

101 Career Mistakes and Solutions

Books by Kylie Hammond

The Executive Candidate's Survival Guide

101 Career Mistakes and Solutions

101

Career Mistakes and Solutions



Kylie Hammond

Published by Kylie Hammond
www.kyliehammond.com.au

First published 2015

© 2014 Kylie Hammond

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the author. The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or 10 percent of the book, whichever is greater, to be photocopied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

A Cataloguing-in-Publication record is available from the National Library of Australia.

ISBN: 978 0 9941685 7 3 (pbk)
978 0 9942683 8 9 (ebk–epub)

Designed and typeset and printed by Palmer Higgs
palmerhiggs.com.au

Distributed by Dennis Jones and Associates
dennisjones.com.au

*Dedicated to my Dad
who gave me the wise counsel and support
to leave corporate life behind to forge
my own business career.*

About the Author



Kylie Hammond is the CEO and founder of Director Institute and Board Portfolio, the leading board search and advisory group in Australia. Kylie is a leading Board and Executive Search, Board Talent Management Consultant, and Australia's foremost CEO Business Mentor.

Kylie represents executive clients via her exclusive Board and Talent Management Programs, manages a number of Executive Search engagements for them, and coaches a range of clients across executive, leadership, sales, business, women's issues and career development areas.

Working in partnership with many of the top CEOs, Kylie's career management support has helped hundreds of senior executives execute highly confidential career moves. Visit www.kyliehammond.com.au to view a range of unique career coaching programs and executive resume writing packages.

Contents

Introduction	1
101 Career Mistakes and Solutions	
1 Having no career plan in a Protean world	5
2 Chasing dollars and prestigious job titles	10
3 Refusing to take an entry level position	13
4 Staying in the same job for too long	16
5 Changing jobs for the wrong reasons	20
6 Getting too comfortable	23
7 No career challenges	26
8 Failing to network effectively	29
9 Playing office politics	32
10 Arguing with your boss	35
11 Undermining your boss	38
12 Sexual relations in the workplace	41
13 Making a mistake at work and not owning up to it	44
14 Treating the workplace like a social network	47
15 Blaming others at work	49
16 Gossiping at work	51
17 Getting drunk at the office party	54
18 Treating employer phone calls like a low priority	57
19 Failing to refresh or develop skills	60
20 Being unprepared for a phone interview	63
21 Allowing your resume to become outdated	66
22 Not having a LinkedIn profile	69
23 Under-dressing for a job interview	72
24 Mishandling multiple job offers	75
25 Handling your resignation badly	78
26 Negotiating job offers poorly	82
27 Forgetting to negotiate your contract	85
28 Spoiling your salary negotiations	88
29 Dealing badly with negative performance reviews	91
30 Not keeping your job search private	95
31 Leaking confidential information	99

32	Bad-mouthing past employers	103
33	Getting off to a bad start	105
34	Having poor communication skills	108
35	Ignoring sexual harassment in the workplace	111
36	Taking your employer to court	115
37	Accepting a job without proper due diligence	119
38	Under-preparing for a job interview	123
39	Responding poorly to job termination	127
40	Letting constructive dismissal control your career	130
41	Putting up with workplace bullying	133
42	Failing to evaluate the details of a job offer	136
43	Receiving a bad reference check	139
44	Accepting a promotion (or not)	142
45	Agreeing to relocate for a job (without thinking first)	146
46	Agreeing to relocate without discussing it with your family	149
47	Hiring a career coach you know nothing about	152
48	Not having a career mentor or coach	155
49	Trusting internal coaches	159
50	Working with your best friend	161
51	Using social media in the workplace	164
52	Failing to manage your personal brand	166
53	"Falling out" with your coworker	169
54	Underestimating social media	172
55	Failing to reinvent yourself when starting a new career	175
56	Not following your passion	178
57	No work-life balance	181
58	Not managing manager expectations	185
59	Turning your back on team management	188
60	Accepting your role as the office doormat	191
61	Not having a career game plan	194
62	Neglecting retirement plans	197
63	No career portfolio	200
64	Overlooking the hidden job market	203
65	Jumping into a headhunter arrangement	206
66	Resigning in the heat of the moment	209
67	Resigning without another job lined up	212
68	Mismanaging holiday announcements when job interviewing	215

69	“What’s in it for me?”	218
70	Not identifying career opportunities	220
71	Ignoring the need for an mba	223
72	Not understanding how you are perceived	226
73	Forgetting there is no “I” in team	229
74	Working harder, not smarter	232
75	Declining to pay it forward	235
76	Letting new job stress get the better of you	238
77	Believing your own PR	241
78	Failing to network internally	243
79	Not caring about volunteering	246
80	Not taking your holidays	248
81	Leaving in the midst of a company merger	250
82	Not reading the writing on the wall	252
83	Using company email and computer systems inappropriately	255
84	Using personal devices for work purposes	258
85	Letting non-compete clauses restrain your career	261
86	Having a bad reputation at work (and doing nothing to address it)	264
87	Being blackballed at work	267
88	Lying or being dishonest in the workplace	270
89	Whistleblowing without considering the consequences	273
90	Making personal phone calls at work	277
91	Waiting for your company to recognise your contributions	280
92	Freelancing without diversifying	283
93	Refusing to work for a smaller company	286
94	Fearing entrepreneurship	288
95	Disrespecting the boss	291
96	Returning to the corporate world without adjusting your approach	293
97	Having no “escape plan”	296
98	Losing your cool and berating your employees in the workplace	299
99	Being an ineffective leader	302
100	Going too far to win a job	305
101	Not caring about your legacy	308
	Conclusion	313

101 Career Mistakes and Solutions

As a well-established and credentialed career mentor, executive search consultant and business owner, you might presume that I have had a blessed corporate career free of mistakes while steadily climbing the corporate ladder, achieving amazing promotions and big salary increases along the way.

The truth of the matter is that I have made every career mistake possible. Sometimes I recovered well and landed firmly on my feet, or I leveraged off my business network to secure the next role. However, other times I really struggled on a personal and business level trying to work out what to do next. I experienced financial difficulties, a lack of career direction, and discovered what it was like to be made redundant, while unemployed for a period of time. As much as I hate to admit, I have also been fired along the way!

In my early twenties, I worked in a family business while I completed my university studies. At the time, I was not really sure what I wanted to do other than work in the family car rental business and support my family. My university degree in Industrial Relations at the time was less than fashionable, and I remember clearly the Professor of the University Program declaring at my first lecture that by the time I had finished my degree, Industrial Relations could well be a defunct topic. I had no real direction other than I was determined to leave my home town of Perth, and try to forge a life and a career in Sydney – the big smoke.

I got an early break into Sydney by joining an IT company that had supplied car rental software to our family business, and I became a software consultant and trainer. Having under-estimated the travel distances from home to office, I lasted only three months and joined

another IT company which specialised in ERP software applications. I was at this new company about 12 months before I was made redundant and experienced first-hand what it was like to be out of work in a big city with limited business contacts and no family to fall back on. Fortunately, I was lucky enough to pick up a great new role with PeopleSoft, which at the time was a very well regarded international IT software company. This career move opened amazing doors and provided new opportunities for me in the USA.

The next decade of my life involved a series of career moves that didn't really correlate to any big picture career plan, and at best can only be described as reactionary to the circumstances of the times. I would resign without a second thought and join the next big thing IT company. I went through a period where I found it relatively easy to secure the next role while achieving a big pay rise each time I moved. I was a mover and a shaker (or so I thought) and I went through at least ten career moves during this time. At one point, my average tenure was six months!

My salary skyrocketed from \$36,000 when I first arrived in Sydney, to \$150,000 plus super, car, bonuses, shares and options. The IT industry was going through rapid changes. There were technology waves to be caught, bigger salaries to be secured! If you had a half decent resume and had the gift of the gab in an interview, you could get a new job in a heart-beat. I learned a lot along the way and accumulated a massive network of contacts. I was like a stone not wanting to accumulate moss, and I just kept on rolling.

Of course, the nature of the IT industry eventually changed. The dot.com bubble burst, the music stopped playing, and it was time to get a 'real job' and start settling into a proper career pathway.

Taking stock of where I was at with my skills and knowledge, I felt that I needed strong project management skills to compliment my other experience. I had a strong desire to join a Big 4 Consulting firm, so I set my sights on Deloitte and their Human Capital Management practice. This was a fairly major turning point career move for me. I enjoyed the work, learned an enormous amount in a short time, and thankfully,

had the support of some amazing Partners in the firm. Having a great boss can really give you the incentive to remain working in a company long beyond your used-by date. While the work was enjoyable and I loved working with my colleagues and boss, my Deloitte experience helped crystallise in my mind that I was a 'frustrated employee' and really needed to take proactive steps to become a business owner and master of my own destiny.

I had a long standing desire to be a business owner – probably deep-seated as a result of growing up with a family of entrepreneurs. I was fascinated with the recruitment industry to the point that I would continually attend interviews for recruitment consultant positions, only to chicken out at the last minute because the salary was not a match for my substantial earnings in the IT & Management Consulting industry.

Eventually, I made the move to the recruitment industry, and spent 12 months doing a reconnaissance, while working for a mixture of recruitment and executive search businesses before taking the plunge and setting up my own business. That was over a decade ago. Naturally, I made many mistakes along the way! I grossly under-estimated the capital I needed to go it alone in business, I didn't always get the best advice, and it took me years to really master aspects of the financial management of the businesses I was involved with.

It is still a work in progress, but I am finally at peace with myself, as I have been able to combine my passion and career interests with running a successful and profitable business venture. Life is too short to spend it doing something that you simply don't enjoy.

So, this is the premise for writing this new book. I wanted to share with you some of the most common mistakes that people make in their careers. However, more importantly, I want to arm you with practical ways that you can correct your course with specific solutions to different career mistakes so that you can – like me – come out on top. I hope you enjoy!

Mistake No. 1

Having no career plan in a Protean world

In 1976, when D.T. Hall wrote about the Protean Career model, he was seeing an emerging world. Today, we see this world as an established culture that is strengthening.

The Protean Career is one that the individual owns and manages, regardless of the success or failure of the economy. Each individual must monitor and access the best opportunities in their specific market to anticipate market needs, develop relevant skills and adapt to create success, despite multiple circumstances or challenges. To do this, candidates must “break free” from traditional approaches and think about how to manage their careers proactively and consistently. In a Protean world, individuals shape their own career paths based on:

- Personal and professional skills
- A well-developed personal brand
- An organised and targeted job search
- Ongoing personal growth goals.

Creating your own success

Long-term job security and internal organisational progression are no longer guaranteed in today's fast-paced companies.

Instead, you need to create your own success with a carefully developed career vision and plan. By creating professional inventories, building your brand, focusing your job search and committing to ongoing growth, you can own your future and instigate your personal and professional success, regardless of what is happening in the marketplace.

Remember – plan, don't panic

Whatever your job search journey – whether you have decided to look for a higher-level position or whether you have found yourself unemployed – it is important to stay focused, committed and in control. Do not panic or jump into a role you don't want or that you are not ready for.

Although you may want to accelerate the job search process, there are vital preparations that you must accomplish first. The first step in preparing the next stage of your career is to develop a career plan that will enable you to conduct an effective job search.

Job search goals

Creating a career plan requires setting measurable goals that are based on your vision. Some of these goals may include sending out a certain number of resumes each week or contacting a specific number of people in your network. Other goals can include:

- Investing time and effort to polish up your resume, CV and/or cover letter.
- Contacting various recruitment agencies.
- Working with a specialised recruitment consultant or head hunter.
- Searching for opportunities via social media (e.g. LinkedIn, Twitter).
- Setting a realistic time-frame to guide your job hunt.

There are many career management strategies that you can adopt, but the most important thing is to work out a plan that will aid in keeping you focused throughout your job search.

Job searching takes time

Searching for the perfect job for your skill set and aspirations may take time, so it is important to stay strong in the face of setbacks and challenges. Finding a new job can be a full-time task in itself. Just remember that *you* are in the driver's seat, with full control over what direction your career path takes: *You* are the one who decides what you want to do and what you need to do to get there.

Take control, develop your own career plan

The first step in preparing your career development plan is to identify what attributes and competencies you can bring to the industry or marketplace. What is your own “vision” for yourself as a professional?

At this stage, it is important to avoid judging yourself based on what others (like employers) might think are “good” or “bad” skill sets. Instead, give credence to each competency you feel you can offer and consider how your capabilities can help you maximise your job search success.

Know your strengths and weaknesses

When assessing your abilities, consider what skills you have gained through both education and training, and work experience. You should also single out your transferable skills – that is, any expertise that you have acquired during the course of your career that you may be able to transfer or apply to another task, role or even industry.

Understanding where your strengths lay is critical when developing a career plan, as it will assist you in determining what kind of value you can bring to an employer.

If you can accurately identify your key strengths and also your weaknesses now, your job search will be much more focused and simple:

- You will be able to compare your skill set to any given job description, and determine whether you are suited to the role (and vice versa).
- If you can align your strengths and capabilities to what the employer wants, even at the application stage, you will be placing yourself amongst the top contenders for the position.
- A strong idea of your weaknesses will also allow you to see what skills you need to improve and/or refine, and you can build this into your career plan.

When it comes to evaluating your weaknesses, remember – it's not possible to be good at everything. Weaknesses are an intrinsic part of all professionals and everyone is expected to have them – they're not a sign of your “ineptness”, but an indicator on how you can continue to grow, learn and develop your professional value.

At some point during the interview process, a prospective employer will ask what your key weaknesses are (or what your biggest weakness is). Becoming intimately familiar with your weaknesses is vital, as you will need to be ready to confidently respond to these types of questions and show how you can use your strengths to overcome obstacles that your weaknesses might unveil while on the job.

Uncover your personal traits

Finally, think about your personal traits – these are qualities that form your professional and behavioural persona. Personal traits can include:

- Reliability
- Loyalty
- Trustworthiness
- Diligence, dedication
- Friendliness
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Creative ability to problem solve.

You will need to tweak and tailor these personal traits to suit each job you apply for, and to address any specific behavioural criteria listed in the job description.

Why branding yourself is important

Once you have listed your personal and professional skills, the next step is to think about the brand that you want to take to market. How do you want to present yourself to potential employers, based on your strengths, skills and most honed capabilities?

What you are doing here is essentially creating your own, personal brand.

Branding yourself is about clearly defining who you are in your chosen profession, and letting potential employers know exactly what they will be getting when they do business with you.

Building your own brand starts with embracing the features that are quintessentially “you.” While you can continue to grow and develop your skills throughout your career, you also possess a marketable set of abilities that can bring value to an employer *right now*.

Utilising your unique skill offerings and crafting your brand can also help you save time and energy by narrowing your job search parameters. In other words, a strong brand will let you know what types of jobs you should be looking for and you won’t waste time pursuing unworthy or unsuitable roles.

A targeted quest means you can seek out positions where your personality, behaviours and talents will be put to their best use – and where you can continue to polish and progress your brand, expanding your skill set and experience for the future.

“The most effective way I know to begin with the end in mind is to develop a personal mission statement or philosophy or creed. It focused on what you want to be (character) and to do (contributions and achievements) and on the values or principles upon which being and doing are based.”

Stephen Covey

Mistake No. 2

Chasing dollars and prestigious job titles

There are two schools of thought on career planning:

1. The first is to develop a career plan that only focuses on finding a job offering the highest salary possible and/or seeking out a prestigious job title that simply serves to enhance your “social standing” or “professional appearance”.
2. The second school of thought is to create a plan that allows you to chase (and hopefully, fulfil) your career dreams. In my experience as an Executive Search Consultant, the second option is much more rewarding and realistic – and is often the only one that leads to true, professional happiness.

Why chasing dollars and prestigious job titles is a mistake

Chasing money or trying to secure a “fancy” job title can harm your personal and professional relationships, as well as your health and your individual happiness.

While it is important to consider your financial goals when job hunting, money is only a means to an end; it does not guarantee career success or security, job satisfaction or professional fulfillment.

Prestigious job titles are also not a mark of your real value as a professional, nor your real talents and abilities; as a result, trying to secure that “impressive” job title can lead to a lower level of job searching success.

Even if you *do* secure a prestigious job position, you may not have the skills to adequately take on such significant responsibilities, and this can quickly lead to stress, “burn outs” and career unhappiness.



All of this can lead to high levels of stress and fatigue, which places you at risk of frustration, depression and even physical illness. None of these are states you will want to be in when searching for a job!

Using money or job titles as a benchmarking tool for your success can also cause you to lose sight of both your professional and personal values. This can force your work/life priorities to become unstable or unbalanced and often means making much personal sacrifice to achieve only “short-sighted” rewards.

Solution

Reassess your priorities

Take charge of your career happiness and set goals that will bring you real career satisfaction and rewards that go beyond chasing dollars and prestigious job titles. By building your career in this way, you’ll develop a stronger vision of what you want and will ensure that your job hunt and goals are focused, realistic and attainable.

Instead of chasing money or looking for prestigious job titles, consider what your real priorities are. Financial and position-based goals can be valuable, but they need to be achieved in accordance with your career desires and your true capabilities and skills.

When thinking about your career plan and development, reassess your priorities and set new goals by asking yourself:

- Will this new job make me (and my family) happy?
- Will I be able to adequately perform my job while building a family or spending time with loved ones?
- Will I find this new position fulfilling and rewarding, both long-term and on a day-to-day basis?
- Will this new position provide me with opportunities for growth and learning?
- Will this job move me forward along my career path and take me one step closer to my real goals?

“Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn’t matter to me ...
Going to bed at night saying we’ve done something wonderful
... that’s what matters to me.”

Steve Jobs

Mistake No. 3

Refusing to take an entry level position

The economic recession has undoubtedly taken a toll on most of us, as evidenced by the number of job losses over the past few years. As a result, many job seekers are now opening themselves up to new avenues that will help them find and secure a role in the competitive recruitment world.

With the outcomes of the Global Financial Crisis still in effect, larger organisations and even respected brands have closed their doors to top-tier and even middle management hiring. More and more professionals have subsequently found themselves in the position of considering and accepting an entry level position. And that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Why consider an entry level role?

Entry level roles offer the opportunity to both secure employment and situate yourself within a valuable company. From an entry level position you can grow your skill set, learn about the organisation, and focus on developing your career from within the organisation by taking on new responsibilities as opportunities arise.

This strategy can prove to be highly effective for your career development and goals and is often a great solution if your job applications and interviews are not coming to fruition.

The following are some of the reasons why employers today are on the lookout for more experienced candidates for their entry level positions:

Lack of required skills

Many candidates looking for entry level roles (particularly first-time job seekers) can lack the skills required for advancing beyond the initial

position. It is widely believed that students often do not graduate with the background or skills that are required by employers, even when it comes to junior roles. As a seasoned professional, you have a strong advantage when going up against these younger candidates and you can showcase the wealth of experience and skills you have, which less experienced candidates cannot offer.

Higher expectations

Today's companies also have higher expectations when it comes to their beginner level employees. As markets become more competitive, organisations are looking for employees who possess the necessary capabilities (such as problem solving, being able to think critically and hitting the ground running) that can truly bring a competitive advantage to the role and the business.

Negative experience

Many employers have had bitter experiences with juniors and graduates who accept positions they are unsuitable for or who aren't really interested in developing internally with the company. Younger candidates can also lack the maturity and behavioural skills required to thrive in a corporate environment and even though their skill set may be sufficient, their personal traits and behaviours are often unrefined.

Solution

Consider an entry level position when changing or starting a new job

A number of employers advertise positions for graduates with *some* work experience to fill their entry level positions. In some cases, this can be a thinly disguised way of attracting candidates who have more than a little work experience and/or who want to change jobs or start a new career. This is a great opportunity to put yourself at a competitive advantage, secure the kind role you want and/or get your foot in

the door of a fantastic company that offers a potential for long-term growth. While you may be overqualified for an entry level position, many employers can find your knowledge and talents to be much more appealing than candidates with no experience.

If you do choose to apply for an entry level position, great! But remember – make sure that it aligns with your career goals and that it will put you on the right path to your desired career success.

“The only limit to our realisation of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Mistake No. 4

Staying in the same job for too long

Teresa B. worked for her company for 14 years, starting as a sales clerk. As the company grew, so did her responsibilities and experience. During her tenure, she continued her education and received several certifications related to her field.

Eventually, as a senior manager overseeing ten employees, Teresa felt that she was ready to move on to new opportunities and challenges outside of the company. It was quite a shock to discover that her longevity with the company was considered more of a liability than an asset.

Same job, negative impact

There are a variety of reasons why staying in the same job too long can have negative impacts on your long-term career:

- Potential employers may feel you will not adapt as easily to a new culture or way of operating.
- They may also be concerned that you're not ambitious, simply because you haven't advanced your career outside of one company.
- While loyalty is respected, employers and recruiters may also question your career direction or decisions – and ask why you've only chosen to change jobs now, after such a long time.
- Employers may also feel that staying with one company for too long has put you “behind” in your industry and means your knowledge of industry trends and changes is not up to date.

At the same time, employers and recruiters are also wary of a resume that shows a history of “job hopping” or moving from position to

position. This can be even more harmful to your career, as you may come across as an unfocused, unreliable candidate with no real career direction.



Solution

Consider your career objectives

This all comes down to your own career goals and desires. It's a tough balancing act, but one that must adequately ensure your career objectives are continuously being met. If you've become too comfortable in your role, challenging yourself with a new position may be the best way forward.

Do you have a valid reason to leave?

Regardless of how long you have been with a company, you must have a strong reason to leave that will ultimately benefit your career goals or career happiness.

If you have held the same job for many years, your employer is probably happy with your performance, and you likely have a reasonable compensation package and benefits as a result. Those are not things to give up lightly without a good reason.

However, there may be good reasons why you want to leave and seek out a new position:

- General job dissatisfaction or boredom
- Lack of upward mobility within the company
- Lack of day-to-day challenges
- Slow increases in compensation or remuneration
- New-found career direction or needs
- Changes in management that (negatively) impact your job.

Are you only looking for a change?

We can all grow bored or tired with our jobs and sometimes, all we want is a change. But this doesn't mean that you necessarily need to leave your current position. Before you “jump ship”, ask yourself:

- Am I qualified to handle a higher volume of work or different duties in my day-to-day work to make it more interesting?
- If I could take on more responsibilities or tasks in my current role, would that be satisfying?
- Am I simply after a change in pay or compensation? And if so, is there a possibility of a raise or a bonus here?
- Could I move laterally within the company, applying my organisational skills and knowledge in a different department or area?

Talking to your boss

If you decide to have conversations with your boss regarding compensation or other positions within the company, make sure you are comfortable with the potential consequences. Your manager may start to see you as someone who is unsatisfied with the job, and wonder how much longer you wish to stay.

Getting ready to move on

Once internal options have been investigated and ruled out, the time may come to look for a new job and progress in your career elsewhere. As you start job searching, I would also advise you to:

- Document your current responsibilities, and also your successful progression within the company, breaking these down into job titles, responsibilities and achievements.
- Prepare to show that you have been exposed to different practices during the course of your job, and that you are flexible and open to change.
- Be discreet regarding your search, so as not to “ruffle feathers” in your present job or compromise your employment; remember, never use company time or equipment to search for a new job.
- Make sure your new position will offer you the chance to reach the goals that you are looking for – whether it be upward mobility, compensation or higher career satisfaction.
- Start thinking about your “exit strategy” and the notice that you need to give if and when you do secure a new position; you may also want to consider who you will use as a reference if you are successful in the interview round.

My final piece of advice – whether you decide to leave your current job or not – is to make decisions that are based on rationality and reasoning, rather than emotions. While there may not be a valuable reason for you to move on, remember that staying in the same role for too long can often lead to career “staleness” and also stagnated growth and poor job satisfaction.

“Waiting for a good time to quit your job? The stars will never align and the traffic lights of life will never all be green at the same time. The universe doesn’t conspire against you, but it doesn’t go out of its way to line up the pins either. Conditions are never perfect.”

Timothy Ferriss

Mistake No. 5

Changing jobs for the wrong reasons

There are many reasons why you might want to change jobs: more money, less stress, the need to change locations, more work/life balance, dissatisfaction at work, and so on. Yet if you consider changing jobs, you need to be sure the change is a good one.

Let's take a look at some of the key motivations and reasons why people decide to change jobs:

Job stress

Job stress is one of the top reasons that lead to job or career changes. However, you should look at what is causing your work-related stress before deciding to throw in the towel and look for something new. A new job, no matter how great it looks before you get there, can also be just as stressful or demanding, particularly in the first few months, when you'll be adapting to the organisation.

Is there anything else you could do to relieve stress in your current role?

Job "burnouts"

Feeling "burnt out" on the job can leave you feeling exhausted, fatigued and unmotivated. For example, you may be experiencing burn out if:

- You have experienced or are experiencing a long bout of stress; this stress can be work related, or may be personal.
- You feel like every day is a bad or stressful day.
- Things at work you used to take pride in now just seem like a "task".
- You have trouble sleeping or constantly think about work, even when you're elsewhere.
- You don't feel motivated or inspired at the start of each day.

However, given all of these job “ailments”, it would be a mistake to quit a job in the middle of a “burn out” phase.

Why? Because changing jobs in the middle of a burnout phase can lead to a similar situation or even failure in your new job. If you are burning out, the best solution may be to step back and assess the problems that are intensifying your stress.

Conflict in the workplace

If you are changing jobs because of conflict in the workplace, consider if it would be more beneficial for you to address the issue and confront the problem “head on”, rather than simply looking for a new role. You may want to talk to your boss about the conflict, for instance, or consult with your HR Manager. The solution to your problem may simply involve resolving the conflict, rather than “jumping ship” and joining another company (where more conflict may be present, anyway).

Higher compensation

Needing a higher salary or a more competitive compensation package can also be a reason to change jobs, especially if one of your goals is to boost your financial stability. If you do choose to seek out a job for more pay, you need to be careful that you’re not chasing dollars for the sake of it and that your job change is still able to bring you career satisfaction and happiness.

You will also need to consider that a raise in salary may also lead to more demanding responsibilities, including higher levels of accountability and even longer working hours. Ask yourself: Is the rise in remuneration worth this new role and how will my quality of life and work/life balance change?

Take a “timeout” before you decide to change jobs

Before making the leap and changing jobs on a whim, consider taking some personal leave to enable you to consider the issues that are causing you stress.

This will help you develop a fresh perspective in regards to your job and can give you the time to develop solid career plans and consider the solutions before you blindly move forward.

During your “timeout” you could:

- Find ways to relax and de-stress
- Deal with or correct any personal problems
- Consider how you feel about your job
- Devise solutions to other issues that are impacting your life or job.

Once you have relaxed and reconsidered, you will be able to make a more rational decision about whether you need to change jobs and why.

A final tip

If you do decide to change jobs, make sure you leave on a high note. Give plenty of written notice, ensure you organise an adequate handover and thank your employer for the opportunities you were given.

“For changes to be of any true value, they’ve got to be lasting and consistent.”

Tony Robbins

Mistake No. 6

Getting too comfortable

After obtaining his law degree a few years ago, Scott R. landed a position with a large, prestigious firm in Brisbane. This was a tremendous success for him, especially given the tough competition involved and the calibre of other candidates vying for the role.

However, once Scott was established within the firm, his supervisors watched him less closely and allowed him to “coast” into a field of boredom and complacency. When it came time for review and advancement, Scott was never considered. His superiors thought that he was good at his job, but that he wasn’t really exceeding their expectations or “going the extra mile” to bring more value to the company.

Have you become like Scott?

Most of us know what a “comfortable” job is. It’s one that we have learned to master with minimal effort or that doesn’t challenge us in any way. And it often allows us to spend lots of time surfing the web, chatting to colleagues, taking long lunches or leaving early.

How can you tell if you’re too comfortable in your role?

- You feel bored, unmotivated or unchallenged each day.
- Your job responsibilities or duties haven’t changed for a long period of time.
- You’ve adapted to being laid back or lazy, rather than being proactive and driven.
- You don’t care about your tasks or responsibilities.
- You feel like you’re “going through the motions” or just carrying out routines that don’t challenge or utilise your skill, strengths and knowledge.



Solution

Get out of the danger zone of complacency

Finding yourself in the “comfortable” or “complacent” zone can be dangerous to your career.

While having lots of freedom and time for personal tasks at work may seem like great perks, getting too comfortable in your role can quickly lead to job boredom, career inertia and even poor on-the-job performance.

Always put your best foot forward

The employment market is extremely competitive and there are no doubt dozens of candidates who would love to steal your job. If you are doing the bare minimum just to get the job done, beware of the hazards of being reprimanded and replaced. Keep adding value as much as you can and focus on meeting/exceeding expectations to maintain your position in your company.

Keep updating your skills, knowledge and education

When did you last pursue a training course or attend a business conference? Are you reading industry journals and publications on a regular basis? You can easily lose your professional credibility if you are not constantly honing your skills and knowledge. It is crucial to nurture your ambition for advancement, so look for ways in which you can grow your talents and ensure your industry knowledge is up to date.

Make the most of new opportunities

If you're presented with an opportunity to develop your capabilities or take on more responsibility in your role, go for it. If you are not making the most of your professional opportunities, it's easy to become "comfortable" – and often, this is enough to renounce your value in the company and render yourself invisible to upper management. Instead, be on the lookout or seek out new projects that can help you maintain credibility and boost your involvement and motivation in the role.

"The apple cannot be stuck back on the Tree of Knowledge; once we begin to see, we are doomed and challenged to seek the strength to see more, not less" –

Arthur Miller

Mistake No. 7

No career challenges

The ideal work environment is generally dynamic, challenging and fast-paced, requiring creativity, an analytical approach to tasks, and the ability to meet deadlines.

However, there may be times when you find yourself “out of sync” in your current position. This can result in boredom, complacency, negativity or plain dissatisfaction, making it hard to drag yourself out of bed in the mornings and stay motivated and dedicated.

The reason this often happens is because challenges are lacking in your day-to-day job.

It is important to feel consistently challenged in the workplace so that you can maximise your potential, employ and grow your talents, and develop a positive and satisfying approach to your career.

Why you need to stay challenged in your career

A good work environment should be like a school classroom, where employees are constantly learning about themselves and advancing their marketplace knowledge and experience.

Multi-skilled positions are fast becoming the industry standard and employees who demonstrate that they can navigate and resolve a multitude of professional tasks have a much greater advantage over candidates who have failed to remain challenged in their roles.

Since your industry will often undergo changes and fluctuations – whether trend-based, socio-political, technological or economic – it is important to stay abreast of these changes and continue challenging your skills and knowledge. As an employee, this helps you stay relevant to your company and your industry – which is essential when it comes to advancing your career and establishing your expertise, whether while on the job or when it comes time for a job change.

Breathe challenges into your work life

While a lack of challenges in your career may not be a direct consequence of your own actions, it is still your responsibility to take control of this “mistake” and breathe challenges into your working life.

Ask for additional responsibility

Approach your employer and make some suggestions about how you can take on more responsibility in your role. You might want to present some ideas on how to improve current operations or ask for or suggest brand new tasks.

Make sure you highlight your capabilities in these areas and show how you will be able to take on these new duties, without compromising your present tasks. Be aware that conversations like this can often lead to discussions about your future plans for growth within the company, so be prepared to talk confidently and clearly about your goals here as well.

Challenge yourself

Once you have achieved a particular goal, go further. Create performance goals and KPIs that can drive you to succeed and that push you to exceed your expectations. If you can do more, go for it! Never stop looking for ways to improve and challenge yourself, even with current or “easy” tasks.

Participate in opportunities for professional development

Ask your employer about on-the-job training opportunities or courses, or about tuition aid for attending classes, workshops or seminars to expand your knowledge. Reading white papers, articles and professional

publications related to your position, industry or goals (e.g. books on leadership) can also be a great way to develop professionally.

All of these ideas can not only help you renew your enthusiasm and motivation for the job, but they'll demonstrate to your employer that you are actively pursuing greater opportunities and challenges within the company – and that you're a passionate, focused employee who wants to grow and succeed.

“Take a risk a day - one small or bold stroke that will make you feel great once you have done it. Even if it doesn't work out the way you wanted it to, at least you've tried. You didn't sit back ... powerless.”

Susan Jeffers

Mistake No. 8

Failing to network effectively

With tools like social media and mobile connectivity, there's no excuse not to network.

Networking is a critical part of building your career success and can lead to amazing opportunities and connections that can ultimately boost your career. If you have dreams of climbing the ladder in your chosen profession, networking is likely to be one of the tools that will help make those dreams a reality!

Why is networking so important?

Let's say you hold a position in a company that is in your desired industry or field. You love your job and you're passionate about your responsibilities. After a few years, you are promoted within the company and given a raise. A few more years go by, and just as you are expecting another major promotion, the company goes out of business and you are kicked to the curb and left to fend for yourself!

It happens more often than you think. And if you haven't been networking and building your connections, you will likely struggle to pick up your career quickly with another role. Despite having great experience, you won't have any connections or personal relationships to leverage, and if the job market is highly competitive, you could struggle significantly. It's like being left out at sea, without any lifelines to help reel you in. A similar situation will apply if you decide to change jobs or take your career in another direction.

Network well and create strategic alliances

One of the easiest and most effective ways to network is to use social media. Sites like LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and others allow you to seek out other professionals, leaders and even mentors who work in your field and who may be able to influence your career. The brilliance of today's technology means you can connect with these "influencers" instantly and begin building rapport.

In addition to social media, it's also possible to network in a variety of other ways. These can include:

- Joining professional organisations and attending conferences that enable you to connect with like-minded professionals in your industry.
- Attending community functions, such as local events and workshops, that allow you to connect with other professionals with similar interests.
- Keeping in touch with existing contacts by reaching out from time to time; face-to-face catch ups are often most beneficial, but even a quick phone call (or email) can keep you in touch with valuable contacts who can benefit your career in future.

Of course, networking isn't just about finding jobs. There are many other advantages to networking as well, such as:

- Refining your communication and relationship skills, particularly when it comes to meeting new people.
- Increasing your industry knowledge and learning from other industry experts and leaders.
- Sharing or gaining feedback and guidance on your ideas, opinions and plans.

- Conversing regularly about trends and fluctuations in your industry, and staying abreast of news and changes.
- Having access to a pool of talented people that you can even hire or bring into your company, should the need arise.

It can be easy to neglect networking in your day-to-day job, but making time to connect with other experts in your field is vital for your career. Make a habit of completing networking tasks and growing your contacts on a regular basis, whether weekly, fortnightly or monthly.



“Rather than aiming for a massive network, focus on building an efficient one. This requires knowing people with different skills and viewpoints. They should be different from you, of course, but also different from one another.”

Harvard Business Review

Mistake No. 9

Playing office politics

If you're lucky in your career, you can end up in an organisation where office politics are either absent or minimal. But at some point, even the best of us can find ourselves in the midst of an office environment where politics are in play.

Gary's "political" blunder

Gary H. worked for a consulting firm, and decided to apply for a promotion for a senior role. He also discovered that three of his coworkers were also applying for the same promotion. Gary heard that one of these three colleagues had also made a huge but silly mistake on a recent project.

