



## Navigating Your Career Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Have you ever noticed an individual walk into a room and everyone turn their heads? Have you ever wondered why when some people speak, everyone stops to listen? Are you noticed? Are you remembered? Are you sought out for your expertise? And are you recognized as a vital contributor by the movers and shakers of your company?

As a consultant, trainer and speaker during the past 10 years, I've had the privilege to work with decision-makers. I've picked their brains. I've challenged their decisions to hire, promote and terminate employees. I've learned what distinguishes those who win and lose in the corporate environment.

This edition of The Leader's Edge is devoted to empowering you to navigate your career successfully in the corporate world well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A successful career today has a lot more to do with building a reputation for making things happen than it does with climbing a ladder. And the one absolute requirement for building that reputation is becoming a master at self-marketing. You must take responsibility for your career path by developing a clearly defined game plan and seeking out personal coaching and mentors to achieve your mission. You must be fully aware of those skills that define success for the next millennium.

### Brand Yourself

See yourself as a brand and learn techniques to distinguish yourself from others. Your brand must reflect who you are, the expertise you provide and the added value you bring to the organization. Relate your brand to the product brands you regularly use. You don't need to read labels, qualify prices or measure results - you just know the right brand for you. Of course, building

brand recognition and loyalty takes time. It takes strategy. And it takes work. But because it is the one sure path to

career success, to promotions, opportunities and options, it's worth it.

### Be Conscious of Your Brand Packaging

Your personal presentation is an integral part of the total leadership package you provide to your organization. A leadership presence gives you a competitive edge.

Brand packaging is not about creating a superficial mask designed to mislead others. It is about projecting yourself at your best. What is it that separates dynamic individuals from the rest of the crowd? They look and act successful, confident and in control. They command respect merely by their presence. It's the collection of details that conveys who you are - grooming, wardrobe, poise, body language and voice projection. But that's only the beginning. While these attributes convey credibility, they must have a foundation of substance and integrity. True professionalism is the intangible quality that stamps your brand in the business world. It is your persona, which defines you from the minute you walk into a room, and it encompasses your values, communication style, level of expertise and interpersonal skills. Establishing a professional persona is the result of attending to all these details without losing sight of your brand distinction.

### Brand Yourself as an Established Expert

Global competition, job instability and merger fever mean your opportunity to get ahead depends on how you market your expertise. Tom Peters, author of *The Pursuit of Wow* believes there is no such thing as corporate job security. I

(continued on reverse side)



## Cocktail Party Quiz

1. The appropriate length of time for making small talk at a social function is 20 minutes?  
\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_ False
2. It's perfectly acceptable to break small talk if you notice someone across the room and excuse yourself.  
\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_ False
3. Always choose to enter a group of two people rather than three.  
\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_ False
4. It is appropriate for a man to wait for a woman to offer her hand first before offering to shake hands with her.  
\_\_\_\_ True \_\_\_\_ False

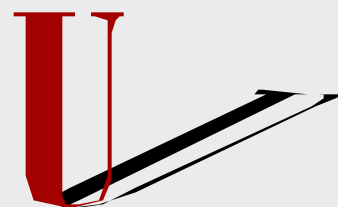
#### Answers:

1. False. Ten minutes is sufficient.

2. True. Actually, a simple way of dismissing yourself is to wait until the other person has finished speaking, and to say, "It's been interesting talking with you" and smile as you move on.

3. False. Two people might be engaged in a personal conversation. Walk up to a group of three or more, smile and wait for someone to acknowledge your presence before barging into their conversation.

4. False. In the '80s this was true. Today, the person regardless of gender who offers the hand first has the advantage. Always offer your hand first, then match the strength of his or her grip. (There should be some consideration given to the South where this rule might not apply.)



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According to studies conducted by Harvard, the Stanford Research Institute and the Carnegie Foundation, success on the job depends 75% on people skills and only 15% on technical knowledge and skills.

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agree with Tom - to be successful you've got to have a personality, you've got to have a specialty and you've got to be a brand. Become an established expert with good PR - making sure decision-makers know that what you have to offer can help the company.

You do that by (1) knowing what you're good at, what you're passionate about and (2) by offering advice to those who can benefit from your expertise. That requires for you to take a risk and speak up even if tension prevails. Deliver your insights and strategies in a thought-provoking manner. Market yourself so that when a problem arises that requires an expert, people will seek you out. Most importantly, speak up in meetings! If you seek brand recognition, you can't afford to sit in silence.

