

Stop Being Overworked and Overlooked 5 Simple Strategies for Career Success

Just as the ancient Roman philosopher Seneca defined luck as “what happens when preparation meets opportunity,” the same is true for achieving career success.

There are an infinite number of ways to define career success. It’s always personal, it’s usually multifaceted, and it often evolves over time. Some measure success in terms of salary. Others view it in terms of title, level, or professional designation. Another gauge may be the reputation that can be cultivated in their chosen industry or field. Yet another focus may be the perceived impact and importance of their work.

Regardless of the measure, in today’s fast-paced business climate, simply keeping your head down and working hard is no longer a recipe for success. The more likely outcome of this approach is being overworked and overlooked. Although working hard and working smart are still key attributes of achieving success, the hardest working and smartest are not necessarily those that will have the most interesting, rewarding, or satisfying careers.

While career success is a common goal, it can be elusive and challenging to achieve. While many people are frustrated and feeling like they are stalled or trapped, others are enjoying the journey and are achieving their personal vision of success. Why the difference?

Having had the opportunity to observe and provide support to thousands of people as they navigate job loss, job change, promotions, and career adjustments, I have come to believe that the secret to achieving and sustaining career success is cultivating the ability to embrace both proactivity and receptivity.

Increasing your capacity to balance being proactive and focused with being receptive and open can yield powerful results. Although they may appear to represent very different skills and temperaments, being simultaneously proactive (knowing what you want, focusing on the goal, driving results) and receptive (open to new ideas, new situations, and new opportunities) is analogous to creating the intersection between preparation and opportunity.

Outlined below are five simple strategies for creating the intersection of preparation and opportunity that will help you define and achieve your personal career success:

KNOW YOURSELF

Before looking outward or looking forward, begin by looking inward. Spend time reflecting on your interests, your strengths, and your work preferences. Give thought as to the environments and situations where you tend to excel. Are you looking for an occupation (a job or a role), a vocation (a calling or a passion), or an avocation (a hobby or passion outside of work)? Where do you get your energy? What causes stress and frustration?

The more objective, honest, and complete your understanding of self, the better you can match your natural skills, strengths and interests, to the world of opportunity.

GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Your comfort zone is a self-defined set of mental boundaries and these boundaries create an unfounded sense of security. Limiting yourself to your comfort zone is akin to embracing inertia and inertia rarely drives achievement or success. The Latin root of word inertia is *iners* which means idle, or lazy. There is limited personal or professional growth within your comfort zone and little chance of driving success when idle or lazy.

The best way to change your situation is to change your actions, your approach, or your attitude. Stretch mental boundaries by trying something new. Take on a challenging project, attack an old problem in a new way, or speak up and share your ideas during your next meeting.

MEET SOMEONE NEW EVERY DAY

The world is full of interested and interesting people. Strive to be one and meet one every day. Even though society is becoming more technology driven and, in some ways, more depersonalized, relationships still matter. People like to work with, do business with, and spend time with individuals they find interesting, interested, and upbeat. Building strong business and social relationships generates a strong personal network that can be leveraged to create opportunity, broaden your resource base, and generate greater visibility and awareness.

Continuing to expand your network ensures that you have contacts and constituents that span multiple organizations, with different demographics and perspectives. The broader your social and business network, the better they will help you stay current and keep you from becoming siloed within your current company, function, or narrow social circle.

Use LinkedIn or Outlook to manage and maintain your contact list. Monitor your calendar to ensure you are staying in touch with current contacts by carving out time for breakfast, lunch, or coffee. Make it a goal to have a conversation with one new person each day or use the time to forge a deeper connection with a current contact.

DEMONSTRATE AND DECLARE

Through your actions, demonstrate the things that are important to you. Understanding and communicating your value proposition is critical, and one of the most powerful ways to communicate it is to demonstrate. However, although demonstration is critical, it's not enough. In addition to the active demonstration of skills, attributes, and abilities, declare yourself. Let people know what is important to you, what you aspire to, and what you are working on. Many people assume that if they do good work and demonstrate positive attributes, people will notice. The reality is that people are busy, distracted, and unaware. If you don't supplement your demonstration of skills with the declaration of skills, interests, desires, people you will be passively waiting for others create opportunities for you rather than letting them know which avenues you interested in and excited to explore.

ANSWER THE DOOR WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS (and knock on a few doors yourself)

This is the crux of being both proactive and receptive. Cultivating a keen awareness of your personal and professional skills, abilities, and interests will help you look for situations and opportunities that might provide a match. When these present themselves, be ready to respond and react. Keep your resume current and always be willing to have an exploratory conversation if someone reaches out to express interest. Sometimes, interesting opportunities will fall into your lap but they will vanish just as quickly if you are unwilling or unable to respond in a timely fashion.

In addition to responding when opportunity knocks, you need to be proactive by identifying interesting opportunities and situations. Pursue and explore each of these with potential opportunities with enthusiasm. Leverage your network and engage them by letting them know what you are looking for, what you are exploring, and what you are learning in the process. Think of these explorations as experiments. The value of an experiment is the learning and the knowledge. If you learn something new, validate an assumption, or clarify your perspective as a result of an initial exploration of a new opportunity or situation, it's successful regardless of whether or not the opportunity came to fruition.

Career success is within your grasp but attaining it is your responsibility and your decision. Rather than allowing yourself to be overlooked and overworked, implement these five simple strategies and take control of career. By being both simultaneously proactive and receptive as you approach the world of opportunity, you can make your vision of career success a reality.

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