He told some people in the company about this, and voiced his opinion that he didn't think his colleague deserved the promotion. One of the people that Gary spoke to, though Gary didn't realise it, was James, who was on the hiring panel. Although James wasn't aware of the blunder Gary's coworker had made, he also lost much respect for Gary for spreading the gossip around. He communicated to the hiring panel that Gary lacked both the professionalism and maturity to take on the role, and was actually engaging in office gossip. Gary, of course, didn't get the job.

Playing office politics can be detrimental to your career, so you need to know how to avoid engaging in damaging political behaviour, and how to protect yourself from it.

Learn how to sidestep the political arena

Be observant and attentive

Know what's going on around you. You may just want to keep your head down and your productivity up, but keeping up with the latest intra-office news (and rumours) will help you avoid being blind-sided. Involving yourself in gossip is never a good idea, but knowing what the rumour mill is churning out can filter out any unexpected announcements or surprises in the workplace.

Avoid gossip

Taking part in gossip and/or spreading it around the office should be avoided at all times. Those who constantly gossip are usually looked upon negatively by coworkers and superiors; if you engage in gossip, you can create the impression that you are untrustworthy and even deceitful or dishonest. This can have a significantly negative impact on your career, and you may even find yourself in a static role, without promotions or special project assignments.

Stay neutral

Sitting on the fence can be very uncomfortable, but in office politics that's where you need to be. Taking sides can lead to an unrecoverable misstep that can harm your career opportunities. You never know who might be your future boss, so let diplomacy be the name of your game plan. Remember, you cannot take sides without making enemies.

Remain professional

No matter how productive or successful you are, engaging in office politics also demonstrates a lack of professionalism. This is enough to hamper your career or signal to your superiors that you're not ready or

suitable for a promotion or a role with more responsibility, just like Gary H. above. The last thing you want is to be noticed by the boss, even corporate leaders, for the wrong reasons.

Instead, learn to adapt to your business environment and handle potential or existing problems professionally and courteously. This may involve confronting and resolving conflict, encouraging honesty and openness or even escalating the problem to your boss or a HR Manager.

Learning to deal with conflicts, politics and rumours in this way is just as important to your career as your knowledge, skills and expertise, so employ professionalism as much as you can in an office environment, especially whenever politics is present.

Develop relationships naturally

Develop professional relationships at all levels in your company utilising traits like honesty, trustworthiness, transparency and dependability. You should respect all members of your company, regardless of role or function, and practise common courtesy as much as possible.

Relationship building is a great way to sidestep the world of office politics and enhance your career through genuine development and growth opportunities, rather than gossip, brown-nosing and hearsay.

“To get a handle on office politics, observe how things get done in your organization. Ask some key questions: What are the core values and how are they enacted? Are short- or long-term results more valued? How are decisions made? How much risk is tolerated?”

Wall Street Journal

Mistake No. 10

Arguing with your boss

Few positive results can be garnered from arguing in the office. Having an argument or fight with the boss is one of the most common reasons people leave their jobs or find their job security compromised.

When questioning candidates who have suddenly resigned for no obvious reason, I am often told the parties “mutually agreed” to part ways. After probing further, I sometimes discover that a serious disagreement with the boss was actually the trigger for the candidate’s departure.

Your relationship with your manager is a critical one. Having a strong, positive relationship can accelerate your career and open doors to new opportunities. Conversely, having a poor relationship with your boss can be a source of significant stress within the workplace and can hold back your career.

A good relationship with your manager relies on several underpinning pillars, including:

- Clear, succinct and specific expectations
- Clear, open and frequent communication
- Honesty and transparency
- Trustworthiness and reliability.

The repercussions of arguing

A disagreement with your boss, or any situation in the workplace that leads to open conflicts or arguments, has the potential to undermine your relationship, as well as your credibility as a professional.

It can be even more detrimental if you raise your voice, swear at your boss, call your boss inappropriate names, make the argument personal or display a highly emotional tirade. These situations are very hard to

recover from and even if you apologise later on, your behaviour can be deemed inappropriate and the repercussions can be serious.

At the very least, you will have done considerable damage to your reputation. Nothing spreads across a workplace quicker than news of an office argument. This is a scenario that must be avoided at all costs; even if you have a boss or colleague that has a tendency to engage in arguments or demonstrate emotional outbursts themselves.



Solution

Discuss, don't argue

Developing a quality relationship with your direct managers means learning how best to communicate with them in order to negotiate and achieve the outcomes you want, but without descending into an argument or conflict. As a general guide, you should avoid:

- Becoming “swept up” in heated confrontations or raising your voice.
- Bringing emotions into the conflict or letting your emotions get the better of you.

- Making matters personal, even if the other party is doing so.
- Using profanity or derogatory terms.

Keep in mind that having a robust discussion and sharing your views on a business matter is very different to having an argument. If you disagree on any professional matter, you should aim to discuss it openly and honestly, rather than arguing about it. Often (particularly at more senior levels), it can be perfectly acceptable to challenge your boss on a work-related matter, as long as your discussion is fact-based and presented in a respectful manner.

"A troubled relationship with your boss can negatively affect your morale, your productivity, your happiness, and of course, your career. A positive relationship can improve your morale, productivity and happiness which could lead to more career success in the form of promotions, raises and higher self-esteem."

Jacquelyn Smith, *Forbes Magazine*

Mistake No. 11

Undermining your boss

It's no secret that some bosses can be bad. They can be egotistical, uncommunicative, incompetent, untrustworthy or even tyrannical.

I once had a client named Darren M., a financial analyst whose boss kept giving him menial tasks to do that hampered Darren's effectiveness on the job and didn't allow him to utilise his best skills. Naturally, this upset Darren and he told a few of his coworkers about the situation. When the word got back to Darren's boss, he promptly wrote Darren up for insubordination and put him on a 30-day probation period. Not good.

Undermining your boss can have significantly undesirable consequences. These can include:

- Compromising your career, potential promotions or future in the company.
- Creating a negative or untrustworthy image of yourself.
- Reducing your perceived value in the company.
- Negatively affecting your performance reviews.
- Having your hard work and extra efforts overlooked.
- Losing your position altogether.

Remember, your boss has much more authority than you in the organisation and is often considered to be more of an expert than other lower-level employees. Undermining your boss also shows that you don't respect their decisions or value their opinions.

The reality is that unless you have strong, evidence-based reasons, it can be difficult to have your boss "removed" or transferred. If you do not like his or her management style, protesting or complaining will never be the way forward and doing so can jeopardise your employment and future career.

This is not to say that you should simply put up with unfair or hostile treatment, but that you are going to have to find creative ways to deal with the issues and forge a relationship that benefits both of you.

Solution

Find ways to manage your boss

Dealing with a difficult boss is usually more problematic than dealing with a challenging colleague. While changing jobs is one option, it also comes with another subset of challenges that can be stressful themselves and/or that can impact the solidity of your career experience. Of course, there's also no guarantee that you won't end up with another "bad boss."

Keep your view professional

This is easier said than done, but if you feel that you are getting angry or upset when dealing with your boss, try to step back and observe the conversation as a third party. This will help you gain a neutral and disengaged perspective of the situation.

Be careful of bringing unprofessional views into play, as this can make your situation worse; instead, keep your conversations and inter-actions professional and fact-based and look for ways to maturely and openly discuss issues with your boss.

Manage your anger, even if your boss can't manage his

Sometimes confrontation can be unavoidable, so if things get to a boiling point, stick to the evidence and don't bring personal feelings, opinions or emotions into it – no matter how much you might feel you are being attacked. When a supervisor exhibits this type of aggressive behaviour, it's often because he is feeling insecure himself.

If the situation is truly getting out of control, simply walk away. You can then take a moment to cool down or seek help from a colleague or even a HR Manager on the issue.

Know what you want

Have a clear picture of your needs and expectations. Your supervisor will have their own ideas of how they want things done, but if you can show your expertise and speak with authority (respectfully, of course), they may be more open to your suggestions.

Be a problem solver

You don't want to be a complainer who moans and groans about every little thing, but if you identify a problem that affects one or more business areas and offer some viable solutions, you may gain some positive traction in the workplace – and in the eyes of your supervisor.

Finally, do not complain about your boss's personality or state any assumptions or opinions you may have regarding their decisions and/or attitudes. Some things are really better left unsaid – especially in the workplace.

“Trust is everything. Being trusted – and knowing whom to trust – are the killer apps of life. No other metric so clearly delineates the difference between success and failure.”

Bruce Kasanoff, *Forbes Magazine*

Mistake No. 12

Sexual relations in the workplace

It can happen in the workplace. Employees can develop strong relationships and friendships at work, and often, they can choose to take things to the next “physical” level.

People who work together share many similarities, including educational and intellectual interests, and sometimes it is natural for a professional relationship to turn into a more personal one. Sometimes these relationships work out long-term, but sometimes they can end badly.

While some companies have unspoken rules regarding sexual relations in the workplace, many companies have written policies prohibiting fraternisation among their employees on (and sometimes off) the premises.

The damages caused by sexual relations

Careers

While you may have genuine feelings for a colleague, engaging in sexual relations can place both of your careers at risk, especially if your relations occur in the office itself. You can compromise promotions and opportunities for growth, or you could lose your job altogether.

Reputation

Your reputation can also be placed on the line if you choose to engage in workplace sexual relations. This can lead to a loss of professional credibility in your role and you may find that others fail to take you seriously. Furthermore, you can develop a reputation as someone

who is trying to increase their standing using “corrupt” or “immoral” methods.

Rapport with colleagues

Your rapport with your colleagues and even superiors can drop dramatically if you’re discovered engaging in sexual activities or overt flirting while at work. You may also find your colleagues will fail to respect you in the office and you can lose much personal and professional integrity in their eyes. They can also come to resent you or downright disapprove of your decisions.

Company culture

Having sexual relations in the workplace can also contribute to a demoralising culture. This can affect the entire office and create an environment that is uncomfortable and intimidating. If you’ve been participating in sexual relations, consider what effect it could be having on your office as a whole.

Legal ramifications

Not all bosses or colleagues are likely to dismiss your sexual activities. Sometimes, depending on the circumstances, lawsuits can be filed which could permanently damage your career and your professional standing.

Solution

Keep sexual relations out of the workplace

There is no way to prevent people from becoming attracted to one another. However, people can learn to be careful and use discretion before becoming involved with someone they work with. Here are

some common sense rules that can be applied in any type of workplace or to any type of relationship:

- Avoid compromising social situations between you and your work colleagues.
- Avoid physically touching anyone you work with.
- Don't flirt with the boss.
- Don't become involved with anyone who is married.
- Don't become involved with anyone who reports to you or directly manages you.
- Do NOT engage in sexual activities in the actual office; if you need to continue with your relationship, take it offsite and keep your relations out of the workplace.

Sexual relations vs. sexual harassment

It is important to understand that there is a notable difference between sexual relations and sexual harassment in the workplace. Sexual relations are fully consensual on behalf of those involved; sexual harassment, on the other hand, means that the engagement, relations or interactions – whatever they are – are not consensual.

If you feel that you are or have been subject to sexual harassment in your workplace, you should speak to your boss, your HR Manager or someone else you trust immediately.

Mistake No. 13

Making a mistake at work and not owning up to it

Let's say you have made a mistake at work that is, at the very least, embarrassing. For example, you might've sent a confidential email to the wrong person, completely miscalculated some numbers that went straight up to corporate headquarters or even communicated incorrect information to a client.

Do you decide to be honest and admit to your mistake? Or do you simply let it go and hope no one notices or finds out that it was you?

Owning up to your mistakes

Any small mistake can turn into a big mistake, especially if you try to hide it. It can impact the level of trust and faith your boss or colleagues have in you, and if the error eventuates into larger consequences, it can place your professional standing, your promotions and even your job at risk.

Owning up to your mistakes is valuable and often vital because:

- It is important to maintain your professional integrity and respect.
- You want to be seen as someone who is accountable and willing to take responsibility for actions in the workplace.
- You can potentially fix the mistake, before it develops into something significant and more damaging.
- You can potentially learn from the mistake, growing your skills in accountability and boosting your professional confidence.

If you do make an error, you should not, under any circumstances:

- Cover up your mistake.
- Directly blame someone else for the mistake.
- Allow someone else to take the blame for your mistake.
- Remain quiet when consequences of your mistake are evident.
- Own up to it, but then act like you did nothing wrong.
- Own up to it, but make “trivial” excuses about why you made the error.

Solution

Be accountable for your errors

Own up to your mistakes, even small ones and show that you are mature enough to be accountable for what you've done. Most of the time, a genuine, honest mistake is forgivable. Everyone makes mistakes; bosses have too. The professionalism with which you handle your error is what will set you apart.

Correct and resolve

If you make an error, aim to correct it straight away, even if it means doing so on your own time. Be honest and upfront and let the “recipient” of the mistake know that you are working on a solution (if you are unable to provide one immediately).

If you need to approach a boss, colleague or superior about your mistake, you should think carefully beforehand about some solutions or suggestions that you can present to them in order to fix the problem. Let them know that you made the mistake honestly and that you're willing to do whatever it takes to repair it. Some errors might be easily and quickly fixed, while others may take more time and effort.

Don't berate yourself

Taking responsibility for your error and berating yourself are two different things. Take responsibility for your actions, but do so professionally. Don't cry, put yourself down or get yourself into a panic, as this can be seen as unprofessional. Remember, everyone makes mistakes. Simply apologise for your blunder and offer solutions.

If the mistake was a significant one, you may want to discuss it further with your boss and put some measures in place to ensure it won't happen again in future.

"Shift from being afraid of making a mistake to being afraid of not making a mistake. If you are not making any mistakes, you are not learning or growing."

Susan Jeffers

Mistake No. 14

Treating the workplace like a social network

Building social relationships and connections in your workplace can be one of the most important career moves you ever make. At work, it is entirely possible to make friends and build strong relationships for the future. However, given that we spend the majority of our lives working, it also means that our personal lives and friendships can become intertwined with our professional ones.

Socialising in the workplace

There is a time and a place for social interaction at work. Keep in mind that social rules will vary depending on the organisation. Some companies promote a very social atmosphere and encourage frequent staff interaction, while others insist that social activities, at least during office hours, are kept to a minimum.

Whatever office environment you find yourself in, it's important to realise that too much workplace socialising can have a negative impact on your professionalism and your career. As a guide when it comes to social events and activities, you should NOT:

- Participate in extended social activities (e.g. coffee breaks, lunch room chats) instead of completing your tasks and duties.
- Use work time to socialise or complete social activities (e.g. long lunches, checking your Facebook or personal emails).
- Drink too much alcohol at organisational events and parties, regardless of whether they take place during or after business hours.
- Engage in “wild” or unacceptable behaviour during social events.
- Gossip or make jokes about colleagues or the organisation on social occasions; even though the environment might be more social and personal, what you say can still impact your professional reputation.

Socialise smartly

There's nothing wrong with being social at work. Socialising can make our professional lives much stronger, happier and productive and it can contribute to a healthy workplace morale and culture.

Being social can also be an important way to strengthen your connections and influence your career. This isn't about brown-nosing or "sucking up", but about cultivating a harmonious and friendly office environment that can benefit your professional decisions and options. After all, professionals are more likely to respond to a boss, colleague or team member who they know, like and respect on a personal level, as well as a professional one.

Smarter socialising means creating a good balance between promoting social activities and friendly interactions while at work, while still maintaining a strong professional outlook and a high level of productivity.

- Put your responsibilities and tasks first; don't let them slide in the face of being social.
- Schedule time in your calendar for social activities and participate in social events as necessary (e.g. attending your boss's birthday lunch, project kick-off drinks).
- Recognise the difference between healthy, valuable social interactions, which strengthen relationships and increase workplace communication, and socialising that hampers productivity and outputs.

"The modern workplace has become a community center, or a 'home away from home' where people get many of their social needs met."

Dr. Maynard Brusman in *Forbes Magazine*

Mistake No. 15

Blaming others at work

How many times have you been caught up in the vicious cycle of making a mistake and then indulging in the blame game?

While it's human tendency to transfer fault to others and shield our egos from criticism, playing the “blame game” can harm your professional image, your trustworthiness and ultimately, your career success.

Research shows people who blame others learn less, lose status more quickly, and perform more poorly when compared to those who take ownership of their mistakes.

Other than impacting your reputation, blaming others for your blunders can:

- Hinder your ability to cope with mistakes and learn from them.
- Prevent your professional confidence from growing and developing.
- Make you vulnerable to making the same mistake again in future.
- Cause you to lose much respect in the workplace.



Take ownership for your mistakes

The best thing you can do is be accountable for your mistakes, whether large or small. Even if this seems overwhelming or difficult, it is much better to take responsibility for your actions so that you can learn and grow as a professional.

Don't blame others for your mistakes

This is dishonourable and makes you appear weak, untrustworthy and unprofessional.

Accept responsibility for your errors

This will show that you are able to deal with your actions professionally and it will help you improve your credibility, solidify your relationships, improve your self-esteem, reinforce transparency in the workplace and grow your problem solving skills.

Take ownership and set a great example

Taking ownership for your mistakes can also translate into future career success; great managers and leaders never blame others for their decisions or actions. Instead, they accept responsibility and set a precedent in their organisation that flows down to even the newest employees. If you plan on being a great manager, director or leader one day, being accountable for your actions needs to begin now.

"Concern yourself more with accepting responsibility than with assigning blame. Let the possibilities inspire you more than the obstacles discourage you."

Ralph Marston

Mistake No. 16

Gossiping at work

Gossiping can actually be traced back to the origins and evolution of human beings, from when tribe members huddled around caves and fires, to ancient times when we would gather in marketplaces and squares to exchange talk and rumours.

Today, gossiping is common in the workplace. It is a form of social and personal interaction in which employees can exchange information, vent anxieties and grievances, pass on “anecdotes” and uncover details about the organisation or other employees.



Gossip can create camaraderie and trust between employees when used constructively. However, if you participate in damaging gossip or if negative statements you make become common knowledge, it could prove harmful to your relationships in the workplace and your greater career.

Potential pitfalls to consider:

- Colleagues, managers, supervisors and employees can find out about things you've said about them or discussed with others, which can significantly damage your relationships.
- Gossiping can lead others to lose their respect for you, and you can damage your standing by developing your reputation as a “gossiper” and someone who is generally not to be trusted.
- If you participate in gossip that ends up being significantly damaging or incriminating, you can jeopardise your promotion or role or even find yourself unemployed.

Solution

Don't get caught up in damaging gossip

“Professional” gossip

Like all other issues in the workplace, you should try and keep your gossiping “professional.” Discussions that are predominantly about work or the organisation can be considered healthy, positive and a good way to connect with colleagues and work out potential solutions to problems. This type of gossip can relate to areas such as:

- Company changes or goals.
- Organisational strategies or plans.
- Promotions or changes in roles/positions.
- Staffing issues, like turnovers, job losses or redundancies.

However, the following are situations you should avoid getting caught up in:

Interpersonal gossiping

This type of gossip involves talking about personal issues related to another colleague or manager or making harmful or emotionally-driven comments about them. This type of gossiping can be unacceptable in the workplace and can breed tension, conflict, disharmony and dysfunction between colleagues.

Gossiping on record

Keep in mind that official office communication systems – such as email, the intranet or instant messaging – should not be used for the purposes of gossip. These systems are almost always monitored by the organisation and anything you say can end up as part of the organisation's official records.

Unsecure conversations

This refers to gossiping with someone who you don't completely trust or who you feel may be unreliable in keeping sensitive information to themselves. This can place you at significant risk in the organisation and it's important to keep in mind that any colleague or manager can also betray your confidence. Evaluate your situation carefully before you engage in gossip or share information with another person; avoid making any comments that could come back to hurt you later on.

"Gossiping or mudslinging can only damage your own credibility. When you are upset or frustrated, wait until you've calmed down to express your concerns. Be direct but tactful. Focus on the black and white facts."

Cheryl Conner, *Forbes Magazine*

Getting drunk at the office party

Getting drunk at an office party should be avoided at all costs. Drunken behaviour can harm your image and compromise your professionalism and reputation.

In addition, drinking too much can place you in undesirable situations and can cause you to carry out damaging actions. For example, you might:

- Reveal your weaknesses or shortcomings to others.
- Confess to a mistake or oversight that might jeopardise your position or job.
- Tell your boss or colleague what you “really” think of them.
- Speak ill of the organisation as a whole.
- Leak confidential or sensitive information.
- Engage in inappropriate behaviour with a colleague.
- Show aggression towards others.

Being the “life of the party” is one thing, but be very aware that consuming too much alcohol can quickly lead to embarrassing and humiliating behaviour. As a result, you might have to spend a significant amount of time in damage control, repairing relationships and re-establishing your professional credibility.

Avoid office party blunders

- Social office get-togethers are opportune times to mingle with coworkers and form lasting relationships. This can be beneficial if you exercise office party etiquette and actively manage the number of drinks you are consuming. A good rule of thumb is to stick to only one standard drink per hour, similar to the drinking pattern you would follow if you were driving.
- Avoid having extensive, professional discussions with your boss, colleagues or team members. While talking about organisational topics is fine, office parties are not ideal environments for initiating discussions around raises, promotions, strategies or other negotiations.
- Don't engage in excessive flirting or other sexual activities with your colleagues or boss at office parties. Remember, office gatherings still need to be professional. If you do have personal avenues that need "exploring", do this on your own time, away from the professional environment.



Facing the consequences of your actions

Even seemingly harmless behaviour at office parties can result in consequences the next time you are in the office. If you have made an office party blunder, you need to be prepared to offer apologies and face/accept the consequences.

In some cases, consequences may be minimal; they might be as simple as colleagues playfully giving you a hard time or sharing photos of you from the party. Other consequences, however, may be much more detrimental, as I've mentioned above, and can result in long-term career impairment.

If you feel you have behaved badly, making an official apology in the first instance, particularly to your boss and/or superiors, may be necessary.

"Right actions in the future are the best apologies for bad actions in the past."

Tryon Edwards

Mistake No. 18

Treating employer phone calls like a low priority

When you are applying for jobs – regardless of whether you’re looking for an entry level role or a senior executive position – responses can come quickly. If you have crafted your resume and application well, and if the employer thinks you could be ideal for the job, you can receive a positive phone call or response within a day or even less. And yet one of the most common errors I’ve seen is when candidates treat these phone calls like a low priority.

Why taking phone calls is important

Recognising employer (or recruiter) phone calls as key opportunities that can help you secure your position is crucial, particularly since there will likely be many candidates vying for the role. In most cases, the employer will be calling to either conduct a quick, informal interview with you over the phone (to further test your suitability for the role) or they will want to invite you to attend an interview with them in person.

Phone call mistakes and why they could cost you the job

The most prominent mistakes candidates make when it comes to employer calls include:

- Failing to answer the call or return the call quickly.
- Answering the call, then requesting to call the employer back at a later time, but failing to do so promptly.
- Having an unprofessional voicemail message or having no voicemail option at all.
- Not returning the call at all (yes, it does happen!).

These are all huge blunders that can damage the quality reputation and professionalism you will have promoted via your resume.

Mistakes like this can also cost you the job. While you're busy "not returning" the interviewer's calls, they can be contacting other candidates who can sweep the position out from under you. Either way, by the time you call them back, it could be too late and your opportunity may have dwindled considerably.

Solution

Make answering calls a high priority

It can be difficult to answer every phone call you receive, especially if you are still working while you are job searching. However, if an employer or recruiter does call you about your application, it's vital that you respond quickly.

If you miss the employer's call:

- Find a space where you can have a private conversation and phone them back as soon as possible (don't forget to have your documents organised too, so that you can refer to them while on the call).
- If you are unable to get away from your desk or talk extensively, phone them back, let them know you are interested in the role and arrange another time to talk, ideally as soon as possible (e.g. in an hour) or at least within that same day.
- Whatever the situation, aim to return the call on that same day – don't wait until tomorrow or the next day.

If you do manage to answer the call, but find yourself in an inopportune situation, you can employ any of the above tactics as well. The key thing to remember is to harness the opportunity as quickly as you can.

Returning a phone call promptly illustrates to the employer that:

- You are enthusiastic about the position and willing to do what it takes to get the role.
- You are an organised and disciplined executive who can juggle many balls at once.
- You respect the employer/recruiter and the time they have taken to contact you.
- You also respect yourself as a job seeker and believe in your credibility.
- You appreciate the opportunity, even if you decide not to proceed with the application.

Whatever you do, return that call! It could be the beginning of a wonderful career opportunity and it can lead to your next ideal position. I always advise my candidates to return calls within an hour or the very least, on the same day.

"Respect your efforts, respect yourself. Self-respect leads to self-discipline. When you have both firmly under your belt, that's real power."

Clint Eastwood

Failing to refresh or develop skills

Most professionals today work in challenging and evolving industries and environments. Yet surprisingly, many fail to continually improve their skill set. Often, this can amount to significant career setbacks, including missed opportunities or promotions, an inability to take on certain tasks or responsibilities or to truly understand marketplace fluctuations and make intelligent business decisions.

One of my previous clients, Daniel H., a professional adviser, was recently let go, simply because he no longer possessed the latest skills and knowledge required for his position. And yet, the skills Daniel needed could have easily been acquired through simple workshops and other training programs.

Today's job market is extremely competitive. Employers often expect both candidates and employees to possess up to date knowledge of the marketplaces in which they are working – and to regularly adapt and develop their competencies and skills so that they can carry out their tasks effectively.

For this reason – one that Daniel didn't grasp – even experienced employees must refresh and refine their expertise and talents on a regular basis. Regular and consistent training also demonstrates to employers that you are invested in your position, and also interested in professional growth.

Boost your career by refreshing your skills

The continuing development of your professional skills is indispensable in today's fast-paced and evolving work space (especially when we look at the way digital technologies are driving industries forward). Candidates who remain limited in competency and skill are at a constant disadvantage, lagging behind their colleagues and competitors. It is crucial to understand that career prosperity and competitiveness primarily rely on expanding your skill base and ensuring it is able to meet current employer demands.

How can you truly boost your professional competencies?

- Attend relevant training sessions and workshops offered in your industry.
- Participate in conferences and other educational or industry events.
- Read publications (magazines, journals, books) that relate to your specific industry or skill set.
- Participate in online training seminars or social media discussions if available.
- Keep abreast of industry news, trends and key fluctuations.

Why develop your skills?

- Expanding your skill level and knowledge is a great way to become more eligible for a new job. When you challenge yourself to master something new, you'll also have new skills to add to your resume and profiles. This can provide you with professional opportunities that can accelerate or enhance your career.
- Learning new skills can help you transition into a completely new role or a completely different career path that is more aligned with your professional goals and desires.

- By keeping up-to-date with trends, you are preparing to become an expert in your industry, which can impact your career in positive ways. This will also enable you to earn the trust and respect of colleagues, as well other leaders and experts.
- If your present job skills are outdated, you won't be able to make good decisions in the evolving job environment. By learning new skills and honing your competencies, you challenge yourself to match changing job demands, both while at work and when it comes time to reconsider your career options.



“A winner is someone who recognizes his God-given talents, works his tail off to develop them into skills, and uses these skills to accomplish his goals.”

Larry Bird

Mistake No. 20

Being unprepared for a phone interview

Phone interviews are generally conducted as a preliminary “screening” interview before companies (or recruiters) decide whether to progress to a second round of face-to-face interviews. This is an opportunity for the company to confirm that you, as the candidate, can meet their most critical requirements. It’s also a great opportunity for you to clarify the basic details of the job, learn about its scope and gain an insight into the company at hand.

For these reasons and many others, performing well in a phone interview is crucial. Employers and recruiters want to see that you can conduct yourself confidently and professionally on the phone, and they often use phone conversations to gauge how interested you are in the position and how seriously you are taking the opportunity.

Solution

Prepare for a phone interview in advance

In some ways, preparing for a phone interview is similar to preparing for a face-to-face interview:

Prepare early

Preliminary phone interviews are often unscheduled, which means it’s important to prepare for the interview as soon as you submit your resume. Employers and recruiters can often respond quickly, especially

if you have the right skills for the role, so you need to be ready. Good preparation allows you to maximise your performance whenever the call comes through.

Do your homework

Conduct as much research as you can on the employer. If you applied through a recruitment agency and don't know the specific company, conduct research into the relevant industry and be ready to ask your own questions about who the company is, what they do, how big they are, and so on.

Rehearse your answers

Employers will often ask some basic interview questions during your phone interview, so it is essential to prepare your answers in advance. Standard interview questions can include:

- Why are you leaving or why did you leave your current/previous role?
- What are you looking for in your next position/company?
- What appealed to you about the job description?
- What are your main strengths and weaknesses?
- What are your main career achievements so far?

Take your time, be professional

It's important to conduct your phone interview as professionally as possible. Remember, phone interviews are just as significant as face-to-face ones. When you receive the phone call:

- Make sure your environment is quiet and distraction-free; if you are at work, head into a private space or to a space outside of the office where you can talk openly without being overheard.
- Have the required information on hand (your resume, prepared answers, employer's website etc.) so that you can refer to it while speaking.

- Give the caller your full attention and don't try to multitask during your interview; this can make you sound unprofessional, disorganised and even disrespectful.
- Remember to replace body language and visual communication (like nods) with verbal responses and cues.
- Keeping a glass of water nearby can be great during a phone interview, but never eat and talk at the same time.
- End the call on a high note; thank the caller for getting in touch with you and communicate that you are interested in the opportunity, and let them know you're looking forward to their response.
- If your phone interview is successful and you're invited for a face-to-face interview straight away, have your schedule ready so you can negotiate a time.

If you get called for a phone interview without notice, hopefully you will be in a position to drop what you're doing as quickly as possible and get in the right headspace. If you're truly not able to do so, ask if you can call the employer/recruiter back shortly.

Send a thank-you note

After your phone interview, follow up with a thank you email to the interviewer. This can help you stand out from the competition and remain prominent in the interviewer's eyes. You can also use this opportunity to reiterate why you are interested in the position, and add a few key points on your value proposition and what you can bring to the role.

"Don't get caught with your guard down. Be sure to research the company, study the job description, and practice your responses to anticipated questions, just as you would for any other interview."

Monster.com

Allowing your resume to become outdated

The value of a professional, executive resume should never be underestimated. Your resume is an essential marketing tool that needs to be strategically customised to highlight your experience and knowledge, while showcasing your unique skills, strengths, and capabilities. An executive resume could possibly be one of the most important documents you ever own.



Is your resume outdated?

Possessing an outdated resume – or allowing yours to slide into obsolescence – can have dire consequences on your career movement, particularly if you find yourself in a situation where you want or need to apply for a new role or an internal promotion.

If you allow your resume to become outdated:

- You'll have to spend time updating it when it comes time to apply for a role, which can delay your job search or application significantly.
- Someone else (who has an updated resume or portfolio) can jump in ahead of you, submit their application and become the lead contender for the position.
- If you're scrambling to update your resume in a hurry, you can overlook or leave out important facts, details or achievements, simply because you've forgotten about them or because they occurred months or years ago.
- Consequently, your resume can also become much less convincing and effective and can even appear to be unprofessional, unfinished or unsuitable to the job you are applying for.

Solution

Update your resume frequently!

Whatever the situation, you must be prepared for any changes or upsets to your career, even at short notice. Keeping your resume updated means you can be ready at any time to seek out new positions, attend an interview, showcase your skills or even apply for a promotion.

- Make a habit out of updating your resume on a regular basis – perhaps once a month or once every quarter or half-year, depending on your situation.
- Every time you acquire a new skill, accomplish a task, complete a training session or achieve success in anyway, add it to your resume; this will ensure nothing falls through the cracks and that your document remains updated with important details.
- You can also use your resume as a reference document to keep track of your accomplishments; if you notice that you haven't achieved much in the past few months, it can prompt you to seek out new courses or workshops or look for other ways to expand your skills and industry knowledge.

- If you haven't revised your resume in a while, but have decided that you want to look for a new role, start updating immediately; you'll need to think about your specific job goals and about what competencies and skills you most want to highlight for your next employer.

To prevent a career disaster or to avoid missing out on key job opportunities, you need to continuously manage your career. And to be prepared for new opportunities on the horizon, you will need an updated resume that communicates your skills, expertise and achievements.

Keep your resume updated!

"If you're given notice today, will you be ready to start your job search immediately? If a friend mentions an opening at your dream employer, will you be ready to submit your resume? If a legal recruiter calls, could you e-mail her your resume today?"

Shauna C. Bryce, Careerealism.com

Mistake No. 22

Not having a LinkedIn profile

Over 300 million professionals use LinkedIn worldwide – but if you think that LinkedIn is just another social networking site for people who are between jobs, you are mistaken.

LinkedIn is a powerful networking site that allows you to connect to experts, leaders, professionals, employers and groups, all of whom can influence your career direction and pursuits.

Employers, recruiters and head hunters also frequently browse LinkedIn to locate and connect with potential candidates who can bring the utmost value to their organisations. As an executive coach, I know many candidates who have obtained their current positions through LinkedIn or who have been offered incredible opportunities simply by networking on the site.

As someone who should be continually managing and growing your career, it is critical to ensure that you are active on LinkedIn and that your LinkedIn profile is as up to date and professional as possible. Even if you aren't looking for a job or a new opportunity, one might be looking for you.



Create a “LinkedIn” profile now

Most corporate job seekers today are expected to have a LinkedIn profile, regardless of whether they are targeting senior leadership roles or entry level positions.

Create a strong profile

Strong LinkedIn profiles are ones that are complete with accurate information about your skills and work history and that are also kept up to date. Ensure that you complete all of the relevant sections in your profile and look for ways to emphasise your key competencies and strengths. The more detail you can include, the stronger your profile will be. A professional photograph is essential as well.

Use relevant keywords

To draw more attention to your profile and maximise your visibility in search results, use specific keywords related to your industry when writing about yourself and your work experience. Keywords should be included in your:

- Summary
- Specialties
- Skills
- Experience
- Recommendations
- Projects.

If you have a website, include a link to it in your “contact” section. This can significantly increase your web exposure, as well as your visibility for recruiters and employers. If you are actively looking for work, ensure you list your contact details as well to make it easier for employers to get in touch with you.

Join a LinkedIn group

LinkedIn is a great place to make connections by joining and participating in “groups.” Groups are created online to facilitate networking and professional discussions that can relate to anything, from individual career decisions to industry trends and news.

Talking to others in your field can give you new insights and perspectives on your career, and enlighten you to more appealing opportunities and corporations, which you may wish to further pursue.

“Online professional networks like LinkedIn have brought visibility to the talent market and allow people to showcase their abilities as never before. Online professional networks are now the second-most popular (as well as the fastest-growing) source of quality hires.”

Fiona Smith, *BRW*

Mistake No. 23

Under-dressing for a job interview

When it comes to job interviews, making a dazzling first impression is vital. Those who “dress for success” and present themselves well have a greater chance of moving through to the next stage.

Candidates who dress poorly for a job interview, however, can:

- Come across as unprofessional or disinterested in the role.
- Compromise their first impression and success, especially if they are seeking a role in a highly corporate company.
- Lead interviewers to assume they are unprepared for the interview, and therefore the job.



Dress to impress

The right attire in a job interview can communicate a strong sense of professionalism and work ethic, as well as show interviewers that you are serious about the opportunity. Ensure your attire is formal and professional, even if the job you are seeking is more casual. Keep your dress as simple and crisp as possible.

