

## **10 Commandments for making a career out of a job**

1. Behave courteously to all people at all times, no matter how they interact with you.
  - From janitor to big boss everybody deserves a please and thank you.
  - You just can't have too many people on your side: you always want to be the phone call they return first.
  - As you develop your workplace persona, a bit of charm is valuable: people appreciate when you are able to make them feel a little special. Spreading small doses of sunshine throughout the day costs you nothing and will be highly valued by the recipients. But, hold the line between Blarney and BS: nobody trusts a liar.
2. Listen actively. Take steps (like rephrasing back) to make sure you're clear on what the other person is trying to say.
  - This alone will separate you from over half the population.
  - Many people aren't very good at communicating their thoughts. That doesn't mean there is no value to what they're saying.
  - It is nearly impossible to overstate the value of really understanding what is being said.
  - People will remember you for this and learn to trust and respect you for it.
  - When you get to a stage where you have to negotiate things, you'll immediately have an advantage if you really understand what the other side needs and what they just want. WIN/WIN solutions are generally somewhere in the area where you give as much of the first as you can afford and as much of the second as you can without cost.
3. It's OK to assert yourself. It's actually preferred, but do it with class and purpose.
  - Exhibiting temper or using foul language will leave a lasting impression you don't want.
  - When you give feedback to superiors, always make it actionable. Pointing out that something is wrong, doesn't do anything to solve a problem. It just dumps it on your boss's desk with a pile of other things that are probably higher in priority. "Could we do it this way because..." suggests a solution. If you don't know how to solve it, show that you're willing to be part of the solution: "I don't know exactly how to fix it, but can you suggest someone with whom I could work on a solution?"
4. Avoid gossip – it should be very, very rare that you speak about one person to another. Do it with restraint and keep it work performance related such as: "you could communicate with him more effectively if you keep in mind that he ...."
  - You never know who will quote you or who has secondary connections with another person.
  - Missteps in this area can follow you almost forever.
5. If your boss has a problem, you have a problem, whether it's in your job description or not.
  - As soon as you possibly can, forge a partnership of trust and confidence with those you report to (all the way up the line). Look for opportunities to help beyond what's expected.

- Be committed to his/her success in everything you do.
  - Work at being the person they are most grateful to have on their staff.
  - This is not brown-nosing, it's giving the most possible value for the pay you receive.
  - Strive hard to trust your leadership and be as forgiving of their errors as you want them to be of yours. BUT, if you become convinced, beyond doubt that you can't trust the people who control your future, cut your losses and move on. They don't deserve you.
6. Write things down.
- Take notes, read them back if necessary to make sure you got it all.
  - You may work with someone who rattles things off with no particular organization. This may be the only way for you to capture what they consider important.
  - Colleagues and superiors will develop the kind of trust you want in you if "you get it all" and you don't lose things.
7. Take a couple of times a day (at least at the beginning and end of the day when you can do it on your own time if necessary) to look at your priorities and take steps to clarify if necessary.
- Getting everything down, doesn't mean you'll be able to get to everything, it just means you won't lose track of them.
  - The most effective thing you can do is assess priorities and work on the most important things.
  - This prioritization not only makes the best use of your time, it also gives you a sense of confidence you're making the smart choices even when the environment is chaotic.
  - Later in your career this is when you'll decide what to delegate and what to do yourself. At that time, you'll prioritize by which things can only be done by you and which can be handled as well by someone else.
8. Seek feedback and commit yourself to work with it.
- Active listening is never more important than here. A good "coach" is pretty rare, so you have to be always receiving the message: It can come in many ways: a facial expression, a particular word or phrase, asking someone to redo what you just did.
  - You own your performance. Nobody else can. So you also own seeking the information it will take to get better. "She never told me" will never get you anywhere.
  - Make everyone your mentor: when you observe someone doing something really well, seek that person out separately to ask them how they do it or how they became proficient. Most of the time, they'll be flattered by your noticing and will go out of their way to be helpful. Remember, you just can't have too many people on your side.
  - If the place where you work does not have a periodic written review process, you may have to invent one and insist that it occurs even if it means interviewing your boss, writing the copy and getting them to sign it (this would be really rare). When a manager has to go to the effort of writing an evaluation, different information may come out and it will carry much more weight. If nothing else, it will help you sort out the most important things to work on. This should take place at least twice, but probably not more than four

times a year. Monthly progress reviews are very valuable, but they rarely include written performance evaluation.

9. Own your mistakes.

- If you never fail, you aren't trying hard enough. Learning, experimenting, innovating all require some level of tolerance for failure. The best managers will grant you many “get-out-of-jail” cards if you handle your errors right.
- The first step in handling errors right is communicating that you know what you did wrong. If you don't know you need to ask or you won't learn anything but inhibition from your errors.
- Blaming others or making excuses (as natural as these reactions are) will probably do you more harm than the error itself.
- If there is some punishment or consequence that comes of an error, take it quietly and with dignity. This is the only way to get past it. Nobody likes whining and it marks you a loser.

10. Act as if you are in it for the long haul.

- If you're in an enterprise with other people, commit yourself totally to the success of that enterprise even if you know it's only for a short time. You want to be the person they remember as “we wish we could have kept her” rather than the person nobody remembers.
- There is no part of your work or personal life that will improve with less commitment from you. There's an old song with a line that goes: “Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose”. I just can't say it any better than that.