### Be Comfortable with Self-Promotion

I know that few people enjoy selling themselves. Most feel it's a vulgar concept and dismiss it as brown-nosing and other pejorative terms. However, you have to be known to be appreciated. Before I begin coaching an individuals, I always ask how their peers, their boss and senior executives perceive them. Ninety-five percent say they never thought of asking but believe they're seen as valued contributors. Then I ask how they felt about their last performance review, and the truth usually comes out. Most say their bosses are unaware of their daily contributions, how much they help others and how much they accomplished during the past year. Many say their senior executives don't really know them.

Look for opportunities to be seen, heard and appreciated. Become comfort-

able tooting your own horn and, whenever possible, do the same for others. Speaking well for others establishes you as a team player, not a "brown-noser."

### Become a Master Networker

Harvey MacKay, author of *Swim with the Sharks*, recently published a book titled *Dig Your Well Before You Are Thirsty* - already considered by the New York Times as one of the top 15 inspirational self-help books of all time. MacKay writes: "If I had to name the single characteristic shared by all the truly successful people I've met over a lifetime, I'd say it is the ability to create and nurture a network of contacts."

Business is all about building relationships and networking enhances your profile internally and externally. Remember that people do business with people they know, trust and like. Your ability to nurture positive relationships is essential to success. I believe that relationships are developed more quickly outside the office than inside. The golf course is a great place to build relationships. Also, never underestimate the power of sharing lunch or dinner. Restaurants provide an easy social environment where people behave more naturally. Discuss anything but business. Book 10 minutes a day to make the rounds in your company just to say hello. Talk to people in other companies to share information. As my mother always says, "What goes around comes around."

### Become a Master Schmooser

Face-to-face interpersonal skills are no longer optional for advancing your career. You must develop, hone and use people skills. You must become the master of artful conversation to make people - of any culture, of any age - feel comfortable around you, to want to listen to you, to want to support you, to want to do business with you. Susan RoAne in

her book *What Do I Say Next* describes a study conducted by Dr. Thomas Harrell, professor emeritus of business at Stanford University, in which he studied a group of MBAs a decade after graduation to identify successful traits. The GPA had no direct influence on their success. The one trait the most successful graduates had in common was their verbal fluency.

### Become a Master of Small Talk

Small talk is how we exchange information, ideas and opinions. As Susan RoAne says, "Small talk is what we do to build the big talk. It is the schmoozing that cements relationships and success."

To master small talk, try the following four tactics:

1. Research four topics that enable you to start a conversation with anyone - sports, current events, entertainment and human interest. This information can be gleaned from your local newspaper, TV, magazines (Time, People, Sports Illustrated, Fortune) and the Internet.
2. Match experiences and common interests with people. Establishing common experiences and interests (sports, travel destinations, hobbies) breaks down barriers and builds relationships.
3. Choose open-ended questions, encouraging the other person to become actively involved in conversation - "How did you spend your vacation?"
4. Show a keen interest in the other person. Most people enjoy talking about themselves. Listen carefully. You'll discover plenty to talk about. Topics to avoid: politics; religion; off-color jokes; personal questions about age, weight, race, marital status, health; gossip; abortion; and gender differences.

## MANY PROFESSIONALS LACK SKILLS TO PULL IT OFF

Individual branding, as we have seen, will become even more crucial to success in the corporate environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but, unfortunately, many professionals are sadly lacking in the skills to pull it off.

Corporations are expecting and even requiring their people to entertain clients and be masterful in the art of small talk, but many, particularly technical people, are not comfortable socializing. In fact, a lot of people don't see these skills as necessary for career advancement. They're wrong today, and they'll be even more wrong in the future.

Engineers, accountants and lawyers are being asked for the first time to go out and generate business, to represent their firm at a cocktail party, trade show or convention.

Social skills are becoming more important as

more people work in teams, and their success depends on their ability to form relationships. The people who just come to work and don't nurture any relationships, they're the ones who are left behind. We can't just keep our heads down and do our jobs anymore. We must sell ourselves as a commodity. To succeed we have to be networked with the right people in the organization. We need to understand that we are really selling ourselves first.

Think of yourself as your own company, and you're a product of your own company. What do you need to do to distinguish yourself from others? Part of it is your expertise, certainly, but part of it is how well you interact with others. It is the expertise plus the people skills that establishes the brand that everyone wants.



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We would also love hear your ideas for future editions of **The Leader's Edge**.

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