What to wear

- For men, professional dress involves either a complete suit or a long sleeve formal shirt and tie.
- For women, a corporate suit is ideal, with either trousers or a pencil skirt, along with a conservative and simple blouse or shirt. If you don't have a full suit, you can opt for a long sleeved blouse or a shirt paired with a skirt or a knee-length dress.

Colours

Solid and subtle colours are the key to sensible interview clothing. Both men and women should stick to either black, white, navy blue or grey. While a splash of colour is fine, you should avoid bright or overt colours and patterns that can end up being distracting.

Shoes

Your shoes should also match your professional wear. Avoid any casual shoes, such as sneakers, loafers, thongs or sandals.

- Shoes for men should be either black or brown – with or without laces is fine.
- Women should choose low-rise pumps or heels that complete their formal look; peep toes can be suitable, as long as they are professional, and low heels are ideal so that you don't wobble into the interview room!

Makeup and perfume

- Candidates should not wear “over the top” makeup for job interviews. Makeup bases with a neutral colour are best, especially when it comes to lipstick and eyeshadow.
- A slight hint of perfume or cologne is fine, but be wary of wearing anything too strong which could irritate or “put off” the interviewer.

Accessories

Other than a bag, notepad and pen, you should not take many accessories with you to an interview, especially if they detract from your appearance or cause you to fumble and look unprofessional.

- A brown or black leather bag/purse for ladies is best and the men should carry a sleek bag, briefcase or satchel.
- Subtle jewellery is perfectly fine, but beware of pieces that are too bright or bold; piercings that can appear “distasteful” in an employer’s eyes (like nose piercings, lip piercings) should also be removed for interviews.

Hair

Make sure your hair is neat and presentable. Men should comb and/or style their hair, and ensure their facial hair is neatly trimmed. Women should pull their hair back into a ponytail or similar.

“You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.”

Will Rogers

Mishandling multiple job offers

Receiving multiple job offers is an exciting prospect for any job seeking candidate. It means that a variety of opportunities are on the table – and it also means that your job search strategies and interview tactics have been incredibly successful!

Yet being the recipient of numerous job offers means you'll need to make some tough decisions and decide which one you want to accept. You will need to consider all the advantages and disadvantages of each role and make the best possible choice for your career, while still maintaining a strong relationship with the employers you decline.

It is important to remember that the companies offering you employment often expect you to make a decision quickly (i.e. within a few days). They may need to adhere to an internal deadline themselves or they may want to offer the role as soon as possible to another candidate if you decline.

What to do when you receive a job offer

When you are offered a position, you should thank the hiring manager and let them know you would like to think it over. You should also ask when they would like to hear back from you.

When dealing with your potential employers and their offers, you should not:

- Take too long to respond; you must then make your decision within the timeframe they give you.
- “Play off” one organisation or offer against another or try to engage in political negotiations.
- Display any unprofessionalism, disinterest or impertinence towards the employer, even if you are not 100% keen on their role.

Evaluate all of your offers carefully

The first step in effectively handling multiple job offers is to decide which components of each position are most important or appealing to you. The first variables you will need to weigh up include:

- The remuneration package or wage offered.
- The responsibilities and duties you will be taking on in the role.
- Benefits included, such as car allowances, medical cover, holidays and leave, flexible work hours etc. The potential working hours that may be involved in the role and how this might affect your work/life balance.

Other elements to consider

Career progression

Throughout the interview process, you ideally will have been asking specific questions about your potential position and the organisation. This should give you a clear picture of what your career path in each company could look like and what the opportunities are for promotions and pay rises. Only once you understand the possibilities available in each organisation, you can then factor this into your decision as well.

Team and culture

You should also consider the people or team you will be working with in each organisation if you accept their role. Beyond salary, benefits and upward mobility, this is where you will be spending the majority of your time on a daily basis, so you will want to be comfortable with the people, culture and atmosphere of the company. If you have a “gut” feeling that you might be happier in one place more than another, you should give that feeling due credit when making your decision.

Job location

If you are eager for a particular role, you should be willing to travel for it. However, you should also analyse at this stage if long commuting periods could impact your work/life balance. Will it mean less time for your personal commitments? Will it make your overall working day much longer and more stressful? If so, you should assess whether the location will be right for you.

Having multiple job offers is a great situation to be in – it means you can choose your opportunities and gain even more control over your career direction. However, it is not always an easy choice. Make sure you obtain as much information as possible from all the companies you are considering before you decide, and ensure the decision you make is well informed and valuable when it comes to your career goals and desires.

“Treat people as if you will need to deal with them again ...
It is far better to have people regard you with a sense of trust,
rapport, and good will than a desire for revenge.”

Leonard Greenhalgh

Handling your resignation badly

Resigning from your job is a task easier said than done. Contrary to popular belief, there is an art form to resigning. Mismanaging your resignation can have significant consequences in relation to your career; it can affect your future career prospects, burn valuable bridges and place your reputation and professionalism in jeopardy.

Why is handling your resignation properly so important?

The job you currently hold is a valuable part of your career. It's on your resume, it's likely given you the opportunity to expand your experience and knowledge and in most cases, it will serve as a reference for future endeavours. Treating your current job with respect throughout the final days of employment is essential. It ensures that you continue to maintain a strong, healthy relationship with your employer and your peers, both of which can benefit your career later on.

When you do resign, you should avoid:

- Overestimating your true worth within the company and displaying a lot of ego.
- Talking badly about the organisation or your managers and colleagues (to anyone!).
- Failing to remain enthusiastic about your current position or “slacking off” on responsibilities.

Are you really ready to resign?

This is a critical question you must ask yourself. Before you hand in your resignation, be certain that quitting and moving on is what you really want – and that it aligns with your greater career objectives.

Question if this is the right decision and confirm your reasons are validated and worthy. If you are resigning without another role to go to or because you are angry, frustrated or “fed up”, I would advise you to take some time and rethink your decision. You should never resign without a strong career plan in place or when you are highly emotional or angry.

Solution

Resign gracefully and professionally

Your final bow must be executed with dignity and class. You must exercise professionalism and respect at all times and do the right thing by your current company. Here is what I advise to ensure your resignation is smooth and graceful:

Review your contract

Regardless of what level you are at in your career, you should have a Contract of Employment (or similar), which you will have agreed to in writing and which outlines your terms should you resign. It is vital to review these conditions prior to resigning to avoid any legal complications. Know what your obligations are and what notice you are required to give. Depending on your role, you may need to give at least 2 weeks notice, while others may need to give one month or even longer.

Prepare your resignation letter

An official resignation letter should inform the employer you are resigning and include your final date of employment. This letter will form a record to show that you have adhered to any termination requirements. There is no need to include your reasons for resigning in the letter.

Meet with your boss

Organise a meeting with your manager to resign in person and hand in your resignation letter.

If you wish, you can use this meeting to discuss why you have decided to move on – you should ensure your reasons relate directly to your career development. Take responsibility for your decision and accentuate how this change will be beneficial for your career.

You should also address any immediate issues in your meeting. Remember to keep this discussion professional and respectful at all times; under no circumstances make your resignation personal or vindictive.

Develop a proactive transition plan

Developing a transition plan that benefits the organisation you are leaving ensures that the changeover will not disrupt operations. It also reinforces that you are maintaining your professionalism and integrity in the role, and that you still value your position and your accountabilities, even though you are moving on. Determine who is going to take over your work and make sure you set aside enough time to thoroughly cover all areas.

Identify unfinished projects

Clearly identify any unfinished projects that you will be leaving and present their status in an organised manner to your superiors and colleagues. This will make it much easier for them to take over your projects and they will appreciate your organisational skills and respect for the job.

Tie up loose ends

Tying up loose ends can be done closer to your resignation date and involves making sure every last element of your transition or handover is taken care of. As a guide, you should:

- Make sure all of your work and duties are fully handed over.
- Leave reliable contact information with your manager or assistant.
- Ensure your office or work space is left in a neat and tidy condition.
- Hand over any phones, laptops or other equipment you still have.
- Say a professional farewell to each of your superiors and colleagues.

Don't burn any bridges

Maintaining good connections is crucial, even after you leave a company. Whatever your reasons for resigning, don't burn your bridges or create animosity between you and your company or your colleagues. It's a small world and you never know who could be of value to you in the future.

Finally, you must maintain a professional and pleasant attitude at all times, from the moment you resign to the moment you leave, and beyond. It's the attitude and attention to detail that you display during this time that will make your job exit a successful one.

"Given that ... most who defect to another employer remain within the same industry sector, it's important to keep contacts in good repair, so it's worth getting your final performance right."

Anna Tims, Sydney Morning Herald

Negotiating job offers poorly

A few years ago, I worked with a reputed CEO, who unfortunately encountered numerous setbacks and issues when trying to secure new employment.

In the course of our discussions, it turned out that he had been offered a very exciting role with a well known entrepreneur to manage and turnaround a chain of under-performing retail stores. The salary package on offer was very generous, and well over the industry benchmark.

“Why didn’t you take this job?” I asked the CEO. He then went on to explain that although he had been negotiating, the offer had been rescinded at the eleventh hour. I found this quite surprising, since it is uncommon for a role at this level to be pulled off the table at the last minute.

As I delved deeper, I discovered that the CEO wanted a more generous pay-out if the job didn’t work out long-term. Plus, instead of a 6-month notice period, he had demanded a 12-month notice period.

This was essentially a case of mismatched business cultures: the entrepreneur was looking for a business executive who was prepared to take the risk on the board for the company and get the job done. Basically, he was looking for a CEO to have “skin in the game.” However, the CEO was from a more traditional corporate environment and had never worked with an entrepreneurial business, which made him very risk adverse.

I counselled the executive that contract negotiations at this level can be very delicate and sensitive – and that demands, particularly strategic or monetary ones, need to be stipulated and negotiated with much care.

Negotiate your offers wisely

I think quite poorly of employers who rescind a job offer without very solid reasons (such as uncovering a major issue with the candidate that they are about to hire). However, in this case, I think the entrepreneur made the right decision to withdraw the offer; if they had hired the wrong executive for such an important role, it would've become a mistake that could not have been easily undone.

What the CEO did wrong

The CEO's attempt to negotiate a more generous pay-out figure did not align with the market conditions at the time; nor were these terms offered to other employees at the company.

In addition, since the CEO had been unemployed for several months, he was not in a strong position to negotiate. This offer represented him with a chance to get back into the market – in a high profile role with a strong compensation package – and should have been accepted with limited “horse-trading.” “Horse trading” is a term I use to describe back-and-forth messy salary contract negotiations.

How to get your negotiations right

Seek help

One of the biggest mistakes the CEO made was to go at it alone during the contract negotiations. Regardless of what type of role you are looking for, I strongly recommend leveraging a business advisor, career coach or contract negotiation specialist to avoid such dramas and help you maintain perspective during sensitive salary and contract discussions.

Evaluate your worth

When it comes to contract negotiations, you can only barter with what you're worth and what value you can bring to the company. You'll need

to benchmark your skills and expertise and consider how your offering or package compares to industry standards. Once again, a coach or negotiator can help you evaluate these details properly and determine what you can ask for in a negotiation – and what you should be willing to compromise on.

Get it in writing!

It is imperative that before resigning from your current role, you must have a valid signed and fully executed employment contract (i.e. where all parties have signed).

Email or verbal job offers are often not strong enough and are very difficult to enforce later on; they simply convey an intention to enter into a contract, but are not a substitute for the contract itself. You need a signed employment contract to have the confidence to resign from your current employer and prepare for your new role on solid ground.

In most instances, when I have seen an employment offer rescinded there is no signed employment contract. In the event that you do have a fully executed employment contract that is rescinded, please seek independent legal advice, especially if you have resigned from an existing job, as you may have grounds to claim some compensation.

On the other hand, sometimes things in life happen for a reason! If a company demonstrates poor business ethics and rescinds on a written employment contract, ask yourself if they are really the type of company that you want to work for. Sometimes you are better off thanking them and moving on to a better opportunity with a more reliable and reputable organisation.

“Place a higher priority on discovering what a win looks like for the other person.”

Harvey Robbins

Forgetting to negotiate your contract

Sometimes, job seekers tend to give in to the pressure tactics of prospective employers without negotiating a new employment contract.

This is a big mistake because it can result in unfair compensation and the loss of other benefits. A well-drafted employment agreement firmly states what is being offered, what expectations each party has and what their obligations are to one another. A strong employment contract can also be a great tool should there ever be a misunderstanding or dispute between the employee and the company.

Should you negotiate?

Yes! Regardless of your skills and experience, most organisations expect you to negotiate a few contract terms after they make their initial offer.

- If you are concerned about how to negotiate your contract or about what types of things you can ask for, seek help from a career consultant or an experienced contract negotiator.
- At more top executive levels, employment contracts can also be difficult to maneuver, and high-level executives often use a qualified negotiator or even an employment law attorney to help finalise the terms.
- If you decide to handle any contract negotiations on your own, understand that it can be tricky. Negotiations must be handled with care, and you must hone your interpersonal and communication skills so that you will appear self-confident and assured, rather than aggressive or timid.

Negotiate every time you get a new contract

Negotiating a new contract well can add value to your employment package substantially, rewarding you with benefits and perks that may not originally have been included or offered.

When negotiating employment contracts, your ultimate goal is to show your real value to the company and convince them that all parties will mutually benefit from the negotiations and partnership. A successful negotiation will occur when both sides are able to see this value and hammer out a win-win agreement.

- Before reading your job contract, mentally prepare a list of all the key items you want to cover, in their order of priority or importance. Some of these may include: salary/compensation, equity grants, leave time, position, reimbursement of expenses, annual incentives, restrictive clauses, and severance, among others.
- Naturally, salary is often the most important of all and is one of the most common points of negotiation. Explore the market benchmark for your skill level and job position so that you will know what the median pay is. A prior understanding of what you are willing to accept will aid you in the negotiation process.
- During the negotiation phase, revisit your top priorities. Know what issues you are firm on and what you are willing to negotiate or even forfeit. A successful negotiation contract should include what you consider to be important requirements. You can always acquiesce on other items if both parties agree on the key priorities.
- When negotiating a job contract, be sure to give yourself room for flexibility. This will make you appear reasonable to the employer and show you are a team player. Avoid making demands or setting stringent terms that you aren't willing to be flexible on.
- One of the best ways to manage job contract negotiations is to always be polite and think before reacting. Keep the lines of

communication open. If possible, ask for time to discuss the legal terms with a trusted advisor.

- If you feel disappointed after negotiating an employment agreement, you can always walk away. This means you risk losing the job opportunity, but you shouldn't feel forced to accept terms that could lead to job/career dissatisfaction or unhappiness. After all, job satisfaction is crucial to your future success. A few months down the road, you don't want to regret your decision or regret accepting the role solely on the employer's terms.



"The single and most dangerous word to be spoken in business is no. The second most dangerous word is yes. It is possible to avoid saying either."

Lois Wyse

Spoiling your salary negotiations

Nothing can hurt more than salary negotiations that go wrong – and there are plenty of reasons why they do:

- You may have “low-balled” yourself during negotiations and failed to ask for what you deserve, thereby ending up with a less-than-satisfactory package.
- You may not have been aware of the market rate or industry benchmark for roles at a similar skill level.
- You may have found out, after accepting the position and starting work, that you are being significantly underpaid compared to colleagues with the same level of experience and skill.
- In some cases, you may not have made any negotiations at all.

All of these processes and more can greatly hamper your career satisfaction, as well as your job happiness and enthusiasm. Now that you have additional information about your salary, what should your next plan of action be? Should you ask for a renegotiation of your employment contract?

Renegotiate your offer

The ideal time to negotiate your salary is *before* you sign the employment contract. But if that doesn't happen, it can be acceptable to go back and renegotiate certain areas of the salary agreement without jeopardising your job.

Negotiate the benefits

If you still want to keep your job without directly bringing up monetary compensation, consider discussing other benefits that were not addressed during the interviews or the negotiation stage.

This can appeal more to an employer than giving you a direct pay rise. For example, you could ask for additional holiday time, a more flexible schedule with different working hours or a bonus at the end of the year. Remember to keep these negotiations polite and professional at all times and be flexible with what the employer is willing to offer you.

Discuss pay issues

If you find that you are being underpaid when compared to your coworkers, organise a meeting and courteously ask the employer to explain the disparity in pay. You could then discuss ways in which the employer can close the gap in salary and bring you up to where you should be. Be prepared to make suggestions on how this can happen, such as by increasing or changing your responsibilities.

Negotiate for increases after your probation period

This can be a good common ground upon which to begin negotiating your salary or other benefits. If you are worried about creating an unfavourable situation with your employer, you can still negotiate the conditions, but ask for the perks or changes to be implemented once you pass probation. This gives you the chance to still obtain the benefits

or pay you want, but also gives the employer an opportunity to see that you're worth the increases.

As always, make sure you get any successful negotiations and terms confirmed in writing, as part of your official, executed contract.

Be careful with negotiations

If you do choose to negotiate your contract after you have signed it or begun work, you need to be aware that asking for an increase in salary does come with some risk, especially since you'll likely still be on probation. Going back to the negotiating table can put you in a negative light, and could hurt your relationship with your managers. In some cases, it may even lead to termination. If in doubt, I advise seeking the assistance of a professional negotiator or coach before you approach your employer.

"The first principle of contract negotiation is don't remind them of what you did in the past; tell them what you're going to do in the future."

Stan Musial

Dealing badly with negative performance reviews

Every organisation aims to maintain a motivated, energetic and fully dedicated work force. The way this is usually monitored in the workplace is through performance reviews and evaluations. These are often seen as an indication of employees' overall performance, productivity and value within the organisation.

A negative performance review can be a huge cause for concern, and is usually viewed as a clear warning that you are not performing up to the required standards or expectations. It can also affect your compensation, and your yearly bonuses or pay rises.

What if you receive a negative review?

If you receive a negative review, the first step is to avoid panicking, becoming angry or attacking your manager. This demonstrates a lack of professionalism and maturity and also an inability to cope with criticism in the workplace.

If you intend to keep your position, you must take any negative performance reviews seriously and consider how you will be able to improve your performance.

At the same time, it is important to identify *why* your manager has been prompted to give you a bad performance evaluation – is it really because of your professional performance or do you feel it is more personal? If you don't get along well with your manager, the reason could be personal, but you will also need to consider whether your professional conduct warrants a negative assessment.

Focus on improvement and progress

A performance appraisal is like a professional report card. If it is negative, you need to work on improving your “grades.”

If you are used to getting good appraisals, even a slightly critical one has the power to lower your self-esteem. You may feel like you have made a huge blunder or that you are underqualified for the role or that you are on the brink of termination.

Instead of regarding your performance review as a personal criticism or attack, you should approach it as a new work challenge and an opportunity to advance your job performance and show your employer that you can really shine.

Talk to your boss

The first thing you should do after receiving a poor review is to arrange a sit-down with your boss and discuss the reasons behind the negative feedback. If you honestly feel that you don't deserve the review, you should let your boss know that you take your work seriously and that you are genuinely surprised by the appraisal.

Now is also a great time to talk about any accomplishments or milestones you have achieved, but that may have been overlooked as part of the review. Make sure you back up your accomplishments with evidence and examples.

While it is natural to be upset and defensive, you should, as mentioned above, avoid overreacting, becoming angry or blaming the boss for a poor review. Instead, make every effort to understand all of the issues raised by your manager.

Create an improvement plan

If you aren't able to renegotiate your performance review or if you have realised your performance is not up to scratch, you will need to work with your boss to create an "improvement plan." This should outline what the expectations are in regards to your performance and what you need to do in order to improve.

Begin keeping a work diary to document your progress and activities, as well as any training or education you undertake. Never lose sight of the critical issues raised during your performance appraisal and be willing to make whatever corrections are necessary.

Setting a timeframe for improvement (e.g. 3 months) can also be a good idea and can motivate you by giving you a definitive goal to work towards. Now is a great time to also investigate any training or workshop opportunities that can help you develop your skills.

Get constructive feedback

Ask your boss to give you regular feedback on your performance and your attempts to improve. Request a face-to-face conference on a weekly or bi-weekly basis and ask your boss what areas you still need to work on. Regular meetings will help clear up misunderstandings, as well as eliminate disagreements on some issues.

This also gives you an opportunity to gain valuable advice or "mentoring" from your boss and can also show that you are taking your performance feedback seriously.

If there is a particular area you are struggling with, don't be afraid to ask for additional guidance from your boss as well.

Acknowledge improvement

The next time you meet with your boss, ensure he/she acknowledges any improvements you have made. It is also important that he/she understands you have taken their criticism constructively and that you are actively trying to correct or cultivate those issues.

Don't forget to praise yourself on your improvements. This can reinforce your enthusiasm and help fuel your motivation and esteem. It is vital to acknowledge your achievements here and recognise that you are growing and developing as a professional.

"If your boss doesn't offer specific examples of poor performance, ask for a few. This way you can learn from your mistakes and also be sure that he or she isn't making any false or misguided assertions."

Wall Street Journal

Not keeping your job search private

Confidentiality is key when searching for a job, and particularly so if your current company isn't aware that you're looking for work.

Failing to keep your job search private can impact your employer relationship greatly – you can compromise your job security, harm any chances of a promotion or pay rise and paint yourself as an untrustworthy and disloyal employee. Keep in mind that many office computers are regularly monitored by IT, and using your work station for job hunting activities can pose a big threat to your present job.

Why keep your job search private?

Why does this all matter, especially if you're planning to leave anyway?

If a manager discovers that you are looking for a new job, they can make it difficult for you to carry on with your current job. They may leave you out of meetings and discussions or reduce or change your responsibilities. They might see you as a threat and restrict your access to important information because they may feel the company's confidentiality is at risk.

There's also no telling how long your job search might take. If it ends up taking weeks or even months, you'll need your present role to remain as secure as possible.

When it comes time for you to resign, it's also important to leave a positive and lasting impression on your managers and colleagues. If you detract from your professionalism or credibility by searching for a new job at work, you can harm these relationships for the future.

Keep your job search under wraps

Keeping your job search private can be difficult, but it is necessary, as you won't want to jeopardise your current position before finding a new one. Here are some steps you should take to minimise the risk of having your job search discovered:

Do not conduct job searches at work

Remember, you are still being paid by your current employer, so conducting your job search while you should be working is not a good idea. In some cases, it can actually place you in breach of your employment contract. Instead, carry out your job searching activities in the privacy of your home and on your own time.

Use a personal email address

Do not use your work address as your email address for job searching and communicating with recruiters or employers. You can easily set up a private email address through a free domain service (or pay to have a more professional one through your own domain, if you have this).

Ensure you choose an address that is simple and straightforward – preferably with your first and last name, and avoid any names or abbreviations that sound unprofessional. If your desired username is not available, you can be creative, but keep it professional. For example, use something like `contact.MikeJames@gmail.com`, or `MLJames@ausi.com`.



Use a personal phone

Similarly, you should not use a company office or mobile phone to make and receive calls related to your job search. This is the equivalent of using company resources to support your job search and can place you at significant risk.

Use social networking sites carefully

Social networking sites are often seen as necessities when looking for work, but be aware that your current employer can uncover your job search activities in this way as well. Be careful about what type of information you post online and how you also present yourself. For instance, if you change your LinkedIn profile to announce you are looking for work, your current employer will obviously start to question your dedication.

Post resumes and job applications with caution

When posting your resume online, use job sites that allow you to keep your contact and employment information confidential. One of the best ways to prevent this from happening is to apply directly to company websites or via sites like Seek or MyCareer.

Pay close attention to job or employer descriptions as well – I once had a candidate who submitted his resume online for what seemed like the perfect role, only to discover he'd applied for a vacancy at his current company!

Be discreet with interviews

Juggling job interviews while trying to hold down a fulltime position can be tricky. Organising interviews either before or after hours can be a good way to maintain your job confidentiality.

If you aren't able to attend interviews before or after work, consider using your lunch break or even taking a day or half-day of leave. This can help you keep your search private.

An interview privacy tip: While you should dress corporately and professionally for your interviews, make sure you change before going into work, especially if your office is not corporate; walking in in your best suit can be an instant giveaway and it won't take long for your manager to realise that you are interviewing for another role.

"Keep your job leads and interviews as private as possible while still harnessing the power of your network. Entrust your search only to those you know won't spill the beans, and ask them to keep your search quiet."

The Undercover Recruiter

Mistake No. 31

Leaking confidential information

Disclosing protected company information is a serious matter. In addition to losing your job and your professional reputation, a company may sue you for breach of confidential information, seeking to recoup the damages caused by your disclosure.

The amount of damages can vary, depending on what was leaked. Damages can range from the hundreds into the millions. For example, if you publicly disclose a draft patent application, the disclosure of the information could lead to denial of the patent because the information is now in the public domain. The ramifications of this for the organisation at hand would be significant, and as the “source”, you could be liable for large amounts in compensation.



What is considered confidential?

Typical confidential information in the workplace can include:

- Employee records or medical records
- Financial information
- Marketing strategies
- “Trade secrets”
- Company documents
- Product information
- Market, client or company data.

Sometimes, confidential information can be deliberately accessed and leaked. For example, a young woman recently and purposefully accessed court records through her workplace that identified a drug informant. She then posted the informant’s name on a social networking site. Not only was the company’s security breach a major concern, but the informant was placed in considerable danger.

However, there are times when an employee can unintentionally leak confidential information, without realising their mistake. Although this might be an honest error, serious consequences and damages can still eventuate. How can you prevent this from happening to you?

Solution

Understand what information is protected

To avoid disclosing confidential information, it is essential to know what information in your company is protected. There are two ways you can discover this:

1. Your employment contract should have a detailed confidentiality clause; in addition, any non-disclosure agreements you have signed should also outline what type of information you are prohibited from sharing.

2. You can ask your boss or any other superior in the company about confidential information before you decide to disclose it to a third party; if in doubt, you should always seek advice from the relevant person or panel in your organisation.

Complex situations can also arise when you work for a firm or agency, and also have a written employment contract or non-disclosure agreement. In these cases, there will still be information that is protected, even though you will not be directly employed by the client company. Use your common sense and if you are uncertain about the confidentiality of any information, ask your manager and think about the consequences if you release this information without permission.

What to do when confidential information “finds” you

Even if you are diligent in guarding your company’s confidential information, you can still be exposed to confidential material from other sources in the workplace.

The risk is that if the source finds out that confidential information has been leaked, and learns that you knew of it, the source may not distinguish between who leaked and who received the information. If the source takes legal action, it may be difficult to prove you did not disclose the information in the first place, and that you did not disclose it once you inadvertently learned about it.

- If you receive or come across confidential information in the workplace, you should inform the source immediately and/or escalate the issue to upper management. For example, if your manager accidentally sends you an email about another colleague’s health status, you may consider deleting the email and notifying that manager that you erroneously received it and have now deleted it.
- If someone deliberately discloses information they do not have the right to tell you (e.g. a colleague tells you about an upcoming redundancy), you will need to decide whether to let the original source know or whether to raise the confidentiality issue with management or HR; in some instances, you might also want to assess whether it will be better just to keep quiet.

- If you discover confidential information that could be harmful to your organisation as a whole, you should escalate the incident to management immediately so that they can begin to mitigate the problem and formulate a damage control plan.

Confidential information is valuable and poses risks to you. Make sure you only work with information you're entitled to, and use diligence in handling it to avoid accidental disclosure.

"Confidentiality is a virtue of the loyal, as loyalty is the virtue of faithfulness."

Edwin Louis Cole

Bad-mouthing past employers

In the realm of job interviews, nothing can harm your chances of success more than bad-mouthing former employers, managers or coworkers. Employers, recruiters and hiring managers often look unfavourably on candidates who speak ill of their former workplaces, and so promoting this negative viewpoint during an interview can diminish your credibility greatly.

By bad-mouthing, you are:

- Putting all of the blame for your failures or dissatisfactions on your boss or employer.
- Creating an impression of yourself as someone who whinges, is negative or who can't maintain confidentiality.
- Forcing your future boss or manager to reconsider your professional outlook – and wonder whether you might speak ill of them one day in the future.
- Revealing your weaknesses, since you will come across as someone who can't maturely cope with conflict, discontent or frustrations in the workplace.

There are a number of common job interview questions that are designed to elicit a response from you about a former boss, colleague or organisation. These can include questions about why you are leaving your current job or about past situations in which you clashed with a manager or coworker.

Knowing how to respond to these questions professionally and “positively” is critical for any candidate, since launching into a negative tirade can mean the difference between securing the job and facing rejection.

Maintain respect for all your past employers

The best way to avoid bad-mouthing a former employer is to remain positive and professional at all times.

Even if you struggled significantly in a past role or have especially negative thoughts about a boss or employer, you will need to emphasise that your “issues” simply relate to your career direction and desires. You can also alleviate any negativity in your responses by emphasising the more positive aspects of the experience or what you learned as a result of it.

For example, your responses can include phrases such as:

- *The role wasn't right for me, and wasn't presenting me with enough challenges.*
- *It was a wonderful opportunity, but I simply felt my career wasn't moving in the right direction.*
- *I didn't feel the task/responsibility/issue/conflict aligned with my own values and behaviours.*
- *It was definitely challenging, but I was able to develop my skills and learned that ...*

The bottom line: you will want any potential hiring manager to have confidence and faith in your professionalism as an employee. You need to reassure them that you can handle future conflicts or disagreements in a mature manner and that you won't end up bad-mouthing them or complaining about the company to another employer in the future.

“Keep your face always toward the sunshine – and shadows will fall behind you.”

Walt Whitman

Mistake No. 33

Getting off to a bad start

Whenever you begin a new job, your employer will always have high expectations. These expectations can come from the people you work with, including your directors, managers, colleagues and CEO. Additional expectations can also come from clients, suppliers/vendors, investors, stakeholders and even the Board of Directors.

Wherever “pressure” comes from, you can often be expected to hit the ground running and to start producing results as soon as you commence work in a new company.

Creating a strong start

One of the things I often note executives grapple with when changing jobs is the transition from their old company into the new one. While you will have developed many methodologies, routines and even behaviours that you feel were successful in your old role, it is important to acknowledge that your new company will probably have a completely different way of doing things, with new processes and practices.

Yet getting off to a bad start in a new organisation often occurs because new recruits make comparisons. Phrases like, “that’s not the way we did it in the last place I worked ...” or “We used to do it this way in my old job” can create the impression that you don’t respect the new company’s culture, policies or procedures – and can mean you’ll start off on the wrong foot with both bosses and coworkers.

What if my goal is to change practices for the better?

When selected for a position, there is an underlying assumption that you will be able to follow through on all of the “promises” you made throughout the interview process. Like all enthusiastic executives, you will likely have a natural inclination to make changes right away, so

that you can prove your worth and show that you can improve certain aspects of the organisation.

Unless you've been given the freedom to do this, however, my best advice is to resist! At least at first. Making changes too quickly, before you understand the organisation's culture or have had time to evaluate the company's strengths and weaknesses, is inadvisable.

Although you were successful in obtaining the role, your imperative (unless stated otherwise) is to learn as much as possible and keep the business going in this early stage. Keep in mind that there are also people in the organisation who have been there for much longer, and who have not yet had the chance to appreciate your credibility, competencies or skills.

As a result, hasty actions can make colleagues feel as if you are trying to undercut them or that you don't "approve" of their way of operating, even though you are new. This can lead to resentment, alienation and general dysfunction in your environment.

Solution

Be patient, learn first

Learning about the culture of any new company you join is critical to your success. A company's culture represents its unwritten workplace rules and also the personality of the business. It is made up of fundamental assumptions, intrinsic values and behavioural norms that all impact the organisation's patterns of behaviour and operation.

A culture determines additionally what is acceptable and unacceptable in this particular company. If you don't understand the culture first, approaching the organisation's members or making changes is perilous and can quickly backfire. Learn as much as you can about the company's culture before you communicate or try to implement any changes. Remember, you can't do it on your own; you'll need valuable people on board to help you.

Below are some additional methods you can utilise to kick-start your job the “right way” and avoid making changes or getting off to a bad start:

- Meet with your supervisor and clarify your role in the organisation, as well as your official position, responsibilities and duties.
- Establish short and long-term goals that align both with your individual goals and the goals of the company.
- Identify the people who are most respected and/or most influential in the company and consider how they might be able to help you improve the company’s processes or practices.
- Don’t take it personally when others make complimentary remarks about your predecessor; instead emphasise that there is much you can learn.
- Schedule time to talk to your immediate staff to begin team building; many new managers will schedule interviews with each staff member in order to learn about their personal expectations, work history, concerns and ideas. This is an excellent way to establish rapport.

Questions will always circulate around whether it’s better to ease into a new position or to act quickly and decisively. Though you may have been hired to solve specific problems, be wary of moving too aggressively, overstepping boundaries and creating tension or resentment in your new role.

“Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere.”

Chinese Proverb

Having poor communication skills

Did you know that great communication can boost your success in the corporate world by at least 50%?

As a professional in your industry, you likely have incredible ideas – but if you are unable to articulate these ideas effectively and professionally, you'll have a hard time trying to convince others of your idea's merits and values.

Success and communication

Strong, influential speakers get noticed frequently in the corporate field, simply because they are able to communicate their messages, opinions and needs in clear, effective and persuasive ways.

Regardless of whether you are going for a job interview, giving a presentation, contributing to a meeting or casting a sales pitch, great communication has become an integral part of today's corporate culture.

As a job seeking candidate, your presentation and communication skills have the potential to make or break your success in the interview rounds. Poor communication skills can force employers and recruiters to rethink your suitability as a candidate, and also it signals to them that you may not be able to communicate well on the job.

Hone your communication skills

Refining your communication skills will benefit you greatly in job interviews, and for the entirety of your working career. Presenting well on every level is about creating more impact vocally – both as a candidate and a professional – so that you can effectively influence others and achieve your objectives successfully.

Key communications skills can be easily developed and honed through consistent practise and coaching. The more you can employ your communication abilities, the more powerful they will become.

Here's how I often advise candidates to improve and polish their speaking, communication and performance skills:

- If you're at the interview stage, rehearse your interview responses, either alone (in front of the mirror is a good idea), with a coach/mentor or with someone you trust; this will both sharpen your communication skills, as well as help you perfect your interview answers.
- Practise speeches, pitches, presentations, interviews or other spoken activities with friends, relatives or colleagues. All can help you identify unclear or inconsistent communication areas that need more attention.
- Read as much as you can by experts in your industry; this can assist you in improving your vocabulary and verbal strengths, and can be a great way to see how complex ideas can be simply and convincingly articulated.
- Practise speaking in an engaging and expressive voice; a good way to do this is to speak to groups whenever possible, whether it's an impromptu occasion or by invitation. You may be nervous to start with, but over time, you will see a marked improvement in the way you present yourself and your words.
- Think about your audience and focus on speaking clearly and sustaining your vocal energy in order to capture your audience's attention and interest; you should also manipulate your facial

expressions and gestures to accentuate your messages. Remember, no slouching. Keeping eye contact at all times is essential.

- Consider investing in a training course, coaching session or even a mentorship if you feel you need significant help with your communication; this can be a fantastic way to perfect your communication skills with the help of a qualified professional and you'll often see results much more quickly.

Great communication skills are critical in today's competitive corporate world – do as much as you can to refine your communication at every stage of your career.



"Communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding a bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of very part of your life."

