

Staying Fresh and Indispensable!

The value of education is priceless. Whilst a qualification might open career doors, a qualification alone will not *keep* those doors open for you. As an employee, you need to show the practical application of your education. Once you are employed, you need to prove to your employer on a *daily* basis how your skill-set is helping the organisation to grow and be profitable.

Experience versus potential

As a newly qualified graduate looking for your first full-time employment, your qualification is a signal to potential employers that you have *potential* to perform within their organisation. At this level, you are most likely going to be between the ages of 20 to 35 years old. Employers are willing to give you chance and offer you the position that you have applied for based solely on the qualification that you possess. This is because to earn any qualification requires a lot of hard work, dedication, commitment and perseverance to complete your studies. These are the traits that make for a good employee.

However, between the ages of 35 years and beyond, your level of work experience becomes more important than your level of qualification. Employers are looking for people with a proven track record. At this level, regardless of the educational qualification that you may possess, if you are not performing and delivering your work expectations, your career climb could start to subside.

Skills versus Title

The traditional thinking about 'climbing the corporate ladder' is that an employee should chase 'title' and 'money' and ultimately become a 'manager' with a corner office. This is a very shallow definition of success.

A more meaningful way to look at your climb to corporate success is to reflect on **both** the skills that you have acquired and the legacy that you leave behind along your career journey. Use the guide below to reflect where you are on your career journey.

Step 1 - Learning

When you start off in an organisation – you are learning as much as you can about the company. It is important that you understand what your day-to-day role is. People around you also realise that you just started and are willing to give you a chance to learn and make mistakes.

The key skills at this level are: to be curious, ask questions and be open to learning.

Step 2 - Execute

At this stage, you are working for the company in excess of 6 months. You are no longer a 'newbie'. To survive at this level you need to show that you can learn quickly, be able to adapt to new surroundings and to apply your knowledge gained during your first few months at the company.

The key skills at this level are to be adaptable, flexible, be open to change and to be able to synthesize your knowledge gained during your learning phase at the company.

Step 3 - Asset

At this level, you are now working at a functional level within an organisation and you are starting to become an asset to the company.

The key skills are: to be able to work within teams, to manage deadlines and to deliver quality output within requirements and set expectations.

Step 4 - Deliver

You are now a first-time manager with a team of people reporting into you.

The key skills at this level include: being able to manage a team, being able to work under pressure and having the ability to bring out the best out of people in your team.

Step 5 - Edge

You are now a functional manager looking after an entire department of employees that could include having managers reporting into you with teams of their own. At this level you need to be able to solve problems using innovative and creative thinking. You need to have the edge to make tough company decisions.

The key skills at this level include: Being able to handle challenges; stress tolerance; creativity and innovation; decision making and problem-solving skills.

Step 6 - Range

You are now a senior executive and most likely have teams and teams of people reporting into you. You need to be able to direct and delegate multiple projects simultaneously. You also need to have the skill to understand all aspects of the business that could include Finance, Human Resources, Marketing, Sales, Operations and Corporate Affairs.

The key skills at this level include: persuasion, negotiation, business acumen, multi-tasking, project management, communication skills and being able to build partnerships.

Step 7 - Steering

You are now the General Manager, the Managing Director or the Chief Executive Officer of a company.

The key skills at this final stage of your leadership journey include: being a generalist, understanding and implementing strategy, being a change agent, possessing public speaking skills, ability to coach and mentor people around you.

Focus on service

Regardless of where you are on your career journey, as an employee there are two factors that will set you apart from everyone else:

1. Your attitude to work and
2. How indispensable you are to the organisation.

By changing your attitude that you are not merely an 'employee' doing a 'job' but rather an important stakeholder to the organisation - will allow you to approach your work differently.

Ways to become indispensable include:

1. Exceed your goals and expectations – be available at short notice;
2. Be responsive rather than reactive – highlight both the problem and a possible solution;
3. Volunteer for challenging assignments – it grows your skills and shows your ability to multi-task;
4. Coach and mentor other people – it grows your social and people skills; and
5. Find ways on how the company can cut costs and be more profitable – this builds your business acumen.

