you treated employees right, they'd

work right.

The downfall began when the foreman of the shop fired a machinist, and the manager rehired him. From then on, the foreman didn't care about the shop or how the employees performed. The company continued going downhill, and shortly after I left, it went out of business. The problem I saw was the manager wouldn't confront his problems and correct his employees. To run a successful company, owners must be willing to confront problems and take corrective measures. Such action may be painful, but it's necessary for success.

Permissiveness destroys. I've seen it in homes, schools, and teenagers' lives. If you want to be successful, learn to confront your problems and take intelligent action to solve them. Taking the path of least resistance will never lead you to success.