Brian Tracy

Ignoring sexual harassment in the workplace

Although gender interactions have shifted notably in the corporate environment in the past few decades, sexual harassment continues to be an important topic. Sexual harassment can encompass a range of occurrences and incidents, which can include both harassment of the opposite or same sex and harassment of subordinates, equals or even superiors. Harassment can also be verbal, physical or environmental and it can have both emotional and psychological impacts that humiliate or intimidate the person being harassed.

Sexually harassing behaviour often involves:

- Employing sexually manipulative tactics, actions, threats or suggestions to coerce someone into doing something they do not want to do.
- Inappropriate or forceful touching, such as stroking, rubbing, patting, or even brushing up against someone.
- Commenting on, especially in a derogatory way, someone's sexual orientation or preference (whether real or supposed).
- Telling lewd jokes to coworkers or about coworkers, whether in written or verbal form.
- Discriminating against someone or treating them differently due to their sexual nature, preferences or orientation.
- Showing sexually explicit, offensive or “uncomfortable” images to coworkers.
- Making suggestive comments about the way a coworker looks or dresses.
- Sending sexually explicit letters or notes.
- Repeatedly asking for dates or sexual favours.
- Asking intrusive and sexually explicit questions.

According to the Australian Human Rights commission, sexual harassment continues to be a problem in Australia, with 1 in 5 women and 1 in 20 men experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, not only do victims of harassment often feel they are in the wrong, but they often do not know what to do or how/where to seek help when harassing incidents occur.



Solution

Confront sexual harassment in the workplace and seek help

Whether you have witnessed an incident of sexual harassment in your workplace or whether you are a victim of sexual harassment yourself, it is important to seek help as soon as you can.

1. **Confront the behaviour.** If you feel comfortable, you can approach the “offender” and confront them about their behaviour. Let them

- know you find their behaviour uncomfortable, embarrassing, awkward or inappropriate and ask them to cease.
2. **Report the behaviour.** If the behaviour is ongoing, take notes of the times and behaviours that occurred, and report the behaviour to your superior and HR Manager. If neither of these approaches work, you can consider seeking outside help from a lawyer or attorney.
 3. **Be prepared.** The investigative process for many serious sexual harassment claims can be long and arduous, and solutions are seldom immediate, but it's important to keep in mind that you are doing the right thing by seeking help and taking action to stop the harassment.

What to do if you are accused of sexual harassment

Being on the receiving end of a sexual harassment allegation is serious. It not only has the potential to harm you financially, but it can also cause irreversible damage to your career, your professional (and personal) reputation and your emotional well-being.

The best way to avoid accusations in the workplace is to avoid sexually harassing (and any type of harassing) behaviour altogether; even comments or actions intended as jokes or that are meant to be “light” or “harmless” can lead to serious consequences.

If you are accused of workplace harassment, here are some steps you can take:

1. **Consider whether your behaviour was inappropriate.** You will likely need to speak with your superiors or HR department and present your version of events, so think carefully about the appropriateness of your behaviour and how you will tell “your side” of the story.
2. **Do not approach the accuser.** While your natural reaction may be to defend your behaviour and clear up any “misunderstandings”, you should avoid approaching the person accusing you. This can make the situation worse and even give rise to another incident of harassment.

3. **Prepare your defence, but do not go on the offensive.** The accuser will report their allegations, and you will have an opportunity to respond. Do not attack the accuser's work ethic or personality, even if there is merit, as this can make it sound like you are trying to "justify" your harassment. Instead, respond only to the allegations presented.
4. **Seek legal counsel.** Seeking legal assistance may be essential if your harassment case goes beyond the first complaint. It is important to know your rights in this kind of situation, so consult with an experienced employment lawyer as soon as possible.

Successful business individuals are constantly aware of the environment in which they work and a healthy, sustainable organisation is one in which sexual harassment is dealt with accordingly. If you see or become a victim of any type of harassment in the workplace, seek help immediately and ensure the situation is rectified.

"Harassing behaviour can range from serious to less serious levels, however one-off incidents can still constitute harassment. Also, where continued, such behaviour can undermine the standard of conduct within a work area, which may erode the well being of the individual or group being targeted and lead to lower overall staff performance."

Australian Human Rights Commission

Taking your employer to court

If you enter into a conflict with your employer, it is almost always better to settle any kind of dispute outside of court, if feasible. This is especially true of employment-related grievances, which can become messy when taken into the legal arena.

However, there are situations when you may not be able to avoid the court system, particularly if matters cannot be resolved through private negotiations.

Marianne's story

Marianne W., a business services manager in Melbourne, was happily matched with an infant for adoption and filed for adoption leave. Although she met all of the requirements for taking the leave and gave more than adequate notice, her request was met with resistance. In the days leading up to her leave, she suffered less than favourable treatment by her managers and was told she would not be welcomed back. A lawsuit followed.

Like Marianne, there may be many reasons why you might be thinking about taking your employer to court. These can include:

- Discrimination issues (race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, etc.).
- Harassment issues.
- Disputes over wages earned/paid or bonuses, etc.
- Right to benefits (e.g. leave you are entitled to).

Pros and cons of going to court

In general, there are both pros and cons in taking legal action against any organisation. Evaluating these carefully before you initiate any legal proceedings is recommended.

Let's take a look at some of the pros and cons of going to court:

Pro

Potential for resolution: Conflicts with employers can add stress to your life and make it difficult to move forward, both in professional and personal ways. By going to court, you will likely achieve a resolution and you can hopefully move on soon after the case is concluded. At this time, you may also want to consider what the outcomes or consequences could be if the court decides against you.

Con

Slow moving process: While a court case can offer a resolution between you and your organisation, this resolution can take a long time to reach. The court system and its processes are often slow and cases can drag on for much longer than expected – months or even years. Consider whether you are prepared for this level of commitment.

Pro

Working with representation: Having lawyers on your side can reduce the pressure of having to fight your battle alone. Legal help also means you'll be equipped to sufficiently deal with the court system and present your case effectively and persuasively.

Con

Financial challenges: Of course, lawyers can be very expensive and legal fees can quickly outweigh any benefits or compensation that you might gain from the case. Also, many solicitors won't even consider taking on a case unless you are looking at a potentially large pay out,

so if your case will only generate a few hundred dollars, you may have a difficult time finding representation.

Solution

Find alternatives for resolution

I would advise making sure that you have no other viable options before choosing to proceed with legal action. Utilising the legal system can bring favourable (and deserved) results, but it is likely to be time consuming and expensive as well.

Before you decide to go to court, there are several other alternatives you can investigate first to try and resolve your disagreement or problem:

Talk to your HR manager

The first step should be to talk to your HR manager or department regarding the issue. You will need to explain your side of the story and ask them what steps you can take to resolve the problem. HR managers are there to settle conflicts between the company and its employees, so seek help from them in the first instance.

Contact an Ombudsman

In Australia, an ombudsman can help you resolve workplace conflicts. They can offer dispute resolution services and can help you understand your rights or explain to you whether your company is really at fault or not. The Fair Work Commission is the best place to seek out an ombudsman.

Seek legal assistance

You can still talk to a lawyer without deciding to go to court. While this may mean paying a lawyer for their time, they will be able to provide you with some legal advice about your situation and can further advise you on whether going to court is a practicable option.

In my opinion, taking your employer to court should only be a last resort for matters that are very serious or complex or for issues that cannot be resolved between you and your employer directly. If you do decide to take the problem to court, make sure you are confident about your case and consider the ramifications if the court ends up ruling in favour of the employer.

“Putting one’s head in the sand and hoping that conflict will pass you by is not the most effective methodology for problem solving. Conflict rarely resolves itself – in fact, conflict normally escalates if not dealt with proactively and properly.”

Mike Myatt, Forbes.com

Accepting a job without proper due diligence

It is wonderful when the opportunity to apply for a great job lands in your lap. Yet surprisingly, most job candidates don't thoroughly investigate a potential employer. Many will simply read the job advertisement and apply for the role, without conducting any research. They may feel they already know enough about the company from the job description, and feel they can simply trust their intuition by asking some questions during the interview.

In today's job climate, people are often so glad to have a job opportunity that they give in to desperation and misguided perceptions.

Why you should research every potential employer

Failing to research any organisation you want to work for is one of the main reasons why employees often end up unsatisfied or unhappy shortly after starting their roles. This can lead to a very unfavourable situation that can have a negative effect on your career. It also means you'll need to make some tough decisions and determine if you want to stay in the role or move on only after a short time.

This recently happened to a client of mine, James W., who accepted a position as a project manager for a financial firm in Sydney. Although James had heard of the company and knew they had been around for a while, he didn't know the company had a reputation for organisational "thrashings" and a lack of transparency, which made it difficult for project managers to meet their objectives.

After starting the role, James quickly found himself in over his head. Unfortunately for him the role didn't have clearly defined responsibilities making it difficult to know what to focus on. Ultimately, James opted

to stay in the job to gain a few more skills before moving on, but discovered that the great role he had envisioned was instead stressful and gruelling.

Solution

Conduct proper due diligence prior to accepting a job

Due diligence is a very comprehensive process and it is vital that you include it as part of your job search. The amount of due diligence you want to undertake is entirely up to you, but when you are considering accepting a potential position, I recommend completing these three steps:

1. Research

The Internet is one of the best tools for conducting employer research. You should look for:

- Industry-specific or common business articles about the company.
- Product and/or marketing brochures.
- Annual and quarterly Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) filings.
- The company's website, as well as their competitors' websites and other competitor materials.
- Articles about the prospective company's industry, including articles about its competitors; whatever problems that industry has will also be your potential employer's problems, and yours, if you take the job.

2. Investigate

Talking to other professionals is also a good way to uncover valuable information and insight about a potential employer. Consider utilising your networking skills to find the relevant people to talk to or leveraging

your current contacts. These individuals may be able to refer you to somebody who has had experience with that organisation. You could speak with:

- Former company employees or contractors.
- The organisation's suppliers or clients.
- Managers in any other organisational departments you might be working for/with.

Keep in mind that while talking to others is a good approach, the people you speak to can be biased in their own ways; they might be “pro” company or they may have had a sour experience that is simply a result of their personal issues. In short, listen carefully, but take everything with a grain of salt. If you are hearing lots of negative feedback, however, it could mean further research and reconsideration is needed.

If James W. above had taken the time to investigate the company he was seeking to join, he would at least have been aware of their reputation before deciding whether or not to forge ahead.

3. Ask yourself some questions

A lot of candidates tend to “trust their instincts” or “go with their gut” when it comes to considering and accepting a job offer. This is valid, but it also means that in addition to your research, you should ask yourself a few questions:

- What things do I absolutely need to be aware of about this organisation?
- What are the best sources to find this information?
- How reliable are these sources?
- Who can give me the inside scoop and prevent me from wasting time?
- Have I investigated thoroughly enough?
- What problems could occur if I have inaccurate information?

Recognising fraudulent opportunities

Due diligence will also help you to identify a fraudulent opportunity or scam. Often, when something sounds too good to be true – it is! A dead giveaway is when you are asked to make a fiscal “investment” to indicate your interest. In situations like these, the trickster will simply scoop up your money and head for the hills.

Another red flag that an employer may be fraudulent is when they ask you to provide work for free or request that you work on a “trial basis.” Remember – you’re not applying for an internship or a voluntary role, and at this stage of the process, your portfolio and credentials should speak for themselves. There’s no reason why you should provide any value or work without being compensated. If this is asked of you, say ‘no.’

The best way to avoid employment scams is to use the various research guidelines to investigate every company and/or opportunity before proceeding.

Finally, don’t wait until the last minute to carry out your research. Dedicate some time during the application stage to research the company or role, and spend even more time on this if you are asked to attend an interview. By researching prospective employers, you will be enabled to determine whether they are really the right company for you!

“If you don’t take the time on the front end to truly explore what you want from a new job and to figure out if this position satisfies those desires, you’ll end up paying for it on the back end.”

Chrissy Scivicque, Forbes.com

Under-preparing for a job interview

Let's say you have an outstanding executive resume and have managed to secure an interview for your dream job. The interview rolls around, and yet despite your enthusiasm, it doesn't go so well. A few days later, you receive a call from the interviewers letting you know that even though your skills are great, they won't be moving forward with your application.

In a perfect world, you would ideally be given two weeks' notice to prepare for an interview and conduct extensive company research. However, the real recruitment space is very fast-paced and you may be lucky to get even two days' notice. This means that you need to start preparing for your interview as soon as possible.



Spend adequate time on interview preparation

You *must* sell yourself in an interview. Successful sales people know their products inside and out; they know every detail and can answer questions about their product without hesitation.

As a job candidate, you are the salesperson and the product is YOU! How well do you know your professional self? Could you field any type of question the employer throws at you? What can you bring to the table that will be an asset to this company?

Do your homework

Before attending a job interview, it is imperative that you conduct thorough research about the company and the people who will be interviewing you:

- **The company:** Spend some time researching your potential employer. You can do this by browsing their website, reading their annual reports, checking press coverage and talking to relevant contacts. Also, tap into your network to see if anyone can give you a competitive edge over the other candidates.
- **Interview panel:** The more you know about who will be interviewing you, the more opportunity you have in an interview to refine your responses and performance. Always confirm the names and job titles of the people who will interview you. It is relatively easy to find out background information about these people via a Google search or a quick check on LinkedIn. If you went through a recruiter or search consultant, you can also ask them for more information about who you will be meeting.
- **Job description:** You should always ask for a job description prior to an interview, as this will assist in your interview preparation. Take the time to evaluate the job description and understand what the company really is seeking in a candidate, beyond the basic

skills. This will also give you the opportunity to compare your qualifications and present your competencies to the panel in a way that directly meets their needs.

- **Industry:** Learn everything you can about the industry you will be working in, including current and upcoming trends. Identify the skills and knowledge necessary to work within that industry and demonstrate how your knowledge can be an asset in this particular field.

Prepare for basic and tough questioning

In many respects, the job interview is the last step in your job search. By the time you get to the interview, you should have spent considerable time gaining self-knowledge. One way to “sell yourself” in an interview is to anticipate the questions the interviewer will ask and prepare your responses in advance.

Interviews are predominantly framed on ‘competency-based’ interview principles. This means that the interview questions are designed to assess whether you will succeed in the role, whether you can hit the ground running or whether you will fit into the company’s culture and environment. To judge this, employers’ questions are often based around your competencies, expertise, capabilities and past experiences.

As you prepare for your interview, anticipate what questions you may be asked and rehearse quality answers. Some common interview questions include:

1. What were your tasks/responsibilities in your last role/s?
2. Why do you want to work for us?
3. What are your main strengths and weaknesses?
4. What distinguishes you from other applicants?
5. Where do you see yourself in 5–10 years’ time?

Other, more challenging interview questions can include:

1. What are your values, beliefs and ethics as a professional?
2. What are your key career achievements, with examples?
3. Can you tell me about a time when you had to deal with a stressful situation at work?

4. Can you describe an instance where you made a decision and failed and explain why?
5. What do you think would be most difficult for you in this position?

Practise makes perfect. You should practise for an interview rigorously and well in advance. You'd be surprised how many candidates make simple mistakes in a job interview or fail to answer even the simplest of questions well – and this can mean the difference between a job offer and a rejection letter.

Prepare to meet with many or few

Be prepared to meet with as many as ten or more interviewers in a group setting or as few as one in your job interview. Whatever the number, you need to be able to confidently field any question asked of you.

One client of mine, Cheryl D., a business manager from Brisbane, anticipated only a handful of interviewers on the panel she would be speaking with; however, on entering the interview room eight people were present – all of them ready with their questions. Sadly, Cheryl had not rehearsed most of the standard interview questions related to her industry or position. Naturally, this showed in her responses and she was not offered the job.

Spending adequate time preparing for your job interview is essential in giving yourself the greatest chance of success. Avoid being underprepared!

"The minutes before you leave your house for that big job interview might not contain the same level of intensity, but mental preparation can still mean the difference between victory (getting the job) and defeat (back to the classifieds)."

Wall Street Journal

Mistake No. 39

Responding poorly to job termination

No employee ever wants to hear the words, “You’re Fired!” In many cases, employees are caught unaware when they are let go from a job, with no prior signs or suggestions that their employment was at risk.

Were you really caught unawares?

Even though employees often say they are blind-sided when they are terminated, there can be a few signs in hindsight that may have indicated job insecurity. For example, you might have been given fewer responsibilities or been put on fewer projects, invitations to important meetings may have ceased or you might’ve started to receive poor feedback from your manager.

If any of these signs (or even others) were evident, consider whether they may have given rise to your termination.



Deal with termination professionally

If you are terminated, it's vital to remain calm and professional. You should be able to uncover some details about why you lost your role and then make some decisions about the next steps you will take.

Find out why

It's important to get adequate feedback from your superiors about your termination. Question them about what led to their decision to dismiss you and get it in writing if you can.

Don't immediately sign a severance agreement

A severance agreement will free your employer from all legal claims that might stem from your employment. Signing this won't likely benefit your situation, especially if your dismissal seems unlawful or is found to be unlawful later on.

Don't insult your employer

Despite how upset you might be, you must remain professional in any termination situation. Articulate that you are unhappy with the decision and discuss any reasons or details honestly and openly, without becoming angry or emotional. Whatever you do, don't insult your employer or make the issue personal.

Move on

Being terminated is an unpleasant experience and you may find it hard to digest, but the reality is that you must move forward and seek out new employment, especially if you are now in a tough financial situation. If you feel you were dismissed unfairly, you can take up the issue with your HR manager and seek external/legal advice at this point.

Stay positive

Always remember: when one door shuts, an incredible new one opens! A termination can give you the freedom to pursue new opportunities and take charge of your career direction. I suggest taking a few days for self-assessment and recovery. This is the time for introspection and discovering your strengths, while also considering how you can improve your performance and skills.

Discussing your termination in future interviews

In any future job interviews, you may be quizzed about your termination. It's important that you prepare answers to any questions the employer might ask you so that you can speak confidently about your dismissal. Be honest and keep it brief and believable, and avoid complaining or bad-mouthing your former employer. Your goal here is to convince your prospective employer that you can still have much value to offer, despite being previously terminated.

"Cultivate an optimistic mind, use your imagination, always consider alternatives, and dare to believe that you can make possible what others think is impossible."

Rodolfo Costa

Letting constructive dismissal control your career

Occasionally, an employer may decide they no longer want to employ a staff member, but for a variety of reasons, they do not want to fire them outright. These reasons can include financial motivations or wanting to avoid being responsible for unfair dismissal claims.

In this scenario, the employer may begin working towards a Constructive Dismissal – where they essentially create an unfavourable or uncomfortable working environment and situation in which the employee feels they have no choice but to resign.

The methods that can be used by an employer to force a constructive dismissal are numerous. The following are just a few of the possible ways in which an employer can try to make an employee uncomfortable or frustrated with their employment:

- Cutting wages or excluding the employee from pay increases, bonuses or benefits.
- Dramatically altering working hours, perhaps including nights and weekends.
- Directing abuse and/or unfair criticism towards the employee.
- Unfairly or unrealistically increasing the employee's workload or changing the scope of their position.
- Overly disciplining the employee for a minor error or mistake.
- Failing to cooperate with the employee on business matters.
- Constantly overriding decisions or nit-picking at the employee's performance.

- Placing a significantly greater amount of pressure on the employee to perform.
- Alienating the employee from various social situations in the workplace.

Solution

Confront a constructive dismissal attempt

If you are currently a victim of any of the tactics mentioned above or believe that your employer is trying to bring a constructive dismissal against you, there are steps you can take to deal with this issue quickly and confidently.

Talk it over

First, try to speak with your boss or supervisor and discuss your concerns. Is it possible that you are misinterpreting actions and that there could be a more reasonable explanation for some of the issues you are experiencing? Give your boss or employer a chance to voice their perspective; this will give you a better overall view of the situation so that you can decide how to move forward.

If you feel uncomfortable talking to your boss, you could also approach your HR manager and discuss your concerns with them.

Record everything

If you still feel that a constructive dismissal is in play, it would be wise to begin documenting everything that takes place on a daily basis. If you do resign and wish to receive benefits or take further action, the documentation you save could wind up being valuable in demonstrating your constructive dismissal argument. Things like emails and other written notices are easy to save and can prove to be important if you end up in a hearing regarding your employee rights.

Stay put

One important tip is to avoid looking for a new job until you have officially resigned from your company (if you choose to do so). If you are job hunting while you are still employed in your current position, it could weaken the argument for constructive dismissal and make it look like you simply wanted to move on anyway. Your employer can also claim that you were in breach of your contract, since you were using work time and resources to look for other employment.

Obtain legal help

In any constructive dismissal situation, it is always advisable to contact a lawyer or solicitor. Being subjected to unfair treatment in the workplace – in order to force you to leave – is a violation of your rights as an employee. If you suspect a constructive dismissal is evident, whether in regards to yourself or someone else, approach your superiors or your HR manager and seek help straight away. If the issue continues, obtain legal help as soon as possible.

“Never let anyone walk all over you. Stand up for yourself, put your foot down and tell them that you DON'T put up with disrespect.”

Sonya Parker

Putting up with workplace bullying

When we think about bullying, we often associate it with children or a school environment. But bullying can occur at any stage of life – and it can happen in the workplace. If you are experiencing workplace bullying, you may be the victim of:

- Malicious rumours, gossip or innuendoes.
- Unwarranted criticism or false accusations.
- Loud outbursts, public humiliation and/or obscene language.
- Unwelcome physical contact.
- Having your work stolen or having someone else take credit for your work.
- Being given an excessive workload or being continually asked to complete menial tasks that are not in your job description.
- Having your job performance hindered or interfered with by being denied access to resources or information.
- Intentional sabotaging of your work/projects.
- Threats to your job security or wellbeing.

Bullying can range from subtle and minor to overt and very serious in nature. No matter what kind of bullying you feel you are being subjected to, it is important to deal with the issue and stand up for yourself and your rights.

Take action, fight back

In general, there are two ways in which you can become subject to bullying in the workplace – bullying can come from either your boss or a coworker/s, or from your organisation. Either way, be sure to document what is taking place and why you feel it should be classified as bullying. You will probably want to take action, but how you deal with the issue will depend on the type of bullying you are facing.

Dealing with bullying from a boss or coworker

If you are being bullied by your supervisor/s or coworker/s, there are some initial first steps you can take to put a stop to the bullying:

- **Document what is happening.** Document some examples of the bullying that you can present to your superiors as a demonstration of what is happening. Keep track of the date, time and details of the incident, and save written and online correspondence or notes that are also bullying in nature. Also, speak with any colleagues who may have witnessed the bullying and ask them if they would be willing to talk to your superiors as well.
- **Speak to your superior.** Speak with your boss and/or your HR manager about the situation. Hopefully, they will be understanding and will want to help resolve the issue. If they take your concerns seriously, they should deal with the bullying immediately so that you can move on and focus on your responsibilities.
- **Seek additional help.** If your supervisors turn a blind eye, dismiss your situation or complain that they do not want to get involved, you may need to seek help from another source, such as the next person of seniority in your company, or a union representative or lawyer.
- **Don't confront the bully.** The person bullying you is likely aggressive and hostile, whether in an active or passive way. If you are willing to stand up to them, you can do so, but be aware that confronting them may make the situation worse.

Dealing with bullying from an employer

This is a much more complex issue to deal with. Assuming you wish to keep your job and remain employed with the organisation, you will need to proceed with caution when confronting employer bullying. A good way to start may be to speak to colleagues you trust and find out if they have witnessed the bullying, or if they feel like they are victims themselves. If you find others in the office with a similar problem, you can work together to get it resolved.

If you need to deal with the situation on your own and if your boss or HR manager are not willing to help (or if you don't feel comfortable approaching them), you can consider going to an employment office and airing your concerns.

You have rights as an employee and these agencies may be able to assist. However, understand that this kind of action is likely to increase any animosity that exists between you and the employer and may result in a more uncomfortable work environment. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't take action, but that you should simply be prepared for the outcomes.

Bullying should never be acceptable in any type of environment and you should always feel that you have the right and ability to defend yourself, especially in the workplace. If you are targeted by a bully, whether a coworker or employer, start by addressing the issue and trying to solve the problem in-house. If that doesn't work, seek external help and take action if necessary.

"The common mistake that bullies make is assuming that because someone is nice that he or she is weak. Those traits have nothing to do with each other. In fact, it takes considerable strength and character to be a good person."

Mary Elizabeth Williams

Mistake No. 42

Failing to evaluate the details of a job offer

Receiving a job offer is incredibly exciting. But many candidates also accept their job offers without carefully considering all of the information. This is a serious mistake that can result in a compromised situation and a less than satisfactory career move. Essentially, it means that you are signing up for a job that you don't fully agree to or understand.

Why do some candidates accept a job, but forget the details? There can be many reasons:

- Candidates may be so eager or excited to accept the role, they forget about reviewing the details involved.
- Candidates might feel overly grateful about the offer or so desperate to accept it that they feel the details don't matter.
- Candidates can feel pressured by the employer or recruiter to accept the job immediately, and hence give in to that pressure.
- Candidates may not understand what details they need to check, address or negotiate.

Solution

Assess the additional details

With any job offer you receive, you should take the time to make sure that everything is acceptable to you before signing a contract or officially accepting the position. While most of the considerations you need to review will be obvious – remuneration, compensation, benefits, working hours – there are several other details that should be evaluated as well.

The below questions and responses will help you understand what types of details and information you need to assess and what other elements you should consider before accepting your job offer:

1. Have all your benefits and requirements been included?

In many cases, clients and candidates can discuss additional benefits, perks or allowances throughout the application and interview process. But often, these fail to end up in the final contract when an offer is made. If there are any matters that you have negotiated, make sure the details and terms are included in your contract before you sign.

If they're not included, and you accept the role and then realise this later on, the employer will not be obligated to meet your demands.

2. Do you have to sign a non-compete clause?

If you resign or lose your job, a non-compete clause could preclude you from working for a competing company in a related field for a predetermined amount of time. This can be standard practice in many companies.

However, if you decide you want to move on in future, a non-compete agreement can become a serious problem. You won't have total flexibility to look for other positions in a company or role you choose. If an employer is asking you to sign a non-compete contract, make sure you read it thoroughly and that you are comfortable with the terms before agreeing.

3. Is this position taking your career in the right direction?

You only have so much time to establish your career and reach your goals, so you won't want to waste time in a position that won't help you advance in the right direction. With that in mind, make sure the job you are considering is going to be one that takes you toward your goals. Make sure you have a clear understanding of what your responsibilities will be before you accept the job and sign on the dotted line.

4. Can you get the job done?

While this position might be a nice feather in your cap and could catapult you further toward your career goals, be clear about what the company's expectations are and whether or not you have the ability to succeed. The last thing you want to do is set yourself up for failure because the company had unrealistic expectations of you or you needed to sharpen your skills first, before taking on the role.

5. Should you get professional advice?

If you are unsure of the language or wording in an agreement that you are signing, it might be wise to consider asking a solicitor or employment negotiator to take a closer look at the document. This can be particularly important when it comes to senior level positions or positions that involve a lot of criteria and restrictions/requirements.

6. Are you following your instincts?

Remember that you don't have to immediately agree to a new employment offer just because one has been sent your way. Make sure you have considered all of your options, and evaluated what is being proposed before agreeing to the position's terms and conditions.

If there are details you want to amend, now is the time to negotiate. If you find the employer won't budge on key areas during negotiations, you may need to decide whether the job is worth it or whether you should simply walk away and find something else that will meet your expectations.

"Life is like a game of chess. To win you have to make a move. Knowing which move to make comes with IN-SIGHT and knowledge, and by learning the lessons that are accumulated along the way."

Allan Rufus, *The Master's Sacred Knowledge*

Receiving a bad reference check

A winning reference check can be one of the most powerful and influential elements when competing for a new job. Many recruiters and hiring managers claim that a reference check is one of the major deciding factors when determining whether a candidate should join their company. Impressive references can give you a key competitive advantage over other candidates and can mean a job offer is simply an arm's reach away.

Bad references

Unfortunately, not all job references are good ones. You may find yourself in a position where you have to deal with a negative reference from a previous employer.

When asked about a former employee's overall performance, one supervisor sharply responded, "Is there a rating less than unsatisfactory?" Another stated that they let the employee go because they "didn't perform as well as expected." Of course, that is a somewhat ambiguous comment, because who knows what their expectations were and if they were reasonable, but it's one that still has the power to convince a prospective employer to reject the candidate.

A neutral or blatantly "absent" reference can also be damaging. An example from a former employer, when asked about a candidate's strengths and weaknesses was: "I'd rather not comment; you can take that however you will." Similarly, another former manager replied, "I'm sure there are some strengths, but nothing jumps out at me." References like these aren't downright negative, but they can leave a negative impression on the future employer and compromise your chances of securing the job.

Choose the right references

Ensure that any people you put forward as your referees are supporters. Here are a few steps you can take to make sure you avoid or manage any negative references.

Ask for a reference

The best way to ensure a positive reference is to ask your former (or current) manager whether they will be willing to act as a reference for you and provide you with a positive review. If your boss expresses reluctance, hints that your review won't be positive or explains that they don't want to be a referee for you altogether, you can simply move on to your next option.

Ask for a reference in writing

Ask all of your referees for a written letter of reference in advance. This is a great way to add extra credibility to your portfolio and can serve as valuable documentation in future if you lose touch with your managers or they become unavailable. You can also use this opportunity to determine which of your superiors are willing to provide you with favourable reviews and which are less than likely to do so.

Discuss your potential weak points

A poor reference by a referee can often revolve around one specific area of your job performance. Despite this, you may still feel it is necessary to include this person as a referee on your resume. If you decide to do this, discuss the issue with your referee beforehand and inquire how they might present it to a future employer. During the interview process, you can also provide an explanation for the criticism and describe how you rectified or are improving the situation. This strategy should only be used when you are positive that there will be an issue brought up during your reference check.

Confront your negative review

If a bad review takes place without your prior knowledge and it is communicated to you after the event, be proactive and ask for an opportunity to explain the evaluation. For example, you could demonstrate to your prospective employer how you have taken steps to correct the issue and enhance your performance.

The main goal is to show your future employer that the problem was unique and won't play into your future job performance. At no time should you become angry, treat the review with disdain or make excuses to your interviewers about the evaluation. Instead, work on understanding the problem and illustrate how you have overcome it.

"Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen."

Winston Churchill

Accepting a promotion (or not)

Most professionals are interested in climbing the corporate ladder. As a result, they often jump at the first opportunity for advancement and accept promotions that come their way. This is very understandable – it's wonderful to be offered a promotion and it indicates that you are excelling in your current role, and have the potential to take on something greater.

However, there are times when internal advancement is not always the best option for your career or work/life balance. Promotions and increases in salary or seniority can mean:

- Longer working hours
- More responsibility and accountability
- More people to manage
- More pressure to perform or achieve results and outcomes
- Higher stress levels.

A promotion should be treated like any new job offer. While it's exciting and attractive, you still need to assess your priorities and consider whether the job is truly right for your career.

Know when to accept or decline a promotion

Promotions are key to career development. Working your way up the corporate ladder is often ideal, particularly when it involves great job security, more benefits and higher salary packages. However, you should take some time to consider these questions before automatically saying ‘yes!’.

Will longer hours be required?

Is the workload for the new position achievable in a reasonable work week? You’ll need to look carefully at your new responsibilities and consider how much extra time will be required in your new role. A promotion may not be worth it if it impacts your work/life balance or your family commitments.

What will your career path be if you take this new position?

A promotion is great, but will it take you further? Determine whether your new job has the capacity to lead you further down your desired career path, whether it is more of a “dead end” or whether it might even change your career direction considerably. You’ll need to weigh up these factors carefully before you decide to take the role.

Will you be comfortable with your new responsibilities?

Your new responsibilities will no doubt require additional effort and time, but do they fit in with your own beliefs and values? This is important, because a conflict of values can force you into a role that will ultimately make you unhappy. Think about how your new responsibilities and even your new relationships and job expectations will impact your beliefs and ethics.



Would you make a good boss?

In many cases, promotions can mean progressing from a staff position to a supervisory one, where you'll be responsible for other employees. If you love dealing with others and are keen to develop your management skills, this can be great. But being a supervisor is not for everyone. If you find it challenging to deal with employees (especially difficult ones) or just don't like overseeing others, taking the promotion may not be the best career move for you.

Are you comfortable with the staff you'll be supervising?

If you do feel supervision or management is right for you, take a look at the existing staff in the team you'll be supervising. Are they a good team or is there tension or even dysfunction in the mix? Employee or team issues can take up significant managerial time, so ensure that you are ready to take this team on – along with all of its “ups and downs.”

Is the extra money worth it?

More money is always appealing and can mean you're able to live a much more comfortable lifestyle. However, your gross salary increase isn't the same as your net increase – so take a moment to calculate exactly how much more you'll be getting, after taxes etc. Is the extra amount worth the additional hours and stress that could accompany the promotion?

Declining the promotion

If you decide to turn down a job promotion, make your reasons clear to your employer. You may need to take additional steps to reassure your superiors that you're still invested in the success of the business and that you're committed to achieving an outstanding performance. This is a great time to emphasise your passion for your current role, as well as outlining why the new position may not be ideal for you.

At the end of the discussion, let your supervisor know that you are grateful for the opportunity, and you hope that you will be considered again in the future for another position that is more suited to your career direction, values and needs.

"By working faithfully eight hours a day you may eventually get to be a boss and work twelve hours a day."

Robert Frost

Mistake No. 45

Agreeing to relocate for a job (without thinking first)

The advent of the internet in the corporate world has greatly expanded the way businesses operate and connect with their customers. As a result, executives are now developing much of their knowledge and expertise on a global scale – and some are even seeking out roles (or being offered positions) based in different localities, states or countries.

But are the advantages of relocating as “bright” as they seem? If you agree to relocate straight away, without giving it some careful thought or assessing the “pros” and “cons”, you could find yourself in a difficult situation that may not end up being the best decision for your career or life. This applies whether your new role is within the same organisation or is a brand new job with a new company.

Solution

Evaluate the opportunity before you decide

If you have been presented with a job opportunity that will require a move (or you expect that you might be faced with that possibility soon), you should find out as much as you can before committing to the position.

The six questions below should help you to think critically about this opportunity and whether it is one that you should pursue.

1. Is this a short-term or long-term opportunity?

It will probably not be worth your time and effort to relocate for a position that is only a short-term solution to your long-term career needs. If the position is only going to exist for a short amount of time or the compensation is not going to be enough for you to stay in the position long-term, then it might not be the right role for you. That said, a short-term position that pushes you significantly closer to your career goals might be worth the temporary inconvenience.

2. Will my employer help cover relocation costs?

Relocating to a new destination can be very expensive, especially if you have a family. If your employer is unwilling to subsidise some or all of your relocation costs, you might need to think twice about whether you can afford the move. You should assess:

- Packing and moving costs, including any moving insurance fees.
- Costs for storage you may need either long-term or temporarily.
- Accommodation or rent expenses while you search for a new home.
- Expenses involved in leaving, leasing or selling your old home.

3. How stable will my position be?

It's important to investigate both the stability of your new job and also the stability of the company (or division/department) you will be joining. Nothing could be worse than packing up everything and relocating (which is costly and time consuming at best), only to discover a few months later that your role is in jeopardy.