In summary to gain a competitive edge in the workplace:

1. Balance your career ambition with your experience;
2. Build skills rather than chase money and titles;
3. Change your attitude to work – use your skills and experience to serve; and
4. Increase your value to the organisation – become indispensable.

How to bring out the best in your staff

Being a leader in business is tough! Not only do you have to manage your business unit; ensure that customers and suppliers relations are maintained; manage costs and make profits – you also have the responsibility of managing a team of people reporting to you. In this article, lets take a look at the top 7 tips that you can implement to bring out the best in your staff.

1. Have a clearly defined vision

As a leader – have a clearly defined vision for the company and its employees – both long-term and short-term. Whilst most organisations do have this in place, what is missing is the regular communication of that vision to all employees.

All employees have their own set of unique values, goals and objectives that they wish to achieve for the year. As an employer you have the unique position to get the best out of your staff, if you are able to align the values, goals and objectives of an individual to the overall vision, goals and objectives of an organisation.

By taking the time to understand an employees individual circumstance and their own career ambition – you will be able to assign appropriate work and projects to those individuals who have a passion and desire to learn. The overall work productivity will increase the greater the alignment of employees individual goals to the organisations vision.

2. Define the culture

The culture of an organisation and how that culture is instilled among the staff will influence how people relate to each other. By default, any company is naturally competitive - the company needs to compete in order to survive in the marketplace. Conversely, in order for a company to grow the company needs to be able to come up with new exciting and innovative products and services.

This places a dilemma for an organisation culture:

- a. Should the culture be **performance driven** – so that employees are managed on how well their goals and objectives are achieved to help the company remain competitive? or
- b. Should the culture be **innovation driven** – so that employees are allowed to make mistakes and are not adversely performance managed because making mistakes precedes creativity.

As an employer your role is to allow **both** a culture of performance and a culture of innovation to co-exist to get the best out of your employees and to allow your organization to grow.

Employees should be offered a safe environment with set parameters to make mistakes. Allow employees to use their skills and experience to come up with a unique way to solving a problem. As an employer, become fascinated with a different viewpoint – it is in a divergent viewpoint that a new solution can be found.

3. Celebrate failure

Set up an environment that signals to employees that it is okay to make mistakes.

Imagine the potential for new ideas if as organization you can implement a process of “Celebrating the best failure of the month” whereby every month, one employee with two runner-ups are acknowledged for highlighting the biggest failure or problem that was encountered with the solution that the employee came up with to resolve the problem.

4. Coach and mentor others

As an employer your success as a leader includes a factor of how many leaders you have helped to grow. Mentor and coach employees in your organisation. Sometimes employees are not able to see the potential of what is possible unless they are mentored into the role. As an employer, you can be the catalyst for change in an employee by being a role model to them and guiding them towards success. Give employees a chance and believe in their potential.

5. Challenge the status quo

As individuals we all have our own pre-existing and self-imposed comfort zones of what we believe we are capable of achieving. If we push ourselves a bit harder, and challenge those pre-existing comfort zones, we start to establish a bigger zone of comfort from which we operate at – this is the natural growth process in life.

As an employer, your role is to challenge your employees pre-existing comfort zones by providing direction, setting deadlines and defining work outcomes. By demanding higher standards of excellence, new skills are learnt and the perception of individual and team capability is enhanced.

6. Be supportive

As individuals we all operate from our unique from our perspective of life, our skills and experience, our background and culture. As an employer you want to bring out the best in your employees by allowing them to express their uniqueness.

To do this you need to be:

- a. Non-judgemental – allow employees the freedom to express their ideas;
- b. Patient – Give employees the space to think and work freely;
- c. Acceptance – Accept the decisions made by employees and their personal circumstances. Be sincerely happy for an employee if they have decided to leave your company to pursue their own career success.

7. Public appreciation

Say “thank you” do this often and do this publicly!

When employees have exceeded their goals; made mistakes and found innovative ways to solving them; challenged their own comfort zones and delivered excellence, your role is to publicly acknowledge these individuals.

This can easily be done at team meetings or special month-end meetings. When acknowledging the individuals remember to:

- a. Be specific on what was achieved;
- b. Mention 2-3 points on what the person did; and
- c. End with your acknowledgement and personal well wishes.