4. What is the new area like?

Careers are important – but they aren't everything in life. Try to do as much research as possible about the region where you will be living. If possible, organise a quick trip to your destination to see if it is going to be ideal for you. If you will not be comfortable or happy in the new environment, it may be best to move on and search for other job opportunities.

5. Will the organisation move me home if the role is for a fixed period?

The costs of relocating to a new state, or country can be huge, but make sure you consider the costs to get you back home again if the move isn't permanent. Many companies will include the relocation cost of the return journey, and in some cases will also include the cost of flying home to see your extended family once a year.

6. What additional costs will I be faced with?

It's important that before you make a decision about moving that you've considered the cost of living, transport, education and child-care in your new environment. Many expats in Asian countries talk about the shock they experienced when trying to get their children into English speaking or International schools. Make sure you do your homework and speak with experts currently living in the new location.



"Nothing is so awesomely unfamiliar as the familiar that discloses itself at the end of a journey."

Cynthia Ozick

Mistake No. 46

Agreeing to relocate without discussing it with your family

If you are offered a role that involves moving to a new location, it will hopefully be very exciting and an excellent step forward in your career. But although your career is important, you should remember that your family – and their happiness – is also just as significant.

If you accept the job and agree to the move, but fail to take your family's desires into account, it might cause tension and discontent and it can also impact the way they feel about you – especially if your new role means relocating to a different city or country. And while the job may end up being everything you hoped, the move might not be worth it if your family is unhappy.

Solution

Talk it through with your family

Before you accept a role and agree to any type of move, you should discuss the opportunity with your partner or family.

Be understanding

When you broach the topic of a relocation with your family, they may react in a variety of ways. They might be excited for you or they might be shocked, upset or even scared of moving. It's important to be patient and understanding with your family members at this stage; let them

know you're keen to discuss the decision with them and that you also value their happiness and input.

Communicate the details

Your family will likely have many questions they want to ask, so you'll need to know the answers and details so that you can provide them with a full picture of what the relocation might entail. Conduct some research and ask yourself, before the discussions:

1. How many months or years will the move be for?
2. Where will my partner work?
3. What will we give up by moving, such as friends and activities?
4. How old are my children, and how will changing schools affect them? Will they still receive a good education? What about their extracurricular activities, like sports?
5. If moving to another country, will language barriers be a significant issue?
6. How will our lifestyles and enjoyable activities change?
7. Does the career move really offer me more than we would give up?
8. Can I afford the costs of relocating and the costs of living in this new location?

Emphasise the pros

If you find your partner or family is not entirely supportive of your job achievement, help them to understand your point of view by explaining some of the “pros” of the situation. For example, you might want to emphasise:

- How the job will be beneficial for your career, and for the whole family, in the long-term.
- Any increases in pay that can have a positive effect on your family's financial situation.
- The opportunities your family can also take advantage of in the new location (e.g. better jobs, schools, new friends etc.).
- The cultural advantages of experiencing life in a new destination.

- How the job is a part of your personal life goals and dreams.
- That the move is only temporary and not forever.

Ask about their concerns

If your family is still resistant, find out what their main concerns are about having to relocate. Are they worried about jobs or school? Do they not want to leave their friends behind? Are they unwilling to live in the respective country or destination? Once you grasp their main concerns, you'll be able to understand how best to discuss these issues with them and/or alleviate their worries, so that you can come to a decision.

Make the decision together

Finally, you and your partner/family will need to make the decision together. You can weigh up the final pros and cons and determine whether moving away or staying put is going to be best.

If they're all on board and keen to move, the decision should be easy. However, be prepared for the fact that you might have to let the opportunity go if staying in your current location offers you and your family more benefits than moving away. While not taking a great job might slow down your career projection, your family's ongoing support and happiness may offer a more balanced and fulfilling life in the long run.

If you don't decide to move

If you decide not to relocate, you can still look for other ways to enhance your career and keep it moving in the right direction. You could ask your current organisation if any other opportunities/promotions are available, search for a new role altogether that will offer you the same benefits or find out where your family *would* be willing to move to and inquire about opportunities there.

Hiring a career coach you know nothing about

Career coaches and mentors can make a fantastically significant difference to your career success. They can aid you in formulating goals and mapping out plans, as well as provide you with quality advice and guidance when job searching or trying to improve your career.

But not every career coach is a good one. While many coaches will have your best interests at heart, there can be bad eggs out there – so it's important to do your research and make sure you hire a coach that is going to directly benefit your career objectives.

What do you know about your coach?

Hiring a coach you know nothing about can be a substantial waste of your time and money and it can also have dire consequences for your career. Hiring *anyone* you know nothing about is a risky move and should be avoided. Why?

- You can end up hiring a coach who is completely underqualified or who knows nothing about your industry or field.
- Your coach may not have a high success rate in working with other candidates or helping them accelerate their careers.
- Your coach might give you inadequate or inaccurate advice that is not relevant to your career or goals.
- Your coach may not be compatible with your working “style” and therefore may not be able to fulfill your needs.
- Your coach may even be a fraud who is simply trying to swindle you for money.

Research and investigate every potential coach

When you apply for a new job or are offered a new opportunity, you should be researching and investigating the company as much as possible to determine whether it is going to be the right fit for you. The same type of caution should be applied when you begin searching for a career coach or mentor.

A coach/mentor is someone who will have significant influence and input into your career direction, so you'll want to ensure that whoever you choose will have the experience, skills and expertise to help you achieve your goals.

How to hire a coach you can trust

- **Coaching experience.** Seek out a coach who has experience at your same job level (e.g. executive, leadership) and ideally who has some knowledge of your industry. This will mean that your coach's experience will be much more aligned with your own needs. For example, if you're working in the technology industry, you'll want a coach who at least understands how this industry is structured and what trends dominate hiring and recruitment. Similarly, if you want to move into a leadership role, a coach who hasn't had any experience working with CEOs or similar won't be of benefit to you.
- **Networking.** One of the best ways to find a great coach or mentor is to utilise your network and ask those you trust if they can recommend anyone. If they can put you in touch with a reliable coach, you'll be at an advantage, but continue to do your research nonetheless.
- **Success rates.** Whoever you select as your coach/mentor, you need to be sure that they have achieved success with other professionals. Ask for their references and if feasible, talk to some of their previous

clients for feedback and insight into their coaching success and strategies.

- **Career goals.** It is important to also consider your specific goals and needs when choosing a coach or mentor. For instance, if you are keen to make a total career change and secure a role in a brand new industry, you'll want an experienced coach who can help you achieve this specific goal and work with you on the change management process.
- **Qualifications.** In Australia, there are no formal qualifications an individual must obtain to become a coach or mentor, but inquiring about any qualifications your prospective mentor or coach has is recommended. You can also ask if your chosen coach is a member of any professional bodies, such as the Career Development Association of Australia (CDAA), the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association (RCSA) or the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI).
- **Coaching achievements.** You can also research any accomplishments your potential coach has attained, such as speaking at conferences, publishing professional papers or even reaching their own goals. Coaches who have achieved success in their personal careers are much more likely to be successful coaches, with the ability to impart intelligent and practical advice and knowledge.

"That is the difference between good teachers and great teachers: good teachers make the best of a pupil's means; great teachers foresee a pupil's ends."

Maria Callas

Not having a career mentor or coach

Henry C., an analyst from Brisbane, was content with his current position, but felt like he should be doing more with his career. He wanted to progress and grow, to expand his technical skills and improve his management and leadership capabilities. Yet he had no idea how to go about it. A short time later, at a technology conference, he met an experienced career coach.

The coach was able to help Henry set new goals, enhance his skills and accelerate his professional career. As a result, Henry achieved much more success than he would have on his own and he continues to work with his career coach to this day.

The prospect of hiring a mentor or coach to assist with the development of your career is an idea that you may have considered during your professional journey, but never acted on. This may be because you are unsure of the benefits that a mentor or coach could bring to your career, or because you feel you don't have time to focus on this in your life.

Bringing a mentor or coach on board can make a world of difference to your career success by providing you with tools and techniques to help you analyse, reflect and take action to achieve your objectives.

Partner with a career coach

A big picture view

Developing an external or even “big picture” view of your career path and prospects for the future can be challenging to do on your own. You might not understand what your career path is or what steps you need to take to secure your dream role. Or you may not even know what you want to do with your professional life altogether. A coach will be able to discuss these issues with you and provide you with valuable advice that can assist you in deciding how you want to manage and drive your career forward.

Objective advice

Even if you ask colleagues and friends to help you make career decisions, their perspective will still be influenced by their feelings for you. A career coach, on the other hand, will be objective and impartial and can instruct you on how to overcome your challenges and take those next steps. They can be incredibly encouraging and motivating, but they can also open your eyes to the reality of your industry and what you need to do to achieve the results you want.

Networking

Career coaches are also invaluable people to have on your side when it comes to networking and connections. A successful mentor will have worked with a variety of executives, leaders and experts over the years, and can connect you with people who can influence your career and provide you with great opportunities.

Coaching costs

There are costs associated with career coaching, but it's important to think of these costs as an investment in yourself and your career. Coaching and mentoring can also be much more rewarding and practical than simply reading a book or attending a training seminar – and it will also be much more personal and relevant to your individual career objectives.

Specifically, career mentors and coaches can:

- Work with you to identify and prioritise clear career goals that relate to your life values and needs.
- Help you identify the obstacles, barriers and key challenges that are holding your career back.
- Help you create intelligent career strategies and clear action plans in order to overcome these obstacles and challenges.
- Hold you accountable for meeting those goals and staying “on track”.
- Help you with job search techniques and interview preparation.
- Motivate you and bring more positivity into your life.
- Help you recognise and improve the skills that you will need to succeed in your industry or position and work on your behavioural abilities, such as conflict resolution, change management, leadership, talent management, negotiation and so on.
- Assist you in creating/marketing a cohesive and appealing personal brand.

Career coaching can cover a huge range of areas and topics, all of which will depend on your personal desires and objectives. You will need to discuss your career goals with your coach and determine what specific areas you want to focus on during the initial coaching period (you can always change or refine this later on). Career success can be achieved by simply meeting with your coach once a week or even once a fortnight or month.



"I realized that I wasn't so clear on my dream job, or how to even approach planning the next steps in my career. And although I'm sure the answers were somewhere inside me, I needed to bring them up to the surface. So I decided to enlist the help of a career coach."

Ilana Arazie

Trusting internal coaches

In recent years, many workplaces have begun utilising internal career coaches to help motivate staff teams, troubleshoot office conflicts and obstacles, and work with employees to set goals, build skills and develop their careers.

Often, the role of internal coaches is to focus on up-and-coming executives who have the potential to take on a promotion and ultimately grow into a leadership role as part of the company's succession plan. Coaches in these instances help to bring stronger and more sensitive leadership to the organisation at hand, cultivating aspiring talent so that they can one day play a greater role in the direction and management of the company.

Why internal coaches?

Many businesses have come to prefer the concept of internal coaching, simply because the coach or mentor is part of the organisation (i.e. an employee). They know how the organisation works, what the culture is like and what skills team members need to develop in order to move up the ropes.

However, it should be recognised that an internal coach is essentially working in the best interests of the organisation, rather than the employee. While this can be beneficial for employees who wish to progress internally in the company, internal career coaches are not there to give objective feedback on an individual's career direction or goals.

Internal coaches and bias

Coaches should never be biased, but some can be. Because internal coaches are a part of the organisation, they develop friendships and relationships in the office just like anyone else, and they can also be

privity to certain information regarding the company itself. This can sometimes impact their impartiality or professional perspective and may lead them to be an ineffective or unreliable career coach.

Solution

Seek out an external coach

An “external coach” is a consultant hired by the company who is brought into the organisation, often for a limited time, to help facilitate a stronger work environment. They can work with individual employees, teams and departments or company leaders and directors.

An external coach learns about the organisation from reports and other documents, and is often able to remain unbiased because he/she has a wholly analytical view of the office, rather than an emotional one.

While external coaches are far less likely to be biased than internal coaches, it’s important to remember who they are working for. If they’ve been paid by the organisation to provide coaching services, then they may still be providing feedback to the company about your sessions. It’s very important that you speak with the coach about their discretion and confidentiality.

“A career coach is an expert professional who has the ability to help you discover your true potential. They can assist you in discovering the areas where you are strong. They can help you know about your weaknesses. More importantly, a career coach understands your dreams and aspirations.”

The Undercover Recruiter

Mistake No. 50

Working with your best friend

One of the most rewarding aspects of the workplace is the opportunity to make friends. You often spend many hours a week with your work colleagues and many of these relationships can develop into genuine friendships that provide value beyond the workplace and the professional environment.

While friendships in business are important – they can cultivate teamwork, boost communication, help relieve stress and enhance general workplace happiness – they can become a career distraction if appropriate boundaries are not set.

For instance, do you find yourself chatting and socialising, rather than working? Is your work inbox full of personal conversations? Or have you made a friend with someone who has since become your boss or superior, or vice versa? All of these are signs that your workplace friendships are affecting your professionalism in the job.

Solution

Set personal boundaries in the workplace

While there are many perks in working with a friend or making a new friend at work, it's important to set boundaries to prevent your friendship from “spilling over” into the professional space:

1. **Limit conversations.** While it is easy to get carried away with personal conversations and “catch ups”, limit non-work conversations to breaks, lunches and after-work hours.
2. **Follow IT guidelines.** Your employment contract or IT guidelines likely stipulate that work resources should be used for professional purposes only, so avoid using these for too many personal conversations. Don’t forget – nothing is private when using company technology, so limit what you say.
3. **Be firm.** If you find your friendships are affecting your productivity, be kind but firm. Suggest to your friend that you should catch up later on and explain that you need some time to focus on your tasks.

Being promoted to a supervisory position is highly commendable. However, when “best friends” are involved, it can be a tricky transition and keeping the relationship professional, while still maintaining the friendship, can be a challenge. These tips should help you:

1. **Be aware of company policy.** Set boundaries regarding your personal time/conversations with each other, and discuss ways in which you can continue to be friends without violating company policies or putting either of your careers at risk.
2. **Treat everyone the same.** Do not give your friend preferential treatment when dealing with issues in the workplace. This can tarnish your reputation as a professional and lead other colleagues or employees to lose respect for you or resent you and/or your friend.
3. **Separate personal and professional.** If you need to work closely with a friend, make sure you separate the personal from the professional; just because they’re a great friend, doesn’t mean they’re a great employee. You’ll need to remove your personal emotions and judge or assess your friend based on their professional merits and capabilities only.

Friendships, as with all relationships, evolve and change over time. If your best buddy expects preferential treatment or inside knowledge simply because they know you personally, then it might be time to move on. However, healthy friendships can be wonderfully beneficial if both parties are willing to maintain professionalism and respect while in the office.



“Having friends at work is all about three simple but incredibly important things: staying productive, staying happy and staying sane.”

Shola Richards

Mistake No. 51

Using social media in the workplace

In the past several years, social media has dramatically changed the way people from all over the world communicate. From a job searching perspective, social media can be an incredibly powerful tool; it can be used to connect with prospective employers, head hunters and recruiters and utilising it in the right way can lead to some excellent career opportunities and valuable professional relationships.

However, there is a downside to social media – if used extensively at work, it can be a wasteful “time drainer.” This can impact your productivity, as well as your dedication and professional image. It is all too easy to waste time on social media websites and if your colleagues or managers start to notice, you may find yourself facing consequences.

Solution

Find a healthy social media balance

While it would be a mistake to ignore social media completely, it is important to strike a healthy balance between when you should and shouldn't access these sites. The following tips will help you streamline your social media activities during work hours:

Limit using social media for personal purposes

If you do need to use social media during work hours, ensure it is for professional reasons. Limit the time you spend on social media for personal purposes – and access your account only at lunch times, or when you are on break.

Create separate professional accounts

Divide your professional and personal social media use by setting up separate accounts for each. You will likely already have personal accounts for websites such as Facebook and Twitter, but if you need to utilise these (or any others), ensure you create a professional business account or page that you can use for work purposes.

Log out when finished

It is easy to leave your social media accounts open throughout the day. However, you should make sure you log out and close your social pages whenever you are not actively using them. This will prevent them from becoming a distraction and it also minimises the risk of having your colleagues or boss assume that you are wasting time on social media, rather than working.

Have a clear purpose

When employing social media as a method of furthering your professional activities (e.g. business development, marketing, connecting with clients), it is crucial that you have a specific plan in place to get the most out of the platform. If you just decide to be “active” but don’t really have a concrete strategy, your time is likely to be wasted.

Don't job search on social media at work

Avoid conducting any job hunting tasks during your working hours, even when it involves social media. Company equipment can be monitored and your activities can be exposed here, so be careful. If you are searching for employment, you’ll need to do this on your own time, with your own devices.

Did you know ... “In Australia, more than 9 million people are on Facebook on the web and more than 7.3 million million on mobile every day?”

Sydney Morning Herald

Mistake No. 52

Failing to manage your personal brand

When managing your career, it's important to think of yourself as having a brand in the same way that a business does. A personal brand will help define who you are in your industry and should clearly communicate to prospective employers precisely what value you can bring to their organisations.

Yet one of the biggest mistakes many professionals and candidates make is that they fail to create, build and manage a personal brand.

Solution

Proactively create and manage your brand

A strong personal brand is essential in remaining competitive in the job searching or corporate space. There are many professionals around you who will no doubt have a similar skill set and work history to you and who may, if you're job hunting, be vying for the same positions.

Define your brand message

What's the one thing you want to communicate to employers, leaders or other professionals in your industry? Personal branding is vital in differentiating yourself from the pack and highlighting your own talents in a "stand out" way.

Dedicate some time (or work with your Career Coach) to define a clear and unique message about yourself that will make an impact on

anyone who comes into contact with you. Ask yourself: What talents and knowledge can you offer that others can't?

Develop brand consistency

A personal brand will help you remain consistent in your communications as you move through the job application and interview process or simply through various dealings in the corporate world. It's important to present a clear and consistent brand, image and message at all times.

When it comes to applying for new roles, you will need to concentrate on the elements of your background/experience that are inconsistent or unusual, so that you can account for them in interviews or other professional settings where you have a limited opportunity to convince someone of what you can do for them.

Without a defined message about what your brand is, there's a risk that the people you're talking to will get stuck on any inconsistent or confusing elements in your story and use that as a reason to discount you.

Potential employers in particular aren't just looking to find out who you are; they want to find out how you can fit into their business and into the specific role that they have available, which is why you need a message that's consistent and effective enough to convince them of your worth!

Coordinate your personal brand

Once you've created a clear, consistent brand message, you will need to coordinate your brand across the different platforms and mediums that you employ in your professional life. These can include:

- Your LinkedIn profile
- Your other social media profiles (e.g. Twitter, Facebook)
- Your personal website
- Your business cards
- Your email signatures
- Your biographies or any other personal publications about you.

These areas should be employed to visibly communicate your brand message and approach. You should have a clear phrase or tagline that immediately identifies who you are and what you can do so that people can make a decision easily on whether your competencies can fit their needs.

Update your brand

Is your brand outdated? Once your branding is in place, you will need to keep it current, so that it continues to speak to marketplace demands, as well as showcase your latest talents. On an ongoing basis, you should consider:

- Updating your tagline to include new offerings or address current market needs.
- Changing your description or profile to highlight an “in demand” skill.
- Adding any new achievements, skills, knowledge, qualifications or experience you acquire.
- Developing your brand approach to be more edgy, impressive or competitive.

You’ll especially want to keep an eye on your printed and online materials to make sure nothing becomes outdated. If you don’t have anything new to add after some time, you may want to consider investing in training or finding another way to develop your skills and offerings to make sure that you, as well as your brand, are progressing in accordance with your industry.

“Challenge yourself to think about what your intentions are and what you are capable of delivering to the communities you are serving – both in and outside of the workplace.”

Glenn Llopis

Mistake No. 53

“Falling out” with your coworker

Outside of work, we are allowed to choose our friends and our significant others. However, in an office environment, we don't get to choose the employees we work with. And sometimes, we may have to spend our working lives with people we would normally avoid in a social setting.

Personality conflicts and negative interactions are often expected in the workplace, especially when multiple personalities and values are in the mix. There will be times when the conflicts will be more subversive and passive, but there will also be other times when outright arguments can occur. Unfortunately, these can be the most career damaging if they are not handled appropriately.



Terrence's outburst

Terrence H., a financial planner in Adelaide, became increasingly agitated due to constant delays from his accounts department. One day, he blew his cool with the department's manager and a fallout ensued in the middle of the office. He loudly berated her for never meeting a deadline and asked how she was ever placed in a supervisory position. She responded just as aggressively, claiming he had no respect for his subordinates.

How do you handle a fallout like this one, especially when it's occurred in front of all your colleagues? While it might be easy to give in to your anger and then hold on to resentment, both can have negative effects on your career.

Solution

Learn how to deal with fallouts at work

After an argument like this one, many consequences can follow. Everyone in the office may be watching you, avoiding you or stepping on eggshells around you. People may change their perceptions of you regarding your professionalism. And upper management will likely want to speak to you about your conduct. If you do happen to become involved in a fallout in the office, you can take some steps to ensure that the situation is repairable:

Don't make it worse

Once the argument is over, walk away and take some time to “cool your head.” Avoid making the situation worse by venting out loud to others or making derogatory comments about the person you clashed with. Remain neutral and avoid giving into the desire to prove your point to everyone in the office.

Organise a follow-up to resolve the conflict

Once your emotions have settled, acknowledge that a conflict or fallout has taken place and organise to talk with your coworker about what happened. This can be an “official” meeting that involves others in the office or an unofficial talk. Focus on objective statements, and keep the end goal on clarification and resolution. You should also apologise for your behaviour. If you believe the two of you are unable to resolve the issue on your own, involve a mediator, such as a superior or HR Manager.

Move on

It’s easy to rehash and relive emotionally escalating situations. However, once a resolution has been reached, focus on moving on with your work and projects. This can also mean you’ll need to put aside your feelings and also behave in a respectful way towards the person you were in conflict with.

Conflicts can always occur within the workplace, particularly when sensitive issues and contradictory opinions are involved. How you choose to handle any type of disagreement can impact your continued career success in a variety of ways, so work on resolutions in all instances.

“The first challenge in negotiation is to disentangle the people (or psychological dimension) from the problem (or substantive dimension). Be soft on the person, hard on the problem.”

William Ury

Underestimating social media

Social media is a very powerful place to spend your time. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and more can connect you with literally millions of people in just an instant. All of these people can profoundly influence your career, helping you gain promotions, achieve new positions or even grow your business.

However, when it comes to sharing your opinions and making comments on social media sites, underestimating your impact and reach can be very dangerous – and even a few harmless words or keystrokes can damage your reputation. In short, social media can help you promote your expertise, but you can get attention for all the wrong reasons if you say something insensitive, inappropriate or unprofessional.



Be cautious with social media

If you do use social media for work, there are a few rules and guidelines you should follow to ensure your communications do not paint you in a negative light:

Avoid personal posts

Ensure what you say is professional at all times and keep in mind who could be seeing your content. Avoid posting anything personal or offensive – for example, pictures of a wild night out drinking or an inappropriate joke – that may not go over well with your colleagues or superiors.

Keep your opinions professional

As an executive, the information you post or share on social media is often expected to be insightful and opinionated. Whatever you choose to promote, you must ensure that your comments are professional and that they apply to professional discussions. While it's fine to have personal opinions about certain topics, you should not post anything that could portray you as narrow-minded, disrespectful, prejudiced, controversial or simply rude.

Don't make negative comments about your workplace

This can be seen as very unprofessional and can damage your opportunities and chances of employment in the future. An employee for StubHub completely underestimated his social media impact when he tweeted (accidentally, via the corporate account), “Thank f*** it’s Friday! Can’t wait to get out of this stubsucking hell hole.” Needless to say, the Tweet reached thousands of people, his superiors and coworkers included, and the consequences were likely very unfavourable.

Be careful who you share with

Make sure that you also understand whatever social media platforms you are using to circumvent any “sharing” disasters.

For instance, you might post a work complaint on Facebook intended for your friends, but if you are friends with your coworkers or managers, don't forget that they'll see the update. Another client of mine once also posted a comment on Twitter thinking it was private, and didn't realise her comments were actually public.

If you're unsure, keep your social media information neutral or positive at all times to prevent your comments from affecting your professional career.

“The thing about social media is that it can make things quickly go viral.. If you make one hiccup and say the wrong thing, it can quickly spread across social media like the plague and shatter your reputation.”

Philip Cohen, Social Media Today

Mistake No. 55

Failing to reinvent yourself when starting a new career

When we are young, it's often easy to figure out what we want to do, what industry we want to work in or what type of job we want. Yet as we grow older, visions and ideals can change. Subsequently, many professionals may find themselves “stuck in a rut” or limited to one, very specific career track that is unfortunately not bringing them much satisfaction.

The result is usually a decision to change careers and seek out a new position that will ultimately be more engaging and rewarding. Great! But one of the most common errors these candidates make is that they don't reinvent themselves and their competencies to suit the new industry or roles they are targeting.



Reinvent yourself to revitalise your career

Today, competitive employment environments essentially mean that you *must* reinvent yourself if you decide to change your career. This is necessary in order to achieve your new career goals, fulfil the current demands within the marketplace and show employers that you have got what it takes to meet their requirements.

If you don't do this, you could find yourself struggling to kick-start your new career and you'll be outweighed by many other candidates who have much more experience in the industry.

Pick a specific target career

One of the most common reasons a career change can fail is because of a lack of a specific destination. Deciding that you want to change careers is wonderful – but you will also need to decide exactly what it is you want to do and what type of roles in that industry you want to take on.

Keep in mind that due to your lack of experience or knowledge, you may also have to target more junior or entry level positions. You may also have to complete some training or education before you can make the career shift.

Investigate your skills

With a target career or job title in mind, start researching your new industry and looking at some job listings. This will give you an idea of what skills and experience most employers are looking for. Which of these skills do you already have and which skills do you now need? You are going to need to prove to an employer that you can take on their role, and this essentially starts with your skills. Make a list of what

you can already offer to new organisations and what skills you need to acquire and develop.

Reinvent your resume

Remember, as you reinvent yourself as a candidate and begin preparing for job applications, you must “reinvent” your resume. This means rewriting or refining your resume approach so that it showcases the skills most relevant to your target career path. For instance, if you’re a finance manager looking to move into marketing, you’ll want to emphasise your marketing talents in your resume, rather than your accounting ones.

Remember, highlighting your transferable skills can be great here too; taking what you have already learned from your first profession and adding it to these new experiences can help you become a very appealing candidate, even if your background lies elsewhere.

“If you don’t wake up in the morning excited to pick up where you left your work yesterday, you haven’t found your calling yet.”

Mike Wallace

Mistake No. 56

Not following your passion

It's a common scenario: You graduate from school or university with the whole world at your feet. You've got plenty of ambition in your heart and stars in your "career-focused" eyes. However, this can quickly become discouraged by overcrowded job markets, competitive interviews and less-than-satisfactory job roles. Finally, you discover you're in a job that pays the bills, but offers no other fulfilment.

Sometimes this course of action is unavoidable; we've all got to earn a living and we can't all secure our dream jobs in the blink of an eye. Tough roles and hard yards will always be necessary. On a more practical level, you simply might not have the luxury of waiting around for the perfect job to come along.

While there's nothing wrong with taking a job for these reasons, bear in mind that it can lead to further career frustration and even disappointment. You can find yourself on the wrong career track and even if you're lucky enough to climb the corporate ladder and earn more money, you'll find that your passions and your dreams have been left far behind.

Solution

Find your passion and stick to it!

Find your passion

The philosopher Confucius once said: "Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life."

What's your passion? What would you love to do in your career? These are the key questions you need to ask when planning your career path

and considering your career opportunities. If you are having trouble uncovering your passions, think about what you love doing on a day-to-day basis and what types of tasks you get the most enjoyment from.

Set goals

Once you know where your passions rest and what you want to do, set realistic goals to help you achieve your career dreams. This will help you keep your career path on the right track and you can refer back to your goals and plans when deciding whether a certain job will align with what you truly want.

Don't lose sight of the "big picture"

If you do end up having to take another role to pay the bills (which is fine), never lose sight of the big picture: find other ways to focus on your passions and work towards your objectives. At the same time, you should also be keeping your eyes open and networking with others who can help you land the type of job you want. If you see an opportunity to get your career back on track or take it in a desirable direction, then go for it.

"Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary."

Steve Jobs



Mistake No. 57

No work-life balance

We can become so busy during our working lives that we forget to make a life for ourselves outside of work. Yet with mounting professional pressure to perform on the job, more and more people are realising the real value of achieving a satisfactory work-life balance.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (www.cipd.co.uk) reports that 30% of sick leave can be attributed to stress, anxiety and depression – all of which are amplified by a person's inability to properly balance their work and personal life.

Along with higher salaries and increased company benefits, finding employment that offers a work-life balance is amongst one of the top desires for 47% of working Australians, according to Randstad. If your work and life is not adequately balanced, you can feel:

- As if you are going through the motions to get through the day.
- Completely exhausted at the end of the work day.
- As if the weekend can't get here soon enough.
- That you keep falling further and further behind with no end in sight.
- Like you are on a perpetual merry-go-round and can't wait to get off.

Create more time for “life” rather than “work”

All work and no play can make any professional tired and frustrated. How can you effectively manage your work-life load and realistically balance your work commitments and your outside life? There are no silver bullet solutions here, but making small lifestyle changes is a great way to incrementally bring more balance to your life.

Establish your priorities

If you are an extremely busy professional, you may not have time to achieve everything you want straight away. Instead, make a list of personal aspects in your life that you consider important and want to give more attention to. These can include: family, friends, hobbies, sports, travels and so on. This will help give you more focus and perspective in developing your work-life strategy.

Take control of your time

Getting into the right mindset and being proactive about creating a work-life balance plan is crucial. Instead of being frustrated with your lack of time, find ways to take control of your working week and put some boundaries in place to separate your “work” and “life” responsibilities.

For instance, you might start saying “no” to unreasonable demands or rejecting your feelings of guilt if you leave the office on time. If you do have any spare time at work (e.g. a short break), using this to focus on your personal activities can help change your mindset and take further control of your time.

Delegate tasks

If you are finding there are not enough hours in your day, consider delegating. Off-load some of your responsibilities or delegate specific tasks to other members of your team. Learning to delegate will help you work “smarter”, rather than “harder” and you can find it will balance out your time much more. If delegating is not possible, you may need to rework your priorities and assess what’s really achievable in your working hours.

Reduce or change your hours

Reducing your work hours, whether officially or unofficially, is the most ideal way to enhance your work-life balance. There are many different ways of doing this:

- Make a resolution to walk out of the office by a certain time every day (e.g. 7pm at latest).
- Initiate a rule that you will end the work week at a reasonable hour on Fridays (e.g. 5pm).
- Change your hours to start earlier and finish earlier, if feasible (or start later/finish later).
- Talk to your boss about cutting back your hours altogether if you feel this is an option.

Work from home

Many organisations give you the flexibility to work from home. This means that at the beginning and end of the day, you can use the time that you’d ordinarily spend commuting to focus on a personal commitment or activity. Working from home also gives you the opportunity to spend more time – like your lunch break – doing what you like.

Use your leave entitlement

The excuse that you just don’t have time to be away from work is a common one, yet it can hamper your work-life balance significantly – and it can mean your health, stress levels, happiness and perspective all suffer. Work out how many leave days you currently have available

and arrange for some leave time. If you have many days up your sleeve, taking these regularly throughout the year (rather than in one big hit) can improve your work-life balance as well.

Take a lunch break

Lunch breaks are a great time to implement a better work-life balance. You can utilise these to meet up with a partner or friend, eat out with a colleague or head to the gym. Consider how you can better use your lunch break for “non-work” activities.

If you eat lunch at your desk or skip lunch, you’ll need to break this habit and force yourself to take a break. Try putting “Lunch Break” in your diary so you know this time is reserved for you. Even if you only manage to take a lunch break once or twice a week, it’s a great start for a healthier work-life balance.

Keep it separated

As you progress through your career, resist the temptation to let work tasks and stress spill over into your personal life. Instead, be strict with yourself and reserve your time for family or personal activities.

If you do need to complete work in your personal time (such as on a weekend), set yourself a time limit and stick to it – and then ensure you spend the rest of the time on activities that you enjoy.

“I’ve learned that making a ‘living’ is not the same as making a ‘life’.”

Maya Angelou

Mistake No. 58

Not managing manager expectations

Today's corporate environments are hectic ones; employees often find themselves juggling several tasks and projects at the same time and trying to manage several responsibilities in one day. This can be especially challenging when you're in a job that would normally be split between several others or when you're reporting to multiple bosses.

In the workplace, managing the expectations of others is crucial in order to cope with your responsibilities. If you don't manage expectations, you will likely find yourself:

- Struggling to manage your workload.
- Unsure of which tasks to prioritise over others.
- Feeling generally flustered or “all over the place” at work.
- Performing poorly, since you don't understand what is expected of you.

Managing the expectations of your supervisors will help you stay organised at work, stand out as a top-notch employee and determine how to both meet and exceed expectations.

Solution

Be clear about what's expected of you

Managing your expectations while on the job is essentially about ensuring there is clarity around the tasks you are given.

Clarify your deadlines

In a situation where you're being approached with several different tasks, the first thing you'll need to do is clarify when each assignment needs to be completed.

- Enquire about any external deadlines that you, the team or the organisation may need to meet (e.g. "this report has to be with the client by 5pm on Friday").
- If there aren't any real deadlines, discuss what the purpose of the assignment is and how it will fit in with the other work that you've been asked to complete.
- If you've been told the task is not urgent, set your own deadlines to further assist in managing your time and your workload.

Once you know what the deadlines should be, it's also important to be clear with your manager/s on whether you can realistically get the work done in time. Take your current workload into account and don't be afraid to point out if you're already working on a project that is of higher priority or that has a more urgent deadline.

Clarify the details

Clear, open communication with your supervisor/s is a key element in managing expectations. Along with deadlines, it's important to understand:

- Exactly what you need to do and what is expected of you.
- What the goal of the project or task is.
- Who the target "audience" of the project is (e.g. is it an external client presentation or an internal meeting report?).
- If there is a particular colleague or team that you need to consult with on the project.
- How the manager or project leader envisions the finished task or what they consider to be a "successful" outcome.

These types of parameters will affect how you approach your assignment and also how the final "product" you come up with will look. It will also help you to prioritise your work.

Keep communication open

If your assignment is lengthy or complex, you may want to communicate on a regular basis with your supervisor or project manager about your progress. For instance, you could let them know where you are at with the project, what issues you are overcoming and what your next steps will be. This is especially true if you run into problems, if something else could keep you from meeting the deadline or if the parameters, details or expectations of the assignment need to change.

In general, the most important part of managing expectations is being clear on those expectations in the first place. Then, you'll be in a better position to honestly discuss and decide what you are realistically able to accomplish.

"Don't lower your expectations to meet your performance.
Raise your level of performance to meet your expectations.
Expect the best of yourself, and then do what is necessary
to make it a reality."

Ralph Marston

Turning your back on team management

Securing a managerial role or promotion can be a rewarding milestone in the progression of your career. It can mean greater responsibilities, higher remuneration packages and in many instances, it also means you'll have a team of employees to manage.

Turning your back on your team management responsibilities can be a huge career mistake. Most significantly, it can lead to poor team performance and productivity, which reflects badly on your own career, and it can also affect your credibility and reputation as a manager.

Why do executives fail to manage their teams?

Ignoring your team management duties can happen for a variety of reasons. From my many years in executive coaching, I've encountered attitudes and reasons such as:

- “I’m too busy to manage my team” or “I have other responsibilities that are more important”.
- “I’m not really that concerned with performance management” or “team management is not my thing”.
- “I trust my team to sort out their own issues, so they don’t need any management from me”.
- “I don’t care about individual performance, I’m only concerned with how the team works as a whole”.

Behaving under these assumptions can have dire consequences in the workplace and can impact day-to-day productivity, project results, communication and also individual and team motivation and dynamic. Remember, as the manager, you are also a *part* of the team – not just its leader.

Failing to supervise and guide your team can also mean you're ignoring the opportunity to cultivate your leadership, behavioural and communication skills, all of which can greatly hinder your professional development and suitability for promotions.

Solution

Become a proactive team manager

Make time for your team

As a manager, it's your responsibility – no matter how busy you are – to make time for team tasks. This means scheduling time in your calendar that is specifically related to your management duties. Regular team meetings can be beneficial in this respect, and you should also expect to spend a portion of your overall role and time on team responsibilities on an ongoing or frequent basis.

Listen to team and individual concerns

A great team manager is someone whose door is always open and who team members can rely on and trust. If your team or an individual in your team is experiencing problems, ensure you take time to listen to their concerns. Regardless of how trivial you feel the issues are, you should keep in mind that the team or person has escalated the problem to you because *they* feel it is important. You should respond and attempt to resolve the issue accordingly, even if it means dedicating more time to get the matter resolved.

Solve problems proactively

If you see your team experiencing problems, your employees will appreciate you much more if you step in, put on your managerial shoes and find ways to help them deal with the dilemma. Some things can be easily resolved on the spot (e.g. by shifting priorities, responsibilities, deadlines etc.), while other issues may take more time and effort.

Conduct reviews, set goals

Team and individual performance reviews should form a strong part of your overall management schedule. This needs to be the case even if your organisation does not have an official review policy or system in place.

Holding regular reviews and meetings with your team and employees will also allow you to set professional goals and objectives, which can benefit you and the organisation as a whole and which also serve to keep staff motivated and focused in their roles, while encouraging them to grow and expand their skill set.

This is also a great way to prevent underperformance issues from developing and means that if they do occur, you can deal with the problems promptly.

“Teamwork is so important that it is virtually impossible for you to reach the heights of your capabilities or make the money that you want without becoming very good at it.”

Brian Tracy

Accepting your role as the office doormat

In the office, we often strive to do as much as we can to help others out and assist our colleagues and managers, particularly when times are stressful or hectic. But being overly helpful and always saying “yes” in the workplace can quickly lead you to be cast as the office doormat.

Carly's office doormat dilemma

Carly R., recently commenced a project analyst role in a consulting firm, where she reported to several managers and also worked alongside various project coordinators. One coordinator, Jack, who had been with the company for years, asked Carly if she would be willing to assist with a few junior tasks. Since she was new, he explained that it would be a good way for her to learn the ropes, and eager to please, Carly agreed.

While Jack assigned some relevant tasks to Carly, he also began to delegate some of his menial duties to her. He asked her to file his personal expenses, type up his meeting notes and agendas and even do his photocopying. Soon, Carly began to realise that she was being treated like a “doormat.” However, when she tried to say “no” to Jack, he retaliated by telling everyone that she was lazy, unreliable and not a team player.

Are you an office doormat?

If you feel this way, you will likely find that:

- Others treat you like their personal assistant and frequently ask you or expect you to complete (often tedious) tasks for them, even though those tasks may be outside of your job scope.

- You have a heavy workload that consists of many duties that are not in your job description.
- Bosses and colleagues don't appreciate the work you do for them or respect your individual needs, role or workload.
- You feel taken for granted or undervalued in the workplace and that the work you are doing is not allowing you to utilise your main talents and skills.

Allowing people to continue to take advantage of you in the workplace can have a significantly detrimental effect on your career and your self-esteem. People like Jack can damage your reputation in the office and even in the wider industry, and it also means that your role will end up turning into something that does not benefit your career or competencies.

Solution

Put a stop to “doormat” treatment

If you are being treated like the office doormat, there are various steps you can take to put a stop to this kind of behaviour and earn the respect that you deserve in the workplace.

Set boundaries and say “no”

Saying “no” when others request or expect you to complete their work is the first step towards changing unfair behaviour in the office. Push back and say “no” if the task is beneath your job description, only benefits someone else or simply adds something unnecessary to your workload. Explain that you already have a full workload and that you need to focus on your actual responsibilities.

Tread carefully with your managers

You will essentially need to use your best judgment and discretion when it comes to accepting or refusing requests from your boss. If you

do want to help them out but feel like you don't have the time, try negotiating: ask for an extension (e.g. "I can't get it done today, but I can have it done by the end of the week") or request that they re-prioritise or reduce your current work so that you can complete this new task.

Take credit for the work you do

If you do complete work for others, make sure that they are appreciative, acknowledge your contributions and give you credit for your efforts. Being confident and assertive here is key – especially if others continue to try and walk all over you or take credit for your work. If you find that a specific colleague isn't grateful for your help, say "no" the next time they ask you to assist.

Speak to your boss if you're struggling

If the "doormat" situation continues or if your colleagues develop a negative opinion of you after you begin saying "no", discuss the issue with your boss. Elaborate on what is happening and explain that your job shouldn't involve doing someone else's menial work. A good boss should step in and ensure the situation doesn't continue. If your boss doesn't take the problem seriously, you can also try speaking to your HR department.

"Doormats get discarded once they are too dirty and worn. They are replaced. Don't be one! Learn to negotiate well."

Rhoberta Shaler

Mistake No. 61

Not having a career game plan

When a football team wants to move the ball down the field and score a point, they don't just run out onto the field and see what happens – they have a very specific, detailed plan that utilises the strengths and talents of each member, and that works to get the ball across the line.

This should be the same approach you use to think about your career – you should have a game plan in place so that you know what specific steps to take throughout your career in order to reach your goals and close the gap between the job you have now and your dream job in future.

Without a solid career game plan, you could easily:

- Lose sight of what's important to you and your career.
- Stray from your career path and end up in roles that don't reward you accordingly .
- Fail to achieve your career goals or make decisions that don't take you towards your objectives.
- Feel generally unmotivated or unhappy in your job or career.

Solution

Develop a career game plan

A career game plan is essential whether you are starting your career for the first time, making some adjustments to your goals or changing careers altogether. Below, I offer some critical advice on how to get started with your game plan – and ensure it will take you over the line!

Start with your career vision

What's your vision for your career as a whole? What's your dream job? Where do you want to be in 5, 10 or 15 years' time? A career vision is important in shaping your game plan. It will help you understand where you want to go and what you want to achieve in your career over the long-term.

Think about "concrete" goals

Your goals will also help give your game plan direction – and they'll provide you with something concrete to work towards so that you can gradually bring your career vision to life.

Think about your goals in relation to specific elements, such as specific job roles, role responsibilities, ideal remuneration packages, education and any other aspects that might be important to your life and career.

At this stage, it might also be useful to consider what "gaps" exist in your career experience and knowledge, and what you will have to do to fulfil those gaps and take a closer step towards your goal/s.

Create timelines

Now that you have a clearer idea of your vision and goals, map out some "timelines" or deadlines that can give you a bigger picture of how your career path will look. What do you want to achieve in the next 2 years? Or 10 years? When you look at your goals, at what time your life do you see yourself achieving them? This will ensure you keep your career on track in a timely way and don't stray from your objectives.

Get help from a coach or mentor

Coaches and mentors can work with you to manage your career in significant and beneficial ways – and they can also help you develop or refine your career plan. A good coach will provide you with further tips and advice on what you will need to do to reach your dream job in future. They can also assist in determining the best pathway to take as your career journey changes and progresses.

Learn from other professionals

Whatever you want to do or achieve, there are no doubt other professionals in the industry who have come before you. Dedicate some time during your planning stage to connect with influential executives in your industry and find out what they did to get where they are, and how they did it.

These discussions can provide you with valuable insights and tips on how to shape your own career strategy and they can open your eyes to new ideas, training options or tactics that can also benefit you along the way.

“Don’t limit yourself. Many people limit themselves to what they think they can do. You can go as far as you mind lets you. What you believe, you can achieve.”

Mary Kay Ash

Mistake No. 62

Neglecting retirement plans

Many of us anticipate retiring in our mid-60s; some of us might wish to retire sooner, others later. Yet with the increasing costs of living in Australia, having only your superannuation and your pension as income after you retire may not be enough.

Planning for your retirement is essential in ensuring your quality of life after you finish working.

The longer you wait to start contributing to a retirement plan, the less money you will have when you are ready to retire.

A lack of funds as you reach retirement age can also mean having to delay your retirement or mean you'll need to continue working on a casual basis to support yourself, even after you officially retire. This can make living difficult and for some, it still may not be enough to remain financially stable. As a result, you may even have to sell your home or other assets in order to cover your expenses and debts.

Solution

Start a retirement plan now

A retirement plan is a necessity to ensure you'll be able to survive when you decide that you are finally ready to trade in your laptop for a set of golf clubs. So, how do you go about starting a retirement plan or ensuring your plan will have enough money to support you?

Start early

A large misconception is that retirement plans are only required for individuals who are within 10-20 years of retirement. But waiting until later in life to organise your plans can often mean it will be too late to accumulate the finances you need after you retire.

The earlier you start to save, the more secure your retirement plan and funds will be. Regardless of what stage of your career you are at, start considering your retirement needs now and also your goals later in life.



Define a retirement target

Setting aside a percentage of your earnings early in your career is a great way to save for retirement. You should set a retirement target goal by determining how much money you want to live on per year after you retire. You can also take your superannuation and pension into account. Once you have a monetary goal to aim for, you can decide what percentage of your income you need to be saving now to reach your target.

Take advantage of a super fund or retirement savings account (RSA)

Consult with a financial planner to make sure you get the most out of your superannuation or retirement savings. They will be able to advise what sort of account will be best for you and what your investment options are. In general, “growth” and “aggressive” funds are better for those whose retirement is far off, while “balanced” or “cash” funds are better if you’re planning to retire in the near future.

Finally, make sure you and your partner discuss your living expectations in retirement. What goals do you want to achieve after you retire? Will you downsize or move to a retirement community? What will your expenses be? Do you want to do any travelling?

Get started on your retirement plan now! Utilise a financial advisor to help you adjust your plans and goals as you move through your career.

“A simple way to make your money last longer is to watch your spending ... Do you want to splurge straight after retirement then spend 20 years living on bread and water?”

[Moneysmart.gov.au](https://moneysmart.gov.au)

No career portfolio

While a strong resume is crucial to your career success, many candidates overlook the need for a career portfolio. In today's competitive recruitment space, career portfolios can make up a significant part of your candidate value – and they're a fantastic way to demonstrate your capabilities and accomplishments to a prospective employer.

What is a career portfolio?

A career portfolio is a detailed collection of documents that support the claims you've made in your resume. While a resume is used to briefly convey your education, work history, professional skills, certifications and major accomplishments, a career portfolio expands those sections into multiple or larger documents that work to prove your professional abilities and give employers a more comprehensive view of your “career story.”

Career portfolios can serve a variety of different purposes. Some professionals use their portfolio to gain acceptance to universities or training programs. Others present their portfolios in job interviews or review sessions to help support their case for a promotion or increase in pay.

Because career portfolios have a wide range of different uses, they can vary in content and focus. Just as a resume for a young professional will place greater emphasis on education than a senior who has been working for 20 years, a career portfolio will also vary depending on your specific career experience and goals. Your portfolio will also grow and evolve as you continue to gain experience and education in the professional world.

Start compiling your career portfolio today

While there are few hard and fast rules in regards to the composition of a career portfolio, there are a few items that most portfolios will always contain:

- A resume or CV – both of these documents should contain relevant information about your work experience, education, qualifications and achievements.
- A cover letter that introduces your expertise and outlines your suitability for a position or organisation.
- Evidence of your work and achievements that support both your resume/CV statements and your career goals.
- Copies of your education certificates or similar.
- Evidence of membership of professional organisations.
- A list of references to speak on your behalf – can also include written references.



The content of all these elements – particularly for samples of work – will depend exclusively on your job and career, and your purpose in putting the portfolio together. For instance, a journalist might include samples of their articles, an engineer may include designs or product reports he has written, and a project manager could include outlines of the projects he or she has successfully led in the past.

Regardless of your field, it's important for every professional to have these documents assembled into a career portfolio as soon as you commence your career. If you are asked to present a portfolio of your work, whether by a prospective employer or your current company, it also means you won't be scrambling to put together the information.

Going into an interview or review with a portfolio also illustrates your professionalism, your eagerness for the role and your ability to sell yourself and your expertise in an organised and focused way.

"There are four ways, and only four ways, in which we have contact with the world. We are evaluated and classified by these four contacts: what we do, how we look, what we say, and how we say it."

Dale Carnegie

Mistake No. 64

Overlooking the hidden job market

If you are searching for a new job or have been looking for some time, you probably have a list of places that you search on a regular basis. This can include job posting websites like Seek or MyCareer, the newspaper, trade publications or journals or even recruiter websites.

What you might not know, however, is that many of the jobs which become available – and which you could be suitable for – never make it to any of these destinations. As such, there may be many opportunities opening up and being filled within your specific field of expertise that you are never even aware of.

This is known as the “hidden job market.” Your job searching success – and your greater career – may depend on your ability to tap into this market and apply for the opportunities that are available there. The good news is that with a little effort and persistence, the hidden job market can be uncovered – it doesn’t have to be completely mysterious!

Solution

Network to tap into the hidden job market

Tapping into the hidden job market fundamentally comes down to networking. When someone refers to the “hidden job market”, they are often talking about jobs that they know about via “word of mouth” or positions that are being filled by organisations or recruiters who utilise

their network of contacts in order to find a quality candidate (rather than advertising and culling, etc.).

How does the hidden job market work? Simply put, a hiring manager or search consultant will usually put out the word to associates and connections that they are looking for a new employee. Those connections will either refer someone for the job or send on the job information to *their* connections (and so on). Along the way, any professional who believes they are qualified for the role can then get directly in touch with the hiring manager.

Gaining access to hidden jobs

The key to tapping into the hidden job market is to extend your network as much as possible and make contact with people in your field or industry who can connect you with great roles. The more relevant connections you make, the more your chances of discovering these “hidden” positions will grow.

Networking well

Thanks to the power of the Internet and social media, it is easier than ever to build a network of connections. Reaching out to your previous business contacts is a great place to start or to ask for introductions to others. You can also network by joining professional groups, attending conferences and events or conducting other self-marketing activities.

Depending on your situation, you can choose to tell your connections that you are actively looking for work, if you feel it’s safe to do so; if you are trying to keep your job search under wraps, be very wary of promoting this to someone you don’t fully trust.

Give and take

One additional way to make the hidden job market work for you is to provide value to your network as much as you can; if they’re helping you with employment, you should also assist them in a variety of ways. You can share information with them that you think they will be interested in, let them know of opportunities you hear about yourself or keep in

touch with them about attendance at industry events. As long as you genuinely provide value when you can (without turning into a pest), they will be much more motivated to help you in return.

“First, make networking a habit, not something you do only when you need a job. By including this practice in your normal routine, you’ll automatically increase your chances of hearing about opportunities.”

Nancy Collamer, *Forbes Magazine*

Jumping into a headhunter arrangement

The use of headhunters is somewhat of a divided topic in the job searching world. Some job seekers swear by the benefits that headhunters can bring, while others won't go anywhere near them. The truth – in my opinion – can be found somewhere in between. Headhunters are not the perfect solution for every job search, but they can be useful when employed correctly.

Benefits of working with a headhunter

If you are struggling to find a senior or executive role or if you have your heart set on a particular position or employer, working with a headhunter can have many advantages:

- Headhunters will often have valuable connections, meaning they can open doors to executive positions and be privy to opportunities at certain companies.
- They can also specialise in particular fields, meaning that you have the opportunity to work with someone who fully understands your industry and your individual expertise and value.
- Headhunters can make your search more successful by making specific suggestions on how to improve your resume, portfolio or general case; they can also give you insightful information about employers in preparation for interviews and meetings.
- Some organisations also prefer to exclusively use executives firms and headhunters, so working with a headhunter may be the only way to secure a position with the company.

Disadvantages of working with a headhunter

It is important to understand that working with a headhunter during your job search may not always be the best way forward.

- Like recruiters, headhunters predominantly work to serve organisations. While their best interests are in pairing quality candidates with good positions, the employer is still their client, not you.
- Another potential downside is the cost associated with using a headhunter. Since headhunters make a commission from placing candidates, some companies may be reluctant to use them, or may offer less money to the candidate (i.e. you) to make up for the headhunter's commission.
- Since recruiters typically have a roster of multiple job seekers they're working with, it may be difficult getting a high level of attention from them; you may also have to be patient while they try to match you to one of their clients.

Solution

Conduct due diligence before partnering with a headhunter

As with any career-related decision, you should weigh up the pros and cons of working with a headhunter to determine if their services are going to be a good fit for your needs. Different headhunters will also have different ways of conducting business and working with candidates, so you will need to determine if this will be right for you.

- If you are considering the services of a specific headhunter, make sure you investigate how they work, what placement methods they use and what they are offering to do for you; ask them for a detailed description of their services and find out how they will go about job searching on your behalf, and what their terms and conditions are.

- Headhunters may also require payment by job seekers themselves, so find out how they are compensated; if they do ask for payment, consider this carefully – are their services worth the investment? Will your money be wasted if they don't find you a role or if you could track down the same job leads on your own?
- Some headhunters can also be pushy and manipulative, so do your homework before you enter into an agreement with them; don't let them force you into a job that you don't want or that you're not ready for.

“Think of a headhunter as a gate keeper to not only one door you've just had a quick glance at, but to multiple ones you don't even know of and that may open in the future.”

Jorg Stegemann

Mistake No. 66

Resigning in the heat of the moment

Corporate workplaces can sometimes be fraught with debate, conflict, tension and stress – and all of these can lead even the most professional of workers to resign in the heat of the moment.

Madeline P, a network control specialist in Brisbane, flipped out when her supervisor changed her working hours from day shift to night shift without warning. With an elderly parent to care for, this was a problematic arrangement for Madeline. When the supervisor refused to budge on her decision, Madeline said, “That’s it! I quit!” Two days later, when new care-giving arrangements had been made, Madeline realised that she needed her job to support herself and her parent, and tried to rescind her resignation.

If you resign in the heat of the moment, without considering the consequences, it can be very difficult and even impossible to rescind your resignation. You may find, in rare circumstances, that your employer can be understanding of your situation; but they are also under no obligation to rehire you or even listen to your case to withdraw your resignation.

Solution

Act quickly on your “heat of the moment” resignation

If you do resign in the heat of the moment, you essentially have two courses of action to choose from: you can either try to withdraw your

resignation or you can face the consequences of your actions and begin searching for a new role.

Rescinding your resignation

You cannot rescind or withdraw your resignation (and resume your employment) without agreement from your employer. However, that doesn't necessarily mean that your managers won't consider discussing the issue with you. If you have unwisely resigned in the heat of the moment and wish to retract your decision, you must act immediately.

- If you resigned verbally, organise a time to talk to your manager about what happened. You can explain that you overreacted due to mitigating circumstances and that you made a hasty decision that was an error. Hopefully, your manager will understand your position and give you a second chance.
- If your supervisor does not accept your reasoning or if you resigned in writing, you can compose a letter rescinding your resignation and request that you be reinstated in your position. It is important to be honest and contrite here. If you are a valuable employee, the company may decide that losing you and replacing you will be too much of a risk and they will agree to re-employ you.
- If you have any doubts about whether your verbal resignation is legally effective (depending on the various circumstances involved and the law), you should consult a lawyer before communicating with your employer; otherwise, you may end up admitting that you actually resigned (whether verbally or in a letter), which can then legally place your position in jeopardy.

Keep in mind that resigning in the heat of the moment can have disastrous consequences. Even if you succeed in getting your job back, it may take a lot of time and effort to earn back the trust of your supervisor and coworkers.

Moving on

If you decide not to withdraw your resignation or if your attempts to rescind are unsuccessful, you may need to move on and begin searching for a new position immediately. You will need to dedicate some time at this stage to craft your explanation as to why you resigned from your previous role.

“For an employee, resigning in the heat of the moment might seem like the only possible way of expressing your frustration but once you’ve left the office and cooled down, you may feel differently.”

Job Justice

Resigning without another job lined up

There are a number of reasons why you might choose to leave a job voluntarily: you might be unhappy in your role, you may not get along well with your boss or coworkers or you simply may wish to take your career in another direction. However, it can be very risky to resign from your role without having another job to go to.

Resigning without a new job

There are many reasons why resigning from your job – without having a new one lined up – can have a negative effect on your situation and career:

- It may place you in a financially precarious position, especially if you cannot find employment or income in the near future.
- You may not be able to find a new job quickly, especially in today's recovering job market, which can cause you significant strife and also leave a gap in your resume.
- If you do run into financial difficulties, you may be forced to accept a role that may not be beneficial to your career goals and direction.
- Some employers can also be reluctant to hire someone currently unemployed, regardless of why they left their previous role. A hiring manager may be worried about how unemployment may have affected your skills and knowledge – especially after a long stretch – or they may be concerned because you made a “short-sighted” or poor decision by leaving your last role.
- Employers can also be suspicious of professionals who resign from their roles without a believable reason; they might assume that you left on poor terms, that you are lying about why you left the company or that you could not cope with the pressure of the job.

Rethink and revise your situation

If you haven't yet found a new job, but feel like you are unable to stick it out in your current position, there are some steps you can take to help you cope with the situation.

Consider changing your responsibilities

If you are bored, unhappy or disillusioned with your role, you could try talking to your boss to see if your responsibilities or duties could be improved. You will need to handle the discussion carefully and you should avoid telling your manager that you want to leave. Instead, focus on how you can make your current job more rewarding, challenging and relevant to your career objectives.

A simple change in job scope can fuel your motivation and enthusiasm for the job and it can allow you to find ways to utilise your key skills and strengths. As a result, you may decide to rethink your planned resignation.

Prepare financially

If you do decide that you still want to resign from your role without having a new one ready, you will need to ensure that you can take care of yourself (and your family) financially. In the current job market, it could take at least several months or more to find a new position, so you need to make sure you can cover yourself while you are searching for a job.

Find other ways to grow your career

If you do resign, it's recommended that you undertake a new activity that can demonstrate you are continuing to develop and refine your skills. This could involve completing a training course, partaking in an internship or carrying out some volunteer work. This will help reassure potential employers by showing them that you've been using your time

between jobs productively and that you're committed to continually enhancing your skills and experience.

Gain perspective first

If you want to resign from your role, but are unsure what you want to do next, you could also consider taking some leave to help you gain perspective on your situation. At this point, it could also be beneficial to consider investing in a career coach who will help you determine what you want from your career.

"It's like Forrest Gump said, 'Life is like a box of chocolates'. Your career is like a box of chocolates – you never know what you're going to get. But everything you get is going to teach you something along the way and make you the person you are today. That's the exciting part – it's an adventure in itself."

Nick Carter

Mismanaging holiday announcements when job interviewing

It's no secret that all work and no play can make any professional a dull worker. Taking regular holidays and work "breaks" is vital in ensuring you stay energised, motivated and focused throughout the entirety of your career journey.

Sometimes, however, timing can be a little off – and holidays can get in the way of your career plan. As a result, you may find yourself in a situation where you are close to securing a new job, but you also have a holiday coming up in the next few weeks or months.

Holiday blunders

When it comes to the job search and interview process, I've seen many candidates make various errors in the way they manage or announce their holiday plans. Some candidates blurt out their plans too early, potentially harming their chances of securing the role. Others wait until the last minute, surprising the employer and tarnishing their reliability. I've also seen candidates cancel their holiday plans outright, only to lose the role at the last minute or decide that it's not right for them.

If you do have a holiday in the works, how do you break this to an employer, especially if they're keen on hiring you for the role?

Gauge when to address your holiday plans

Knowing when to disclose your holiday plans to a potential employer will depend on the nature of the opportunity you are chasing, the length of your trip and also your own priorities and goals.

How urgent is the role?

Some positions will always be more urgent than others. Some organisations might require the candidate to start on a certain date, while others will be happy to wait a month or even more for you to begin. You'll need to inquire and use your best judgement to gauge how urgent the role is and how your holiday might (or might not) affect the company's own plans and operations.

- If the role is urgent, you might need to disclose your holiday plans straight away and ask the employer if they would still be willing to consider you. If you are keen on the role and fear you might miss out, you could offer to shorten your holiday or move it to a later date (or cancel it, if you feel comfortable doing so).
- In other circumstances, if you turn out to be a great candidate and the job isn't urgent, the employer may be happy to wait for you to take your trip – in many cases, organisations will be more concerned with securing a quality candidate, rather than meeting a deadline.

When should you disclose?

If you are applying for a position that you discover isn't urgent or reliant on a particular deadline, you'll also need to decide when to disclose your trip plans.

- If you are only taking a short holiday (i.e. 2 weeks or less), the best time to announce your plans is after you are offered the role. You can bring up your time away and incorporate your absence

into your negotiations; in most circumstances, 1–2 week trips won't make a huge difference to the organisation .

- If you are taking a longer holiday, it may be in your best interests to discuss your plans earlier on in the interview process (e.g. after the first or second interviews). If you leave it too late to disclose, the employer may feel that you have wasted their time.
- If you are asked directly by the interviewer whether you have any holidays organised, it is always best to be upfront and honest about your plans. If they want you, they will work around your holiday plans.

"Vacations have the potential to break into the stress cycle. We emerge from a successful vacation feeling ready to take on the world again. We gain perspective on our problems, get to relax with our families and friends, and get a break from our usual routines."

Susan Krauss Whitbourne

Mistake No. 69

“What’s in it for me?”

Have you ever been asked to do something at work and thought, “What’s in it for me?”

This kind of thinking can be common in the workplace, especially when your goal is to progress your own career as much as possible. However, these types of narrow-minded attitudes can also be quite damaging to your career in the long-term. Thinking only of your own benefits can:

- Affect your relationships with your colleagues and superiors, and breed distrust.
- Harm your reputation as a team player.

Create an image for yourself as someone who is only out for themselves and who doesn’t care about the interests of the organisation or of others.

Solution

Change your mindset

Even if you can’t see what’s in it for you, it’s important to participate in activities that are in the best interests of the organisation. By being a team-player you will enhance your reputation as a dependable team-mate and a company-focused employee.

Final tips

Whenever you find yourself in the workplace and wondering “what’s in it for me?” consider asking yourself these questions instead:

- What can I do to contribute more to the team or organisation?
- How will this task or project allow me to utilise my talents, competencies and strengths?

- Are there any new skills or capabilities that I can develop by participating in this project?
- What relationships will benefit from my participation in this task?
- How will the success of this task or project also contribute to my own success and achievements as a professional?

“Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.”

Andrew Carnegie

Mistake No. 70

Not identifying career opportunities

In order to keep your career moving forward and one day end up securing your ideal job, you need to be ready to take advantage of any new opportunity that might come your way.

If you miss a key opportunity, it can stagnate your career growth and even harm your chances of developing your expertise within the workplace or industry. But great opportunities don't always land straight in your lap, nor are they always easy to identify.



Learn to recognise your opportunities

The key to making the most of your opportunities is to be on the alert and make a habit of actively searching for opportunities that can benefit your career. By being aware of what you want and what opportunities might be available, you can figure out how to recognise the opportunities that can progress your career.

Think outside the square

One of the first steps in recognising any opportunity is to think outside your comfort zone and go beyond your expectations about what a good opportunity would look like.

For example, if you're only set on finding a high salaried job within a large company, you might miss out on the chance to take advantage of another great opportunity with a smaller organisation or you might overlook the potential of starting your own business with a colleague.

As I mentioned above, opportunities aren't always obvious. Instead, keep your greater end-goals in mind and consider what opportunities or occasions could help take you in that direction.

Understand when a risk is an opportunity

Taking risks is an important part of finding success and as many successful entrepreneurs will tell you, most great opportunities aren't realised on the first attempt, but rather as the perfected evolution of previous failures.

Seek out or create opportunity

Like a dream job, opportunities also won't always arise on their own; sometimes, you have to seek them out. The best way to create your own opportunities is to stay in touch with your contacts and connections.

Talking to your connections, colleagues and even your friends can reveal multiple opportunities that you can then leverage to your advantage. Even announcing that you're interested in a promotion to your connections can help uncover or fuel developing opportunities.

"What is the difference between an obstacle and an opportunity? Our attitude toward it. Every opportunity has a difficulty, and every difficulty has an opportunity."

J. Sidlow Baxter

Ignoring the need for an MBA

In today's fluctuating economy and tough recruitment space, candidates must enhance their skills as much as possible in order to remain competitive. While studying around corporate work may seem impossible, completing a Master of Business Administration can put you at an incredible advantage over other candidates and it can accelerate your career significantly in the business world.

Erin's MBA mistake

Erin S. was a business executive who performed exceptionally well in her role, but who had never bothered with an MBA, despite encouragement from her managers and colleagues. Erin didn't want to study and felt that an MBA wouldn't be worth her time or investment.

After a few years, Erin realised that she couldn't continue to move up in her company without an MBA. So, she decided to begin looking for a more senior role with another organisation. However, when she began researching the positions available, she saw that almost all of them preferred the candidate to possess an MBA.

Erin understood that she had no choice but to go and complete the degree, but realised that if she did so, her career plans would also need to be put on hold for the next 5 years.



Solution

Incorporate an MBA into your career strategy

Depending on your field and industry, completing an MBA can be extremely beneficial – and in some situations, it will be a mandatory qualification if you want to progress within an organisation, apply for promotions or secure other higher level executive roles.

But in addition to advancing your career, why else should you bother with an MBA degree?

Higher earning potential

Holding an MBA degree can greatly increase the remuneration and compensation you receive over the life of your career; in short, if you have an MBA, you can often demand a higher salary. Even when factoring in the fees and expenses related to the tuition, you will often find that the investment can pay off in the long run, simply because you'll be entitled to much higher financial rewards.

Great impression on employers

An MBA can be an excellent qualification to include on your resume (even if you are still in the midst of completing it). MBAs can be very tough degrees to undertake, and completing one demonstrates to an employer that you are disciplined, passionate and dedicated to your career progression and growth in the industry.

Increasing your knowledge

While an MBA is highly advantageous, it shouldn't just be seen as a means to an end. MBA degrees provide you with brilliant ways to expand your business knowledge and insight, allowing you to cultivate your skills and learn about valuable management philosophies and strategic practices that can benefit you in your long-term career.

Enhanced work experience

Many MBA courses will also require you to complete a practical component in order to qualify for the degree. This can have numerous benefits, since you'll be able to apply your education and learned knowledge from the course to "real world" environments and practical situations. If feasible, you may be able to complete the practical section of the degree within your current company – which is also a wonderful way to enhance your on-the-job experience.

Overall, an MBA can make you a better businessperson and a more innovative leader, providing you with invaluable knowledge and experience that will accelerate your career long-term.

"The value is not so much in the job you get after the MBA, but in improving yourself and your capabilities ... I'd always had the goal of being general manager or CEO of a business at some stage and I saw the MBA as a way of helping me get there."

Chris Stathy, CEO of Fielders

Not understanding how you are perceived

Do you know how your boss sees you? What about your colleagues or other professionals you interact with in the industry – how do they perceive you? In the business world, perception can be everything.

Understanding perceptions

How people see you and think about you, whether as a professional or a person, can impact your working life, as well as your greater career. While positive perceptions should be welcomed, negative perceptions can have a detrimental effect on your job and image.

It can be difficult to know exactly what others around you are thinking, especially since everybody isn't always completely honest. However, there are a few signs that can indicate how others may perceive you in the workplace:

- **Not being asked to help with specific projects.** If there is a particular task that you are never asked to help with, it is possible that others feel you don't have the qualifications or knowledge to handle the task successfully.
- **Not being approached for casual conversation.** This doesn't necessarily mean that people don't like you – more often, it is an indication that they perceive you as being closed off, aloof or uninterested in casual chats. If you keep to yourself and are quiet by nature, others in the office may assume you want to keep it that way.
- **Being micromanaged, even for simple tasks.** Again, this could be a sign that your boss or coworkers may not trust your abilities to get the job done. They may hang around your desk or look over

your shoulder in order to approve of your work or make constant corrections.

- **Not being trusted with sensitive information.** This could be a clear signal that others feel you can't be trusted or relied upon, whether to keep information confidential or apply it to another aspect of the business. If you feel this is the case, you may want to think about what may have led others to make these assumptions.

Solution

Change the perception

Once you have a better understanding of how you are being perceived in the workplace, you can begin taking action to change those perceptions, especially if you feel they are unfair or unwarranted.

Discuss it with someone you trust

Discuss your concerns with someone you trust in the workplace and ask for honest feedback. This can help you gain a more objective perspective on the situation; a trusted colleague or friend can help you understand whether or not perceptions about you might be fair. You should be willing to acknowledge your shortcomings and show that you can handle any feedback or criticism without getting defensive.

Enact changes

If you feel like some of the perceptions about you in the office are unfair, it is up to you to be proactive and find ways to change them, even if you feel those perceptions are incorrect. Depending on the circumstances and the perceptions you've uncovered, you could:

- Ask to help on projects where your assistance hasn't been requested previously. You can use this opportunity to either prove to your boss and coworkers that you can handle the task or to show that you are willing to learn from others. Even performing well on one project can quickly change how you are viewed.

- Take it upon yourself to initiate conversations or social interactions around the office; you might find that coworkers will then be willing to talk to you, once they know you are open and friendly.
- Ask your manager or colleagues to give you more freedom and autonomy with certain tasks; you may also need to reassure them that you will ask for their help when you need it or you might want to set more milestones so that you can get feedback from them on a regular basis.
- Show that you can be trusted. The next time any delicate information comes your way, demonstrate to others that you can keep it confidential or treat the issue with sensitivity and respect.

People form perceptions quickly based on their initial interactions. If you think you have been judged prematurely in your work environment, take proactive steps to change those perceptions. You may find that your relationships will improve significantly because of this, as will your image and reputation in the workplace.

“You must take personal responsibility. You cannot change the circumstances, the seasons, or the wind, but you can change yourself. That is something you have charge of.”

Jim Rohn

Forgetting there is no “I” in team

In almost every job you’ll ever have, you’ll be required to work as part of a team. Whether teams are assembled to work together over the long-term or created to handle short projects, working successfully in a team environment is one of the most valuable skills any professional employee can have.

However, one of the biggest problems with teams is that everyone has their own personal interests to consider. Professionals can make big mistakes when it comes to weighing up their own personal interests against the team’s interests. Negative or “anti-team” thinking here can include ideas such as:

- “I’m better than others in this team and I want everyone to know it.”
- “I’m going to be competing with these people for promotions later on, so I need to outshine them.”
- “Being a part of this team is going to get me nowhere.”
- “I’m not going to be recognised for my individual input, so it’s not worth the effort.”

These assumptions can be disastrous in the workplace and they can create the image that you are selfish, self-centred and unwilling to work towards the goals of the company. This can see you overlooked for promotions, left out of important projects or simply alienated from the others around you.

How can you avoid taking on these perspectives and damaging your reputation in the workplace?

Recognise the benefits of being in a team

The most important thing to keep in mind is that team success will always reflect well on you – even if you don't get all the credit, you'll still appear successful as part of that team and will show that you are capable of working well with others. In addition:

- There is undoubtedly still much to achieve in the workplace, and being part of a team is an excellent way to learn from others and expand your knowledge in relation to certain projects, products or areas.
- Working as part of a team is also a brilliant way to cultivate your skills; behavioural skills like collaboration and communication, and more technical skills like project management, can all be refined in a team environment.
- Being part of a team also means you have the opportunity to enhance the relationships you have with your colleagues; many of your colleagues could be influential to your career in future (or even vice versa) and being in a creative team environment is a great way to kick-start these partnerships.

How to be a better team player

Once you have the right attitude and perspectives in place, you'll often find it is very rewarding to be included in a team. You will have other people to discuss ideas and share opinions with, and these same people can also take some of the pressure off your shoulders. You can even celebrate together when the project comes together successfully!

You can be a better team player by:

- Putting the team's needs and goals first – and even shelving your own interests in the short-term.
- Creating a positive environment in which everyone can thrive.

- Taking your team responsibilities seriously and prioritising your tasks accordingly.
- Treating other team members with respect and valuing their opinions.



“The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say ‘I.’ And that’s not because they have trained themselves not to say ‘I.’ They don’t think ‘I.’ They think ‘we’; they think ‘team.’ They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don’t sidestep it, but ‘we’ gets the credit ... This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done.”

Peter Drucker

Mistake No. 74

Working harder, not smarter

Ethan S., a business manager from Hobart, felt that by being hyper-productive and scurrying around taking phone calls, checking and responding to emails, attending meetings, working late at night and micro-managing his team, he was performing well on the job. He was certainly busy, but Ethan was not a *smart* professional and despite his hard work and long hours, he wasn't achieving the results that were expected of him.

Many professionals operate under the assumption that working long hours and spending a lot of time on assignments is the secret to success. Unfortunately, this mode of thinking can lead you to burn out quickly, experience high levels of stress, become unmotivated or struggle to continue because you feel like your hard work is not worth the reward.



Learn how to work smarter

By being more efficient and making the most of your time, you can be more productive without necessarily having to put in additional hours.

Prioritise what's crucial

In any role, there will be responsibilities that will always be more crucial than others. Making the best use of your time doesn't mean trying to fit as many things as possible into your working hours. Instead, it means simplifying and prioritising so that you can focus on more critical tasks in the time that you have.

Once you understand what's most important, you can concentrate on these tasks and structure your working day around them. Not only will this make you more productive, it will also help you become more organised – and less stressed.

Create daily to-do lists

When you get to work each morning, figure out what your priorities are and make a list of the specific tasks you want to complete that day. How you create this list doesn't matter; it can be written on paper or on your laptop or smartphone.

Be realistic with your to-do lists and keep your expectations reasonable. If you get too ambitious, you can find yourself overwhelmed and hence more frazzled, with less of an ability to work productively. Planning to-do lists in this way can also help you stay on top of deadlines and break your larger assignments down into more manageable parts, both of which are important in managing your day-to-day workload.

Delegate when necessary

Remember, you can't do everything in the workplace. If you're able to prioritise your responsibilities accurately, you should be able to gain a clearer view on the types of tasks you can delegate to others. This can

lighten your workload considerably; it's also a great chance to develop your managerial and communication skills.

Take breaks

It is also vital to stay focused while you are at work – the more focused you are, the more productive you will be. Taking regular breaks will help you in remaining fresh and alert. Limiting distractions (closing your door, sending your calls to voicemail) can also help improve the quality of your work. Minimise the clutter on your desk as much as you can, and be aware of things like personal phone calls and Internet use, which can cut into your time.

Set goals

A large part of working smarter, not harder, is learning how to stay motivated. Motivation is driven by passion, but also by the goals you set and how these relate to you on a personal level. If you find your motivation is waning, remind yourself of your goals and how your job or tasks are contributing to their achievement.

Being goal-oriented will also help you avoid taking on work that will not help you achieve your goals. If your current job doesn't seem to be getting you anywhere and you're having trouble motivating yourself, you may need to question whether you're in the right role or whether you need to rethink your career direction.

“Alternating periods of activity and rest is necessary to survive, let alone thrive. Capacity, interest, and mental endurance all wax and wane. Plan accordingly.”

Timothy Ferriss, *The 4-Hour Work Week*

Declining to pay it forward

When you reach the executive or leadership level of your career, it's worthwhile to acknowledge that there will likely have been at least one influential professional that helped you achieve success in your career. Was it a former boss or manager? A career coach or colleague? Or simply an executive who you connected with via your network?

"Paying it forward" (or as I sometimes like to say, "jobbing it forward") is a vital part of the business and recruitment life cycles in which seasoned executives and leaders can pass on their expertise and advice to younger professionals and candidates in their respective industries.

Those who don't pay it forward

I have come across executives and even up-and-coming leaders who refuse to "pay it forward" to others in their field. They either feel that it is not worth their time or they feel unrealistically threatened by encouraging those beneath them to grow. Some professionals can also feel that helping others is not necessary, since no one "helped them" with their achievements.

This kind of negative thinking is not the mark of a great leader and it can have dire consequences for any executive. It can greatly hamper your communication and business skills, ruin your relationships and networks and ultimately bring you down as a professional. Part of being a great leader is being willing to recognise and develop future talent and create strong succession plans, both in your organisation and the greater industry.

Job it forward and help others in their careers

Paying forward the help that others have given you in your past can be a wonderful way to grow and foster your leadership skills. Assisting other professionals in their career needs:

- Strengthens your reputation and shows you are a strong, passionate and caring leader who is invested in others' interests – people are much more keen to be associated with leaders who are open and supportive, than those who are self-serving, “closed off” or unhelpful.
- Expands your network and connects you with valuable professionals and aspiring executives who could one day work for you, with you or even above you and make a significant difference to your business or career.
- Provides you with the opportunity to practice and refine your leadership, coaching, mentoring and communication competencies, all of which are essential at the executive level.
- Gives you the motivation to continue your journey as a leader; helping other professionals nurture and expand their experience and skills can be very rewarding and it can help you maintain your drive and passion at the leadership level.
- Teaches you that you can still learn something new! While others may look up to you, never discount the fact that you can also learn from them; younger or less experienced candidates can share great insights and ideas that you might not have thought of at your level.

How can you pay it forward?

There are numerous ways in which you can “pay it forward” and help less-experienced professionals in your industry.

- **Respond to requests and questions.** If you receive requests from professionals in your industry (e.g. to connect on LinkedIn or other

social media sites) or questions asking for guidance, make time to respond and offer your advice and insight.

- **Become a coach or mentor.** Coaching and mentoring others in an official capacity is an exceptional way to help others achieve success and cultivate your leadership talents; it can also put you in touch with younger candidates who may be able to help you better understand emerging trends and fluctuations in your industry.
- **Find ways to share your expertise.** Participating in conferences, events, training courses and publishing papers and giving interviews are all great for imparting your expertise and wisdom to the wider community, while also refining your speaking and communication skills.

The key to paying it forward successfully is putting the needs of others ahead of your own. Always keep in mind that someone helped you grow and succeed and the more you can do this for others, the better leader you will become.

“Leaders don’t create followers, they create more leaders.”

Tom Peters

Mistake No. 76

Letting new job stress get the better of you

Starting a new job can be incredibly stressful, both emotionally and mentally (and sometimes even physically).

- There is a tendency to set expectations high because you don't want to disappoint, and there's a lot of pressure to perform well and achieve the results you promised in your interview.
- At the same time, you're also trying to learn as much as possible in the role and apply your new skills and knowledge to your day-to-day responsibilities.
- Some candidates can also be concerned about whether they have made the right decision in accepting the role and can be unsure about how the role will impact their long-term success.



Letting your new job stress get the better of you can reduce your ability to cope with your new tasks and it can also affect your confidence and self-esteem. In turn, this can affect the impression you create within the organisation and the way your colleagues and managers view you in the role.

Solution

Keep your stress in check

To truly manage new job stress, you must be comfortable in your ability to adapt to new settings and work with new people. Keeping your stress under control is important because it can affect your ability to function, learn, make decisions and even stay healthy. If you are overly stressed, you should take advantage of any opportunity to relieve your job stress.

Take it one day at a time

Trying to do too much too early on in your new role or attempting to make lots of quick decisions for the business can increase your stress and make you feel very overwhelmed. Instead of trying to do too much, focus on learning as much as possible in the early stages.

Draw on your confidence

Competent and confident people are able to draw upon their strengths, values and abilities to make contributions and achieve excellence – and also offset feelings of stress, anxiety or panic. While confidence often comes with experience, try to remain assured, calm and confident in all of your tasks and dealings. Even if you are uncertain about something, remaining confident can help you feel more in control.

Ask for assistance

If you are feeling particularly stressed or overwhelmed, make an effort to understand why and then ask for assistance. If there's something you don't understand, ask a colleague or manager to explain it to you. If your workload is a little too heavy, speak to your boss about reducing it while you get to know the ropes. Changing your situation in these ways can greatly reduce your stress in a new role.

Don't be a hero

While it's great to make a good impression, no one is expecting you to be a hero and work twenty hours a day when you're just starting out. If you're placing a lot of pressure on yourself, you may need to adjust your own mindset and expectations in order to manage your stress.

"The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential ... these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence."

Confucius

Mistake No. 77

Believing your own PR

Confidence in any profession is valuable. It can provide you with the skills you need to take on new challenges, overcome obstacles, stand behind your work and advance your career. However, there is a fine line between being confident, and being cocky.

While being proud of your accomplishments is important, believing too much of your own hype, so to speak, or becoming too caught up in your own rewards and achievements is a big mistake – and it can be a recipe for disaster. You can:

- Damage your humble or modest reputation.
- Force others in the industry to lose respect for you or view you as arrogant and condescending.
- Create the impression that you are “self-important” and self-serving, rather than someone who cares about your organisation or industry.

Solution

Remain grounded and realistic

If you are a professional who has seen a significant amount of success in your career, you will likely have received much praise along the way. You may have received various awards or commendations or been offered key opportunities where others haven't.

Regardless of how modestly you receiving these accolades, you need to be careful not to let it “go to your head” or inflate your self-esteem. Staying grounded and realistic is vital if you want to keep your career on track, reach your goals and remain professional.

How can you continue your success without letting your own hype affect your progress and reputation?

- Don't behave as if you're better than others in your workplace or industry; instead, treat others with value and respect, even when it comes to your competition.
- Don't lose sight of the smaller details; over-confidence can lead you to lose focus on the details as you once did. Tasks and challenges that used to be easy for you might suddenly not come so naturally and your performance may suffer as a result.
- Remain focused on your career; instead of dwelling extensively on your achievements, look for ways in which you can continue to grow and improve.
- Never stop learning or admitting that you've still got much to learn; no matter how much you've achieved, continuing your learning and education is essential in developing your career further.
- Work on connecting with others, not with yourself; no one enjoys working with someone who has too big of an opinion about themselves. By helping others and valuing their contributions, you will find it easier to develop business connections and influence your career growth and direction.

"Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all."

William Temple

Failing to network internally

In the job seeking world, networking is a vital function that can enhance your career success extensively. Other professionals and leaders in the industry can have a strong impact on your career progression, offering valuable advice and insight into your career path and even influencing your next opportunity or role.

While networking with professionals outside of your organisation is important, one common mistake that many professionals make is that they don't network internally. That is, they don't bother to create strong ties and connections with others in their own company.

The consequences of not bothering to network internally

Ignoring the need to build professional relationships within your organisation can be a huge oversight that can affect your career in undesirable ways. It can mean:

- Decreased opportunities and promotions internally.
- Lack of support if you wish to progress your career or expand your responsibilities and knowledge.
- Poor workplace relationships overall, which can negatively impact your productivity, performance and job satisfaction.
- Less recognition from leadership or other managers in the workplace, meaning you can struggle to stand out against other employees.

Create strong relationships in the workplace

As a professional, you should be initiating and fostering strong business relationships the moment you enter the workforce or begin employment at a new company.

If you are starting a new role or if you haven't bothered to network within your organisation to date, here are some great tips on how to get started:

Introduce yourself

If you are starting a role or if there are people in your organisation who you don't know, make the effort to introduce yourself. You can either do this formally (e.g. by organising meetings) or informally, by simply speaking up the next time you see someone you haven't spoken to before or don't know well. This is a great way to kick-start your new relationships and begin your networking endeavours.

Be open and friendly

Many great connections in the workplace can be made by simply being open and friendly towards others. While you are not at work to socialise extensively, opening yourself up to conversations, chats and even lunches or coffees (within reason) can be beneficial in starting the networking process. A quick, casual chat in a hallway or kitchen, for example, can make it much easier to connect over a business matter later on. Through being open, you'll find some great contacts moving into your circles and vice versa.

Volunteer

Volunteering for various projects and team tasks on top of your usual responsibilities can be very rewarding and is also a great way to meet others in the workplace who you wouldn't ordinarily interact with in your day-to-day duties. If volunteer opportunities arise, whether they are business related (e.g. working on a special project) or more social (e.g. organising a charity day or company event), consider taking these on in order to expand your internal network.

Cultivate the relationships that matter

Good networking is about investing more time and effort into the relationships and connections that can help fuel your career direction and growth. This doesn't mean being superficial, shallow or ignoring those who can't help you, but it's important to realise that you can't spend time with everyone. Instead, single out the relationships that matter most to you and work on nurturing those in a professional way.

"To be successful, you have to be able to relate to people; they have to be satisfied with your personality to be able to do business with you and to build a relationship with mutual trust."

George Ross

Not caring about volunteering

A fairly common mistake I come across in the recruitment industry is the notion that volunteer work is ultimately non-essential to a career. Many professionals assume that volunteering is a “feel good” task that can be taken on if time permits or they assume that volunteering is simply not worth the effort.

Yet while most professionals are busy individuals with hectic schedules, making time to volunteer for a non-profit organisation or charity can bring many personal and professional rewards.

Benefits of volunteering

Busy professionals, regardless of their position and their respective careers, should consider helping others by volunteering for non-profit organisations or charities. In addition to doing work that helps others, volunteering also brings benefits to the volunteering professional:

- It's a fantastic achievement to add to your resume; potential employers tend to look favourably on professional candidates who utilise their skills and knowledge in a volunteer role.
- It can demonstrate that you are invested in your wider community as a professional and that you are adamant about following through on your passions and interests.
- It's a wonderful way to grow your network and contacts; working with a non-profit organisation provides excellent opportunities to interact with like-minded colleagues, make new professional contacts and cultivate relationships that can benefit your career.
- It's a great environment in which to hone your professional and personal skills, as well as increase your knowledge about how other businesses (and NFP organisations) operate.

Make time for volunteering throughout your career

A non-profit organisation can be a corporation, partnership, individual effort, association or foundation (a trusteeship with a founder). You can find ways to volunteer by:

- Offering your professional services and skills to a not-for-profit organisation; while you may not be able to do this full-time, even assisting once a month can be beneficial for both parties; alternatively, you could also consider using your holiday or leave time to work for an NFP.
- Looking for individual volunteering opportunities in your local area; common institutions that often require volunteers include churches, community centres, political offices, hospitals and charity offices.
- Starting a volunteer program through your own company; you might like to partner with a specific not-for-profit or charity or hold regular volunteer events where you assist a new organisation each month, for example.
- Creating a team or group (whether through friends or professional colleagues) who can volunteer at a particular charity event that might only be held once per year (e.g. sporting events, picnics, festivals etc.).

"Service to a just cause rewards the worker with more real happiness and satisfaction than any other venture of life."

Carrie Chapman Catt

Not taking your holidays

Why is it that so many professionals don't like to use their allotted holiday or leave time?

One reason could be the fear of what might happen at work while we're gone. Many of us worry about our work not being completed or about problems that might arise while we're away. This is often accompanied by the dread of finding emails or paperwork piled up a mile high when we get back.

In short, people often skip holidays because they're afraid the office will fall apart in their absence. They also fear having to fix things when they get back or potentially being blamed for things that might've gone wrong in their absence.

Alternatively, others can be concerned that if they leave, they might not be missed at all. They worry that if everything goes smoothly while they are away, they may be considered expendable, since the company can seemingly get by without them. Many candidates want to appear indispensable and they often feel that remaining at work will make them look dedicated and important.

Reward yourself with leave

Whatever your reasons or fears for ignoring your leave time, you should acknowledge that taking time away from work to refresh and rejuvenate your energy is essential. It can help maintain your mental and physical wellbeing and it can also prevent you from burning out or becoming run down due to stress and fatigue.

All of this can lead to better productivity in the office, higher levels of job satisfaction and an overall better quality of life, despite how busy you are.

When it comes to leave time, consider your schedule, workload and options. You can:

- Take a long period of time off (e.g. 4 weeks), if your company will let you.
- Take additional days off here and there, perhaps to give yourself a mid-week break or create a long weekend.
- Reward yourself at the end of a big project by organising some time off.
- Take advantage of “down time” in the office to use your leave, meaning you can go away without having to worry about deadlines or workloads when you get back.

Remember, you're always going to be busy throughout the entirety of your career, but knowing when to take breaks and restore your energy is key for career happiness!

“To many people holidays are not voyages of discovery, but a ritual of reassurance.”

Phillip Adams

Leaving in the midst of a company merger

The upheaval caused by company mergers and acquisitions can affect everyone within the two companies, from leaders and directors to lower level employees. Even when they run smoothly, mergers can cause stress, tension, conflict and clashes in personalities and cultures, especially when teams and departments are restructured or combined.

As an employee, if you are in the midst of a company merger, your biggest concern may be job stability. Even if you don't lose your job immediately, further restructuring in the months ahead can mean there is a danger of being let go, especially if you suspect your role or function will become redundant as the new company devises a new structure and/or heads in a new direction.

Yet in the early stages of a merger, it can be a mistake to assume the worst and resign straight away. It is often difficult to immediately understand how your role will be impacted by the merger (if at all) and on top of this, you may find that other rewarding career opportunities might also present themselves once the companies come together.

Hang tight – don't leave too soon

When a merger takes place, you should resist the urge to “jump ship” too early or resign before you fully assess the possibilities available. Why should you see a merger out before you decide to quit?

- **Career development.** Merging with a new company can give you the opportunity to move into a new position, secure a promotion or simply take on new responsibilities that can contribute to your career experience, knowledge and portfolio.
- **Long-term stability.** Mergers can also help smaller businesses grow and thrive in a way that wasn't previously possible and this can also mean better long-term stability for your job. If you can make it through the short-term turmoil, you may end up in a better position in terms of your greater career.
- **Positive benefits.** Besides being in a better position in the market, mergers can bring many positive changes for your company and position. A more profitable company can provide better pay and benefits, as well as better equipment and more resources on the job. If the company has become more streamlined or otherwise changed its management structure, you could also find you have much more support in your role, particularly if a difficult boss or coworker has been let go. There may also be a broader and positive change in the culture, especially longer term.

“New job opportunities loom in the distance, with a chance of promotions or different jobs to those employees who are skilled and take advantage of the change.”

Laurie Reeves, Chron.com

Not reading the writing on the wall

Hannah T., a sales manager in Brisbane, had a vague sense that things around the office were off kilter. First, there was a restructuring of duties that gave her fewer projects and staff to supervise. Even when the company started laying off people, Hannah naively believed that upper management would not be affected. Needless to say, she was quite surprised when she was let go a few weeks later.

Are you reading the writing on the wall?

Rarely does a firing or redundancy come truly out of nowhere. “Reading the writing on the wall” means being aware of changes in your company and understanding what may be about to happen in relation to your job. Usually, there are signs that a person’s job is in jeopardy, even if the outcome may take weeks or months to come to fruition. It’s important for you to recognise these signs so that you can take action – whether to discuss it further with a superior or begin looking for other employment.

If you are able to spot these signs as early as possible, it will make it easier for you to find a new position, since you won’t have to explain why you were let go – and you may even be able to go out on your own terms.

Look for signs that your job may be at risk

While you won't want to jump to conclusions every time management makes a change, you need to be aware of what is happening in your workplace – not only in your department, but company-wide.

Recognising the warning signs that tell you your exit could be imminent will give you the opportunity to try and salvage your job, look elsewhere for work, and be financially and psychologically prepared for the inevitable.

Taking away responsibilities

One of the first signs that your time might be drawing short is if management start taking away certain tasks and responsibilities for no reason. If you notice that your responsibilities are becoming more menial and less crucial to the company's operations, it could be because they have come to decide that you are expendable and are preparing your termination.

If this is happening to you, the best course of action might be to confront your manager and express your concern.

Asking you to train someone else

If your managers ask that you teach someone else how to perform some of the functions of your job, it could be another clear sign that you may be fired in the near future. Basically, they want you to train your replacement before they send you out the door. This isn't fair, but it does happen. If you have been asked to train an employee that you think might be your replacement, you will have to decide if this is acceptable to you (perhaps while you search for a new job) or if you want to put your foot down and confront your boss regarding the situation.

Providing negative performance feedback

If you have received constant negative feedback from your superiors, it may be an indicator that your job is in jeopardy, simply because they don't feel you are suitable for the role. This can especially be the case if you are still on probation.

If you're up for a performance review, withholding your salary increases, bonuses or other benefits because of performance issues could also be a sign that you will soon be let go.

Again, you will need to decide if you want to speak up and risk the consequences or remain quiet and start your search for another position.

"The advantage of sensing you're on the cut list: using that extra time to try and improve your standing with the guys in charge. If nothing else, knowing you're getting canned will give you time to set aside your anger and handle the firing professionally, upping your chances for a future recommendation."

Rachael Schultz

Using company email and computer systems inappropriately

Whether you work in a small, medium or large organisation, you will often find that companies utilise their own networks and domains for both internal and external communication. While having an internal system makes communication simpler and creates professionalism and unity within the organisation, employees should remember to use all systems in a professional manner.

Many employees in the past have been fired for misusing company email or computer systems. As an employee, it is crucial for you to understand what kinds of online behaviours are acceptable in the workplace so that you can minimise your chances of breaking company policy and placing your role at risk.

Problems when using company email and computer systems for personal purposes

Excessive personal use of company networks and email systems can lead to a variety of problems such as:

- Exchanging of sensitive or confidential information.
- Exchanging of material that is inappropriate or unethical.
- Potential security breaches and vulnerability to viruses, spyware and hacking when downloading multimedia, audio, and other applications.
- Copyright infringement liabilities if material is accessed or downloaded that is not licensed to you or the company.

- Misuse or abuse of company bandwidth for personal purposes, which both costs the organisation money and can jeopardise your job.

All of these issues can lead to serious consequences in the workplace, and in some instances can mean damaging your professional credibility or even losing your job.

Solution

Use your company network appropriately

Understand policies and procedures

The first thing you can do to protect yourself against network misuse is to understand your company's policies on computer, email and network use. This should outline the details on what kinds of communications aren't allowed via the work system, and will help make sure you understand the regulations.

Since employers are generally allowed to monitor and control information coming to/from their systems, the best protection is to be careful about what messages you send, what websites you visit and what material you access or download.

Do not send inappropriate material

If you do come across inappropriate or sensitive material while in the office, you should avoid utilising your professional email or the company network to pass it on. This can include any type of material that might be considered confidential or information or images that might be offensive or prejudiced.

Create a personal email account

Under no circumstances should you use your work email system for personal emails. Instead, create a free personal email account for personal messages to friends, family or coworkers. You will also need to be careful about how much time you spend using your personal email account while at work.

Create strong passwords

It's important to protect your own privacy when using the company network. One way you can achieve this is to create strong passwords using a combination of upper and lower case letters, as well as numbers and other special characters. This makes it more difficult for hackers to gain unauthorised access to both your personal information and company data.

You should also change your passwords regularly, and avoid giving them out to anyone else. If you walk away from your computer, log off or use a screen lock so that no one else can access your desktop.

"At the end of the day, you are solely responsible for your success and your failure. And the sooner you realize that, you accept that, and integrate that into your work ethic, you will start being successful."

Erin Cummings

Using personal devices for work purposes

In today's digital world, laptops, smartphones, tablets and other portable accessibility devices have increased the chances of compromising confidential information or allowing sensitive material to leave the security of the office.

While it might be easy or even tempting to use your own personal devices to carry out your professional activities, there are many reasons why you should not do this:

- It can create susceptibility to serious breaches of company information and data – and you can be blamed directly for any consequences.
- It can place your professional standing at risk, since you may be removing confidential information that you aren't aware of, thereby violating certain compliance policies.
- If you lose one of your devices, important company data can also be placed at significant risk.
- It also means that you'll be using your own funds to pay for company work and activities (e.g. phone calls, web access).
- Using your own devices can also create version or compatibility problems when you try to load them back onto the company system.
- In certain instances, the company may be able to wipe all information held on your device if they feel there is an informational risk.

Another major problem in using your own devices is that if an issue or conflict arises, the question of legal ownership of the information on your device (and sometimes, of the device itself) can be placed into question. This can become especially tricky if you leave the company, but still possess confidential employer information. In some legal circumstances, you could also find your personal devices confiscated.

Approach personal device usage carefully

While I recommend that you do not use any personal devices for work purposes, it can sometimes be unavoidable. If you do choose to go down this route, there are a few ways to minimise your risks and protect your own interests should a problem occur.

Discuss it with the company first

If you do want to use one of your personal devices for work, make an effort to understand your company's compliance policy and discuss whether or not using your own device will compromise any confidential information on their part or personal information on your part.

Resolve monetary issues upfront

If using your own device regularly for work, it might be in your best interest to approach the employer about paying for some of the associated costs – such as internet and call costs. Your employer may agree to pay for these professional expenses, or may find it to be more cost effective to issue you with a fully paid company device.

Increase security measures

In order to protect your device and the information on it, you'll need to carry out a range of security measures to ensure your device will remain protected. This can include:

- Installing anti-virus software.
- Installing the latest anti-malware systems.
- Password protecting your device, files and apps with strong passwords.

- Installing certain apps that can further protect your device if it becomes lost or stolen; you might wish to install an app that can locate a lost or stolen phone, for example, or an app that can wipe your memory remotely.

Being careful and making sure that your protective software is well updated will go a long way to limiting the risks of using a personal device for work.

“It’s essential for some jobs, handy for most, but don’t be fooled – the personal computer can be a job ender ... You should probably be asking yourself: Am I actually allowed to browse online and read news stories at the office?”

Liz Wolgemuth

Letting non-compete clauses restrain your career

In some professional fields, your employment contract can include non-compete clauses that prevent you from engaging with particular organisations or completing certain work for a given period (e.g. 6 months) if you leave the company.

These clauses can be common in professional services firms and in media companies, and can either be part of an employment contract or a separate agreement. Essentially, they prevent you from working in a competitive capacity for a certain amount of time after your contract ends.

It's not unusual for a professional to sign an employment agreement saying they will not work in the same industry or capacity after they end their contract. While this may seem restrictive, professionals should see this interim period as an opportunity to build up experience in an adjacent industry role. 6–12 months would be a typical length of time that a non-compete would apply, and more than 2 or 3 years would be uncommon (and less likely to be enforceable).

However, if the non-compete agreement is so restrictive that the individual cannot earn a living, these types of agreements can be challenged in court and sometimes dismissed on grounds of restraint of trade.

Know your non-compete rights

The rules and enforcements concerning different non-compete clauses and restraint of trade can vary in different states and organisation. When signing a non-compete agreement, it is vital to understand what you're signing and how you might be covered (or not covered) if an issue arises later on.

As a general rule, the more restrictive the agreement is, the less likely it is to stand up in court.

If you are faced with severe limitations in your non-compete contract, ensure you negotiate after you have received the job offer – be willing to offer flexibility in some areas, but be firm on points where you feel the non-compete agreement could impact your career in a negative way.

Understanding non-compete circumstances

In many situations, the two main considerations surrounding non-compete clauses include the legitimate business interest of the employer and the restrictions on the employee to make a living. Let's use a hypothetical situation to further assess how these clauses can work.

A non-compete situation

A lawyer – let's say his name is John – might sign a non-compete clause as part of a partnership agreement. This agreement prevents John from leaving the company and opening his own firm straight away or signing with another local law firm if he resigns.

If John quit his firm and opened a similar one where he would be competing for the same clients in the same locale, he would likely be taken to court by his employer, who would try and enforce the non-compete agreement.

If John left his company and was then offered a role with a new law firm, he could also find that the offer conflicts with his non-compete agreement. In this circumstance, John should let his new employer know about his non-compete contract. The new employer may be able to help John challenge the agreement if necessary, and the company could also structure John's job so that he won't be seen as breaching his non-compete agreement.

Tip: If you are in this same situation, you will want to be open about any files or information you may have in your possession, whether intentionally or accidentally, that belong to your previous employer. You should then discuss the process of deleting or returning those files, in order to minimise any future risk or breach.

Restraint of trade conflicts

If you are facing a restraint of trade matter that goes to court, you will need to obtain legal help. You and your legal team will need to prove that the non-compete clause would hinder your ability to earn a living. Similarly, your former employer would have to show that your new activities would cause serious harm to their business.

My best advice is that if you are asked to agree to a non-compete agreement, you should seek legal assistance before you sign any paperwork. A lawyer can ensure that you are not agreeing to any overly restrictive terms and will also be able to help you if your agreement causes employment issues later on.

"In a tough job market – like the one we're in now – new hires will be tempted to sign these agreements even if they hurt their long-term interests ... First, know what you're getting into ... Second, don't be afraid to suggest alternative language."

Science Career Magazine

Mistake No. 86

Having a bad reputation at work (and doing nothing to address it)

Your professional reputation is one of the most important elements of your career and requires constant attention and management. If you develop a poor reputation (even if through no fault of your own), it can affect your opportunities and relationships, essentially preventing you from reaching your career goals.

In many cases, a bad reputation can be reflected by various negative behaviours such as:

- Not working well with others.
- Not being responsible or accountable for your activities.
- Having a negative attitude about the business.
- Blaming others for your mistakes or shortcomings.
- Instigating or encouraging conflict or tension.
- Making poor decisions or failing to meet deadlines or expectations.
- Treating others with disrespect.

In other instances, however, you can also develop a bad reputation even if you don't exhibit any overly negative behaviours. For example, you might make every effort to work well in a team setting, but someone else might still think you're not a team player simply because you don't agree with their opinions.

Similarly, you could also be tasked with an important project that others in the office aren't aware of. Although you might be working hard on that project, your colleagues may see you as not carrying your own weight on other day-to-day tasks.



Solution

Get your reputation back on track

Whatever the reason for your weak reputation, it is important to work on restoring it as soon as you notice there may be an issue. Managing your reputation is important because:

- You need to cultivate healthy relationships with your managers and coworkers, since they can influence your career in the way of opportunities, promotions and references.
- You won't want others' views and opinions of you to spread throughout the greater industry and affect your career prospects.

How to improve your reputation

- **Communicate well.** A bad reputation can foster much more quickly if you are “closed off” from your colleagues and managers. Communicating with them on a regular basis means you can keep them informed about your workload, decisions and tasks; they're much less likely to develop a poor opinion of you if they understand

your circumstances, and will be less likely to assume that you are simply “slacking off” or failing to meet their expectations.

- **Accept your faults and improve.** Everyone has faults and weaknesses, but if yours is negatively affecting your reputation, consider taking steps to improve your performance or behaviour. You should listen to constructive criticism and feedback and develop a plan to enhance your skills. Letting others know you are working on improving is also a great way to manage a potentially poor reputation.
- **Be respectful at all times.** Conflicts will always arise in the office, but it's essential that you treat everyone with respect and value. Bad reputations can often arise as a result of your personality, so make sure to use tact, and respect the feelings and emotions of those around you.

“It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently.”

Warren Buffet

Being blackballed at work

Alex W., a civil engineer for a large company in Sydney, unwittingly discovered that he was being shunned at work. He was also being targeted and put down at every opportunity by his manager and coworkers. This all came about shortly after he filed a complaint with the HR department about a serious conflict with his managers. Instead of addressing the issue, management decided to make an example of Alex by blackballing him in the hopes that he would quit or be terminated for poor performance.

What is blackballing?

Being blackballed means that everyone in your workplace has been told, either directly or indirectly, that they are not to unnecessarily communicate with you at work. Blackballing is a form of deliberate exclusion that prevents you from participating in key areas of the business and hinders your ability to do your job properly.

Chances are that if you're being blackballed, you'll know it. Common signs can include:

- Lack of communication or responses from managers and colleagues.
- Being left out of meetings and discussions that you were previously invited to.
- Having your workload, client list or responsibilities decreased.
- Decreased social interactions with coworkers or general unfriendliness.
- Resistance from subordinates, team members, clients or other colleagues.

While there are no definitive ways to confirm whether you are being blackballed in the office, you can try to find out more about the situation. You could speak to a colleague or friend you trust, raise the issue with your manager or try and gauge what is happening from a client.

Whether someone confirms that you are being blackballed or whether you get enough “hints” to suggest this is the case, you’ll need to know what to do to handle the situation.

Solution

Deal with blackballing head on

Blackballing is an unkind process that unfortunately does happen in the workplace. If you fear you are being blackballed, these suggestions may help:

Find out why

While your options may be limited, you can try and find out more information about why this is happening to you. Was it the result of a poor decision you made? Or is it something to do with your performance? Talking to your boss or HR department can be one solution, but be aware that this could antagonise the problem further if you approach it too aggressively.

Challenge your reviews

Managers are allowed to give employees bad reviews if they are displeased with an employee’s work performance. If you have received a bad review, investigate the circumstances and reasons and see if you can provide evidence to challenge the conclusions your manager has made. If there are specific areas of weakness, ask your manager for assistance so that you can improve.

Initiate legal action

Sometimes, blackballing can extend to the point where you may be able to take legal action. For example, if someone in the company simply doesn't like you and makes factually inaccurate and damaging statements about you to others, then you may have a claim for defamation. Alternatively, if someone is destroying your reputation through lies, and that person's dislike of you is based on race, gender, age or another form of prejudice, then you may have a claim for workplace discrimination. Consider consulting a lawyer if you believe you have been blackballed due to discrimination or prejudice.

Look for new work

Being blackballed is an awful experience. If you find yourself unable to rectify the situation or repair your reputation, you could also consider looking for another job. In the end, it may be more beneficial than simply staying in a company where you are being subjected to blackballing behaviour.

The term “blackballing” is said to have originated in ancient Greece, where citizens would use light and dark (black) shells to cast votes. The word “shell” also gives rise to our English word, “ostracize.”

Mistake No. 88

Lying or being dishonest in the workplace

Workplace ethics can be a complicated issue, but any form of lying or dishonesty in the workplace is something you should not be a part of. There are plenty of situations where you might be asked to do something you're not comfortable with, such as signing off on documents that are untrue or exaggerated or lying about something that happened (or did not happen) in the office. In these circumstances, aim to remain honest and ethical at all times.

Matthew's dishonesty

Matthew G. was the Chief Financial Officer of an education business who was asked to sign off on fraudulent financial numbers to appease the shareholders of the company. He decided to comply with the request and approved the numbers. The following year, however, an assessment was carried out and Matthew's lies came to light. He was subsequently fired, his reputation in the industry suffered greatly and he found it difficult to find new employment.



Avoid unethical practices

Respected professionals in the workplace should avoid engaging in unethical practices at all times. If you are asked to participate in a decision or action, you should consider whether moving forward would be unethical. You might want to ask yourself:

- Is this in accordance with company policy or not?
- Is this action illegal or will it place me in a risky position? Should I report it?
- What are the consequences if I agree or disagree?
- If this decision/action is uncovered, how will it affect my career and reputation?
- How can I make this issue work, without compromising on ethics?

Reporting unethical behaviour

If the person asking you to carry out something unethical is your immediate superior and there are additional executives that he/she reports to, it can be a good idea to report what you've been asked to do. Although they might still request that you carry out the activity, this can be a relatively safe way to let people know that you're not comfortable participating. Although going above someone's head can be tricky, it can pay off if you talk to the right person.

Dealing with "honest" dishonesty

For smaller infractions or situations where a manager or colleague may not realise what they are asking is unethical, you might want to consider telling them you cannot do what they want and explaining why. This gives them a chance to correct any genuine misunderstandings.

In all of these situations, it's important to remember that while there may be short-term consequences for not going along with unethical practices (or for reporting them) there are ways that you can manage this behaviour.

If you are thinking of lying or being dishonest in the workplace for the betterment or security of your job, consider the greater consequences to your career if and when what you do is questioned or uncovered.

“Put simply, the link between creativity and dishonesty seems related to the ability to tell ourselves stories about how we are doing the right thing, even when we are not. The more creative we are, the more we are able to come up with good stories that help us justify our selfish interests.”

Dan Ariely, *The Honest Truth About Dishonesty:
How We Lie to Everyone – Especially Ourselves*

Whistleblowing without considering the consequences

Blowing the whistle on wrongdoings at your company may be necessary if serious misconduct occurs, but before you act rashly, it is crucial that you understand the personal consequences that can result if you become a whistleblower.

Why blow the whistle?

A whistleblower is somebody who exposes misconduct, corruption, malpractice or illegal activities in the workplace. Whistleblowing can take place in any type of organisation, whether large or small, and can relate to any aspect of the workplace and its operations. If you witness any severe or illegal wrongdoings in your company, you may wish to blow the whistle in order to put a stop to the activity and expose the company for what they have been doing.

The consequences of becoming a whistleblower

In Australia, the Corporations Act (2001) outlines various legal details that can protect whistleblowers and whistleblowing activities. However, if you do choose to disclose something about your company, there can be serious ramifications for you on a personal basis, including:

- Loss of your job and income.
- Personal and financial liability for company libel/slander if they decide to retaliate.
- Other financial consequences, such as paying for legal representation.

- Damages to your reputation or a loss of regard from others in the industry who may not believe you or respect what you have done.
- Potential threats to you or your family's safety.

You may also find that if you do become a whistleblower, you can greatly harm your greater career and your chances of finding a job later on, since future employers may assume you cannot be trusted with company secrets.

This doesn't mean that you should keep quiet if you are privy to any wrongdoings in your company. It is important to do the right thing, but you need to be aware of the personal consequences you can face and also understand the ways in which your life and career might change.

Solution

Plan carefully before you blow the whistle

If you do see something that you think is wrong or illegal in your organisation, these questions can help you decide whether to blow the whistle or whether to handle the issue in another way:

- What is the actual activity or action I have witnessed?
- What proof do I have that these events or actions are breaking the law or causing a serious violation?
- Do I have enough evidence to back up my claims?
- Can I handle the situation in any other way, other than whistleblowing?
- Do I want to blow the whistle internally, within the company, or externally, via the media, an institution or another source?
- Can I face the consequences of becoming a whistleblower? How will I survive financially if I lose my job/can't find a new job?

Deciding to become a whistleblower

If you do decide to expose your company for illegal or unethical misconduct, there are several steps you should take before you blow the whistle.

1. Prepare evidence and documentation

It is imperative that you have the right evidence, documentation and records when making accusations against your organisation, since you will need to prove the claims you are making. Evidence can exist in the way of formal company documentation, informal documentation (e.g. personal emails) or even video or audio. Ask yourself: If my organisation denies what I say, how can I show they are lying?

2. Seek legal advice

Seeking legal advice is also essential before you become a whistleblower. An experienced lawyer will be able to help you understand what your rights are and whether your decision is right for you. They can also advise what the possible outcome might be of your whistleblowing actions and based on your evidence, whether your claims will hold up in court.

3. Know your rights and your employer's obligations

While your lawyer should provide you with strong advice and representation, it is important that you understand how you are protected (or not protected) as a whistleblower. In many cases, you may not be protected until the matter goes to court and is finalised by a judge – and in the meantime, you may need to be prepared to deal with the consequences to your job, career and living situation.

Stepping back

In some cases, you may end up not deciding to blow the whistle. This may be because you do not have appropriate evidence to back up your claims or because what you have seen, while unethical, is not altogether illegal. If you don't blow the whistle, you should consider what your next steps will be, such as discussing the issue with your boss (if you fully trust them) or resigning and finding a new role.

"To see a wrong and not to expose it, is to become a silent partner to its continuance."

Dr. John Raymond Baker

Making personal phone calls at work

Using telephones has become an essential part of the way we live today and often, it can be difficult to separate our professional and personal phone usage. In many circumstances, organisations can offer flexibility regarding personal phone calls at work, but there can be circumstances in the workplace when making or taking personal calls (and even writing text messages) will be considered unacceptable.

When to avoid making personal calls

In general, you should avoid making and taking personal calls:

- In meetings and interviews, even if they are informal; this can be disruptive and can make it seem like you're not invested in the meeting.
- When dealing with clients, customers or other members of the public; this can make you look uninterested and unprofessional.
- When you should be working and completing tasks or assignments.

Like using social media and writing personal emails, making and taking extensive personal phone calls on company time can hinder your productivity and performance in the workplace. Furthermore, it can also affect your professionalism, and if it continues on a regular basis, it can affect your career opportunities and reputation.

Set boundaries for personal phone calls

There can be times when we do need to make personal calls throughout the working day, particularly if there is something urgent that needs your attention (e.g. your child is sick). However, setting personal call “boundaries” and limiting unnecessary calls is essential in the workplace.

Know your company policy

Some companies may have specific policies concerning personal calls or mobile phone use in the office, such as when or how often you can make calls. Make sure you follow any guidelines surrounding these policies, particularly if you work in a highly corporate or strict environment. If you do need to make calls, do them on your own time, such as at lunch or during a break.

Ask friends and family to call only in emergencies

Advise your friends and family members to only phone you if there is an emergency or if something urgent needs addressing. If they want to speak about anything else, explain to them that you’ll have to chat after work.

Don’t speak at length

While taking a personal call in the office might be acceptable in some circumstances, avoid speaking or chatting at length. This can impact your efficiency in the workplace and can also make you appear unprofessional and lazy. Limit your personal calls to 1–2 minutes in length.

Step away from your desk

If you do need to have an urgent personal phone conversation that might go on for some time, move away from your desk and into a private space. This helps you maintain professionalism in the office. Keep in mind, however, that if you keep slipping away and neglecting your duties, the people around you will notice.

“Personal calls are a fact of life ... but you need to look at how your actions affect the people around you. If you’re in a space where you can hear every word of a conversation that your office mates have (and vice versa), you really want to limit personal conversations. If you can, eliminate them entirely.”

Thomas P. Farley

Mistake No. 91

Waiting for your company to recognise your contributions

Dedicating yourself to an organisation and meeting or exceeding your expectations on the job is an excellent way to make a great impression on your managers and hopefully, secure that next promotion. Yet a common mistake many professionals make, even at the executive level, is that they sit back and wait for their company to recognise their contributions, promote them or offer them more benefits.

In the “real” business world, however, this doesn’t always happen. Many employees, despite their contributions, often get overlooked.

While you may be lucky enough to end up in an organisation that recognises and rewards its employees and drives talent growth, it is up to you to take control of your career and ensure you are getting the recognition and rewards you deserve.

Solution

Get yourself noticed

If you are eager to grow within your organisation and drive your career forward, *you* must ensure that you are being recognised in your workplace. If you fail to take the initiative, you could find that you miss out on key opportunities in your company or that managers simply overlook you when it comes to promotion time.

Here's how to stand up, get yourself noticed and ensure that your employer is aware of your desire to progress internally:

Let your boss know what you're after

Organise a formal conversation or meeting with your boss to discuss the possibilities of movement and promotion within the organisation. Your boss will be instrumental in helping you secure various internal opportunities, so you will need to communicate your goals and let him/her know that you are keen to move up.

Keep records of your accomplishments

As you progress through your role and work on various projects, it's important to keep a record of your tasks, responsibilities and accomplishments that show how you've helped shape the company's success. For example, you may have worked with your team to solve a difficult problem or you may have been responsible for training a new employee.

These records will ensure that you are able to present proof of your contributions when you do need to apply for a promotion or pay rise. You should also refer back to your records when updating your resume and portfolio.

Put your hand up

If there is an opportunity to take on additional responsibilities in your role, put your hand up for the task and volunteer. This will demonstrate that you are enthusiastic about expanding your role and that you are dedicated to taking on more challenges and tasks. This can help you become much more prominent in the eyes of management and they will be more likely to remember you if an opportunity arises.

Work on relationships

Networking and building relationships with your superiors is also vital in ensuring you get noticed. Dedicate time each week or month to

internal networking activities, particularly with managers who will be able to influence your standing and progression within the organisation.

Go for promotions

If a promotion or any opportunity becomes available in your organisation, make sure you step forward and let management know you are interested and apply accordingly. Don't make the mistake of waiting for your superiors to notice you and offer you the role. Instead, it's up to you to ensure you are visible and demonstrate why you could be suitable for the new job or responsibility.



"Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success."

Pablo Picasso

Freelancing without diversifying

In the past few years, growing technologies and changing business trends and demands have led to the embracement of using external freelancers and consultants. Organisations are finding that freelancers (and their lower fees) can be much more beneficial for their bottom lines than hiring a full-time employee – and many professionals are leaving full-time employment and opting for a freelance or consultant working structure. This can be rewarding both professionally and financially, and is also known as “portfolio employment.”

If you do choose to become a freelancer, you'll need to pay more attention to cultivating and managing your career in a way that you might not have had to in the past. In addition, learning new skills and applying them in different ways will make you indispensable to a number of prospective employers.

Yet one of the most common errors I've seen when liaising with freelance professionals is that they do not diversify. Instead of working for a number of different clients or organisations, they simply dedicate themselves to one company, ultimately “putting all their eggs in one basket.”

Why is this a mistake?

- It means you are completely reliant on that company; if they tighten their spending or decide they don't want to work with you anymore, you can quickly be left in the lurch, without work or income.
- It doesn't allow you to develop or diversify your skills and freelance experience, meaning you're not getting the most out of your freelance career; in short, you are still essentially cultivating your skills in the same way you would as if you were an employee.

- The organisation can treat you like an employee, benefitting from your experience, knowledge and talents, but while only paying you a freelancing/consulting rate (instead of a full-time rate, with benefits like superannuation, tax, bonuses etc.).

Solution

Diversify your freelance portfolio

It is critical for all freelancers and consultants to diversify their portfolios and develop working relationships with a number of clients and organisations. You might do this simultaneously (e.g. complete work for multiple clients at any one time) or you might work for a single client for a certain period (e.g. a different client every month).

How to diversify

Diversifying your client portfolio will take time to build. When starting out, it can be common for freelancers and consultants to only work with 1-2 companies. However, you should begin expanding your services as soon as possible.

- **Tap into your network.** At the start of a freelance or consulting career, it can be common to develop your portfolio based on your network. This means contacting those you know and making them aware of your new services and offerings. You may be able to begin freelancing for a former employer or you may find some of your contacts are keen to utilise your skills.
- **Bid for jobs.** Another way to diversify is to “bid” or apply for work on freelance projects within your field or industry. You may need to submit a detailed proposal or you simply may need to put forward a quote; whatever you bid for, ensure it can help to grow your experience and skills and that it contributes to your diversification .
- **Market your brand.** Once you have established a strong freelance brand, you can also start to market and advertise your services in

order to develop your business; this is a great way to diversify and bring new clients on board.

- **Don't let one company monopolise your time.** Careful time management is a key factor of success in the freelance and consulting worlds, yet some professionals can often fall into the trap of allowing one organisation to fill up their plate and take up all their time. Be wary of letting this happen; while lots of work is good, it will also limit how much you can expand and diversify (if at all).
- **Stay “in tune” with your industry.** Even though you are freelancing, it's crucial that you continue to stay abreast of your industry's trends and movements; this will allow you to keep your knowledge and services fresh, and it also means you can identify other niches and ways to expand based on current trends and demands.

“Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mistake No. 93

Refusing to work for a smaller company

Small-to-medium businesses and start-ups have become much more prominent over the past few years, particularly since digital technologies have created many niche, online spaces in which these companies can thrive. Constant corporate downsizing also means that many professionals who once worked in large corporate environments are now looking for opportunities in smaller businesses.

Yet many professionals make the mistake of shunning jobs with smaller businesses because they assume the benefits won't be as numerous. They may also feel that there will be:

- Less room to grow and move internally.
- Lower remuneration packages.
- Fewer resources to complete projects.
- Less industry recognition than working for a larger or a more reputable organisation.

While these issues are not unrealistic, it is important to acknowledge the benefits of working with a smaller organisation, particularly if you are out of work or are having trouble securing a role in a larger company.

Solution

Step out of your “big box” mindset

Although there may be downsides to working for a small business, taking on roles in smaller companies can help you progress to the next stage of your career and achieve your career goals.

What are some of the key benefits of accepting a role with an SMB?

- **More opportunity for responsibility.** In a smaller business, there is often much more opportunity to take on senior responsibilities or bigger projects, which can reward you with excellent experience and knowledge. If you were in a larger organisation, you might not be able to take on this level of responsibility without working your way up the ropes over a number of years.
- **More recognition.** When working with smaller businesses, you are much more likely to gain individual recognition for your contributions, and your successes can often have a much stronger impact on the company overall.
- **More opportunity to grow and progress.** Working in a smaller company can also mean promotions and progression are much more easily and quickly attainable, since there will be fewer employees vying for each role. Smaller businesses are often more flexible in the way they work, you might find that you can also move up the ropes “unofficially” by taking on more responsibility and tasks.
- **More flexibility and freedom internally.** Larger organisations can often be bound by extensive policies and bureaucracy, which make operations and processes harder to improve; in a smaller business, it is easier to understand business operations and also shape how the company works.

“In a survey of more than 3000 Australians late last year, 65 per cent of small business employees said they cared about the future of their organisation, as opposed to half of those that worked in big companies.”

Sydney Morning Herald

Mistake No. 94

Fearing entrepreneurship

As an executive, you will no doubt have built up many years of talent and knowledge in your industry. There may come a time when you want to utilise this experience for yourself, rather than simply for another organisation. In short, you want to become an entrepreneur.

Becoming an entrepreneur can be an ideal move if you want to leave the corporate environment, manage your own business and ultimately make your own “mark” on the industry. Entrepreneurial pursuits can be an incredibly rewarding career move and can offer excellent opportunities to develop your leadership and marketing skills.

Despite this, many executives can be afraid of entrepreneurship. They might fear outright failure, they might be concerned about financial security or they might doubt their ability to make good decisions and take a product to market. Although there are costs and risks associated with the entrepreneurial “leap”, shunning away from entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial opportunities can mean you will greatly limit your career and your professional development.

While going out on your own can be scary, thorough and steady planning can make the entrepreneurial dream possible.

Solution

Prepare for entrepreneurial opportunities

As an executive, you never know when an opportunity for entrepreneurship may present itself. On the other hand, you may already have a great idea that you want to develop and take to market,

but you may be procrastinating about whether to take the next step or you might be unsure about what you need to do to get started.

Financial preparation

All entrepreneurs need a steady financial base when starting out. You will need to develop a budget, taking into account all management and living expenses, and work out how much money you need to save in order to support yourself after you leave your job and start your business.

The more you are able to save, the easier it will also be to secure a business loan as well. Avoid tapping into your assets, equity or other “locked away” funds at this point.

Create a business plan

While not every business needs a formal business plan, it’s a good idea to create one that can exemplify your business vision. You will need to develop and demonstrate a solid understanding of how you realistically expect to make money and how you expect to pay your expenses and operational costs.

At this stage, you should also plan how you will break even and begin to make profit. You’ll also need to be able to explain how your business and product will work in a practical sense, especially if you plan to pitch your product/business to potential investors.

Learn as much as possible

If you have never managed or run a business before, it’s essential that you learn as much as possible in order to succeed. You may wish to complete some training, such as undertaking a small business or start-up course, or you might find it highly beneficial to talk to other accomplished entrepreneurs in your network or industry and find out how they achieved success.

Cultivate strong business relationships

It can be difficult to start up a business purely on your own; instead utilise your network and cultivate strong relationships that could benefit your business later on. You might want to find a start-up partner at this stage or you simply might wish to make connections that you can utilise once your business gets up and running.

Be very careful, however, of disclosing your plans at this time to anyone you don't fully trust; if your employer finds out that you are planning to leave and start your own company, it could impact your current job and reputation.

"Many entrepreneurs are driven by the need to build something great, help other people, or leave something behind ... No matter what the motivation, creating something from nothing that grows and develops through the years can be almost like raising a child; it's your baby, and you've nurtured it to its current level of success. That type of fulfillment is difficult to duplicate in most other career paths."

Tamara Monosoff, Entrepreneur.com

Mistake No. 95

Disrespecting the boss

In life, you can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family. Unfortunately, you also can't always choose your boss – and sometimes, you can find yourself in a position where you'll have to work for a supervisor or boss you don't especially like.

Despite your personal opinions and feelings, showing respect for your boss in the workplace is essential. Disrespecting your boss can have serious negative consequences – it can jeopardise your role, harm your greater career and also make day-to-day work tasks difficult.

Solution

Show respect for your boss

Whether or not you “agree” with your boss's management style and views, it's up to you to make the relationship work in order to benefit your position in the company and your reputation as a professional.

Mutual respect and relationship building

Respecting your boss is a two-way street: If you show respect for them, they will (ideally) respect you as well. Fostering a good working relationship with your boss will help increase workplace opportunities and your chances of securing promotions, raises and greater responsibilities. A strong relationship here is also important if you leave the company and need a good reference or recommendation.

Remaining professional

Despite how you feel about your boss, you should still aim to perform well in your role and maintain professionalism at all times in the face of

colleagues, clients and other superiors. Showing respect for your boss is an important part of maintaining your professional reputation and also shows that you can cope with workplace conflict or tension without becoming disrespectful or making things personal.

Honing your skills

There will be many times in the workplace when you will need to deal with people you don't necessarily like or agree with. Liaising with your boss and showing him/her respect, regardless of the circumstances, is a great way to hone your communication, negotiation, resolution and relationship skills – all of which can benefit your career and your overall skill set.

Growing as a professional executive

If your situation with your boss is tense, make an effort to understand exactly what is bothering you about the relationship. It is important to be honest with yourself and consider whether you could be making the situation worse or drawing conclusions that aren't necessarily correct. Are you being just as difficult?

Questions like this can help uncover valuable insights about yourself and about how you work and behave as a professional. Think about what you ideally want your boss to do differently, and what you might do in the same situation.

"If you've ever felt like quitting your job because you didn't like or respect your boss, take my advice: Don't quit. In companies worth working for, good people last longer than bad managers do."

Jeff Davis

Returning to the corporate world without adjusting your approach

Working for yourself and running your own business can be extremely rewarding, but after some time, you may decide that you want to return to the corporate world. There are plenty of reasons why you might do this; you might need a more steady income, you might have exhausted the challenges of being a business owner and/or you might simply want to be part of a larger, corporate environment once again.

When it comes to revising your resume and applying for corporate positions, it is important to adjust your approach, as many employers and interviewers can be wary of hiring a business owner.

In these situations, overplaying your entrepreneurial experience can be a damaging mistake and employers can sometimes assume that:

- You won't be manageable or won't be able to deal with authority.
- You are only returning to work because your business wasn't a success, meaning you could be a poor decision maker.
- You are lacking in recent corporate experience and have lost some of your "big business" skills.
- You won't be able to keep up with the corporate environment, since you're used to working at your own pace.
- You'll grow dissatisfied and desire to be your own boss again.

I've worked with many candidates who don't change their approach when returning to the corporate world and who emphasise their business experience significantly, only to find that it has discouraged the employer.

You will need to present your solo skills in a way that will be seen as beneficial to the employer and role you are vying for. You'll need to assuage their worries and convince them that you can offer a wealth of value and experience that other corporate candidates can't.

Solution

Know how to present yourself in the corporate world

Get your resume right

The first major challenge when transitioning back into the corporate world will be getting your resume right. In general, avoid using titles such as “CEO”, “Director” or “President” when describing your entrepreneurial pursuit, as this can make you sound overqualified or overly ambitious. Instead, think about what it is you actually did on a daily basis and what you were responsible for in the business. Stick to the same principles in your job description and consider how your experience and achievements could be beneficial in a corporate environment.



Focus on your value

When you start interviewing, avoid simply talking about your own entrepreneurial gains and instead focus on what you can bring to the company and what you can offer from your experience. Keep the emphasis on the future of the organisation and on the capabilities you can bring to the corporate environment.

Rehearse answers, alleviate fears

Interviewers will always have lots of questions about your career choice, so be prepared to answer these in convincing ways. You might need to rationalise your decision to return to the business world and discuss your desire to contribute to a corporate organisation.

If the interviewer is sceptical about why an entrepreneur would want to go back to the corporate world, talk about why you feel their company is a good match for you at this point and how your business experience can help drive the organisation forward in the marketplace.

Apply for the right roles

Some businesses – like SMEs and start-ups – will be more interested in someone with solo experience than others, so select which roles you apply for carefully.

You may also want to look for jobs that offer the autonomy that you're used to or you might want to seek out a role with a company that can offer you the structure and other benefits that you have been missing.

If you're worried about how your management experience will be perceived, try looking for positions in smaller departments where you can ease back into the corporate setting and hone your business skills in the new company environment.

**"Though no one can go back and make a brand new start,
anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending."**

Carl Bard

Having no “escape plan”

At any point in your career, you may find yourself in a job that just doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

You may not be learning anything new or facing any new challenges. Your career isn't moving forward; instead, you're just stuck. If you find yourself in this kind of rut, it's usually a clear sign that you need to find new employment and get your career back on track.

As a result, you will need to develop a solid “escape plan.”

Why escape plans are essential

Even if you are happy in your current career, you should still have an “escape plan” so that you can mitigate any unforeseen job circumstances. You might lose your job at short notice, your company might undergo various transitions that alter your job significantly or other changes in your working environment may mean you're no longer happy in your role.

An escape plan is essentially an exit strategy that outlines how you can leave your company in a smooth and professional way and that details how you will get your career back on track.

Create your escape plan

If you are enjoying your job, it can be difficult to muster up the energy or courage to create an escape plan. If you're miserable, it can be equally as difficult to motivate yourself. However, the following tips and solutions can help you develop a strong escape plan that will eventually reorient your career and steer you towards happiness and success.

Think about where you'd like to go

Make a list of other companies you'd like to work for or job positions you'd like to take on. Next, conduct some research on these organisations or on the types of jobs you want.

Think about your strengths, your skills and your passions and define a goal that you can work towards. This will also help you to feel more confident in your ability to leave. You might also want to look into any additional education or training that you might need to help you secure your ideal role.

Consider when to resign

You'll want to leave on good terms with your employer, so decide how much longer you want to stay in your role for and when the ideal time to resign might be. For instance, you might want to resign/leave during quieter periods or at times when you'll be able to finish your current projects without leaving anyone in the lurch.

Update your resume

A persuasive, fully updated resume is critical for any job search and revising your resume and other documentation (such as your cover letter, CV, portfolio) should be an important part of your escape plan. Making your resume as professional as possible will ensure you maximise your opportunities when it comes time to apply for roles.

Once you have a strong escape plan in place, you'll feel much more secure in your current position, because you now have a backup plan if things change. You can then decide what actions to take moving forward and how you might shape your career in the coming months or years.

"If you don't design your own life plan, chances are you'll fall into someone else's plan. And guess what they have planned for you? Not much."

Jim Rohn

Mistake No. 98

Losing your cool and berating your employees in the workplace

We've all seen coworkers or managers lose their cool in the workplace. Something goes wrong and they lash out, directing anger at their employees.

In your own career, there may have also been a time when you lost your temper. Did you shout at one of your employees? Berate them in front of everyone? Slam a door or riddle them with insults?



Why openly berating your employees is a mistake

High levels of pressure in today's challenging business environments can lead to much stress and occasional outbursts of anger and frustration. However, openly berating your employees ultimately shows that you are a bad manager. It demonstrates that you can't cope with challenges and failings and that instead of finding solutions, you simply get angry.

Other employees and colleagues can also lose respect for you as a manager and you can destroy your credibility and your ability to influence staff to get things done. This type of behaviour can also ruin your relationships, drain productivity and create a strained work environment.

Solution

Exhibit good managerial practices

Apologise and make amends

In the event you do lose your cool in the workplace and take out your frustrations on an employee, you can try and minimise the damage by apologising. As soon as possible after the incident, go back to the employee you berated and say something like, "I'm sorry I behaved the way I did. I was a little upset and I realise it was the wrong thing to do. Can we talk tomorrow about the best way to move forward?" At this stage, it's best to keep your apology brief, especially if the employee is still upset or angry.

Find ways to keep your cool

Everybody gets frustrated at work. However, there are steps you can take to avoid becoming overly angry:

- **Don't react immediately.** If something makes you furious, take a break or a timeout before you react or decide what to do next; you might want to go for a walk or spend some time alone in your office.

If you are in the midst of a meeting or discussion, taking a few deep breaths before you react or respond is also a good approach.

- **Call a trusted friend.** Sometimes just hearing a friendly voice can help put things back in perspective. Use caution and make sure your conversation takes place in private where no one can overhear you.
- **Focus on how to fix the problem.** In all circumstances, solutions will be more productive and beneficial than berating someone; consider what steps you could take to resolve the issue and talk to your employees about implementing them.
- **Discuss it with the employee.** If your employee has made a serious error, address it with them in private, rather than in front of the whole office; they are much more likely to be open with you about the issue and you can work together to find a resolution and put measures in place so that the mistake won't occur again.

Remember, the workplace is challenging enough without creating a toxic work environment. Losing your cool and berating your employees for honest mistakes is the mark of a bad manager. To prevent these incidents from happening, learn to control your temper, focus on solutions and work on employees' performance. This will help create a healthier and more productive work environment.

"Directing your frustration at the action and not the employee helps reduce his or her feelings of defensiveness while still allowing you to express your frustration – which will help you both focus on solving the problem."

Jeff Haden, Inc.com

Being an ineffective leader

Whether you're taking on your first management or team leader role or whether you're the CEO of an organisation, practicing positive leadership traits and behaviours is critical for your career and your leadership development.

Yet not every leader who is in charge of a team or who sits at the top of an organisation is a good one. Ineffective leaders are commonly found in the workplace and their leadership styles, traits and behaviours can negatively impact their companies, their employees and their careers.

Some of the common traits of ineffective leaders include:

- Micromanaging employees
- Poor communication
- Making weak or short-sighted decisions
- Underappreciating or disrespecting employees
- Lacking focus, innovation, vision or direction
- Being arrogant or unwilling to listen to others
- Adopting self-serving attitudes
- Being unable remain calm under pressure or deal with complex situations.

Develop your leadership skills

Often, executives can end up in leadership positions, but without the right leadership skills behind them to perform efficiently and competently. Being an effective leader essentially means that you should be able to make strong decisions and manage your team in positive ways in order to produce great results.

The following strategies should help you enact good leadership practices and ensure that you become an effective – rather than an ineffective – leader and manager.

- **Listen to your team.** It's important to listen to what the people working for you have to say, whether you're making important decisions or casually discussing business issues. Great leaders listen well, value the input of others and respect their opinions, taking all perspectives and issues on board.
- **Delegate to others.** Good leaders also know when to delegate or ask for assistance so that they can focus on more critical business areas. If you're struggling with your leadership duties, consider delegating your more menial tasks so that you can concentrate on higher priorities.
- **Resolve conflicts.** As an effective leader, you need to be willing to confront and resolve any problems or conflicts in the workplace as quickly and efficiently as possible. Great leaders deal with problems swiftly, ensuring that conflict doesn't impact on the performance of the business.
- **Set clear goals and deadlines.** Working towards clear goals and deadlines can help keep your team motivated and informed, and also makes sure that business goals can be met. If you can, relate your goals and deadlines back to your vision and mission: the people working with you will be able to give you much more support when they can see how their responsibilities fit into the bigger picture.

- **Reward your team.** Effective leaders know how to encourage, motivate and persuade, and they also know how to appreciate and value team members. Rewarding your team for their efforts can take place in a variety of ways, from giving them credit for accomplishments and results to providing them with more “tangible” rewards, such as bonuses, pay increases, team lunches and even things like time in lieu or days off. Whatever method you choose, make sure you reward your team to keep them motivated and driven.

“It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.”

Nelson Mandela

Mistake No. 100

Going too far to win a job

When you want to desperately secure a job, you may feel like you should stop at nothing to get it. While being ambitious is important and while you should give the employer every reason to hire you, there are some things that you just shouldn't do in order to land that role.

Despite your enthusiasm, it is possible to go too far during the application or interview process to win a job – and engaging in these tactics could hurt you in the long-run.

Solution

Behave ethically when trying to secure a job

Let's take a look at what NOT to do when pursuing your next job or promotion:

Bad-mouth your competition

If you are familiar with any of the other candidates applying for your role, avoid talking negatively about them or emphasising their flaws. This only demonstrates a lack of professionalism and maturity on your part and creates the impression that you are only focusing on their faults because you are not confident in your own abilities. Remember, no employer wants to hire a back stabber!

Lie on your resume

You should polish your resume to make it as impressive as possible, but lying about your experience, skills or education should be avoided at all costs. Employers and recruiters can quickly uncover resume lies and half-truths and if you're found lying, you will damage your credibility significantly in the employer's eyes and they likely won't hire you.

Try to be funny or entertaining

While a sense of humour and a friendly personality can go a long way, a job interview should be treated seriously. Trying to be overly funny or making jokes during interviews is not necessary and can even dissuade the interviewer from hiring you or contacting you again for another interview. Instead of using humour, focus on your value and experience to convince the interviewer of your worth.

Pester the employer or recruiter

Following up with an employer or recruiter after you've sent through your resume or after an interview is always a good idea. But too many phone calls and emails can quickly transform you from a good candidate into a pest – and it can make you appear desperate for the role. Give employers and recruiters enough time to get in touch with you and only chase them up if you don't hear from them after a certain period.

Go over the hiring manager's head

Yes, it has happened before. A candidate missed out on a position, and then went over the hiring manager's head, contacting the director of the company and emphasising that they should've been given the role. Going over the hiring manager's head shows disrespect and incompetency and even if you do manage to get hold of a superior, they likely won't have a strong opinion of you or want you as part of their team.



"A sign of wisdom and maturity is when you come to terms with the realization that your decisions cause your rewards and consequences. You are responsible for your life, and your ultimate success depends on the choices you make."

Denis Waitley

Mistake No. 101

Not caring about your legacy

If you resigned from your role or your career today, how would others remember you? What would your legacy be?

Leaving a legacy behind once you resign from a company is something that all executives desire; we all want to believe that our improvements and accomplishments will impact the business in the long-term and even contribute to the greater industry.

In the course of my coaching and consulting career, I've occasionally come across an executive or leader who simply does not care about their legacy or who hasn't bothered to consider their legacy in relation to their roles, their decisions and their long-term careers. This always prompts me to ask, *"If you decided to leave everything behind, what would your legacy say about you?"*



Your legacy encompasses all the work that you do, the decisions you make and the ways in which you have shaped an organisation's success. It's the mark or impact you leave via the journey of your career and the ground-breaking accomplishments you've achieved.

Yet failing to care about or think about your legacy can be a drastic mistake that can mean:

- You don't have a strong vision of your leadership career or you don't know how to execute that vision.
- You won't be prompted to make strong, innovative decisions or take calculated risks that can ultimately lead a company to success and influence the industry.
- When you do move on, others won't remember you or they will remember you in an indifferent or uninspiring light.
- You won't depart with a strong reputation in the industry, which can impact your career opportunities in future and your character in general.
- You will have much less chance of achieving success in your next position or endeavour, since you probably won't be considering your legacy there either.

Solution

Consider your legacy every step of the way

Taking your legacy into account at every stage of your leadership career is essential, whether you're up-and-coming or already sitting at the top. By keeping your legacy in mind, you'll be better able to shape your leadership journey in visionary ways, leaving a memorable and positive impact on those around you and your industry.

Make lasting decisions

Making lasting decisions as a leader is a wonderful way to enhance your legacy and leave something behind. The decisions you make should be geared towards long-term successes, and they should also progress or transform the organisation in some way. The more sustainable and lasting your decisions are, the stronger your legacy will be.

Inspire the people around you

Great leaders are ultimately inspirational. They passionately inspire others about organisational or industry changes and needs and they motivate others to “get on board” and work towards success. As an executive, you should aim to inspire the people around you as much as possible, whether in your day-to-day dealings or whether you choose to give a speech or presentation or take on a team to manage.

Find ways to improve

Improve everything, whenever you can, as much as you can. This is an excellent approach that will help you shape your organisation for the better and that will ensure the legacy you leave behind will be remembered and admired. Room for improvement can often be found in any area of your company, from employee processes and company culture to strategic operations, marketing and financial performance. Whenever you think about your legacy, think about what you can improve to make your company more successful or engaging.

Consider your impact on others

No matter what kind of role you are in, you need to consider how your approaches, decisions and dealings impact the others in your organisation or industry. While you might achieve a string of accomplishments throughout your job or career, people will often only remember you based on the way your leadership decisions affected *them*. Ultimately, this is what your legacy will become.

For instance, you might have enhanced the company bottom line significantly, but you may have also taken away valued employee perks and benefits. While you might be remembered as someone who created a financially sustainable organisation, you might also be remembered as someone who doesn't care about employee happiness and cultural morale.

Finally, one last way to orient your leadership journey and bring the development of your legacy to the forefront is to ask yourself the question: "Are you easily replaceable? Or is there really no one else who can do what you do?"

If your answer to that first question is "yes", it means you are not creating a strong legacy at all. However, if your answer to the second question is "yes", it ideally means that you are on the way to cultivating a strong leadership journey for yourself and a brilliant legacy that will stay with others long after you are gone.

"Your legacy grows with each new experience, with each previously untested idea and bold ideal that you are courageous enough to deploy, and each time you inspire others to see something through to fruition."

Glenn Llopis, *Forbes Magazine*

*"You are amazing. You are a shooting star.
I will follow you forever no distance is too far.
Never take for granted your ability to fly.
At times stop and rest, but quickly get back up
before your dreams pass you by."*

Eric Pio, American Poet

