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# Cultivate a Cool Career

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	xvii
1. <b>Face it, you are you and they are them</b> .....	1
Take a positive, practical but sceptical attitude to your organisation. Don't expect to spend your whole career in one organisation and don't trip over internal politics.	
2. <b>Don't bury them in advice</b> .....	5
To have a successful career, good managers need to build a reputation for breeding good people. They lead confident teams, limit the amount of advice they give and help their people solve their own problems.	
3. <b>Make good suggestions loudly</b> .....	9
At any point in the chaos that describes your organisation, an opportunity can arise for you to make a sensible suggestion to the powers that be. Career people should grab such opportunities and actively seek them out.	
4. <b>Don't come to me with your problems</b> .....	13
When does a member of a team get their boss involved in a situation? Answer: when there's a problem.	
5. <b>Watch out for holiday surprises</b> .....	17
In a cut-and-thrust environment where career people are jostling for position and influence, holidays can take on a sinister aspect.	

6. **Do you want to ride in the Derby or pull a coal cart?** .....21  
Organisations serve their shareholders. Organisations also often include a mixture of businesses. Some are high risk with the potential of high return; others are lower risk and are expected to return lower profitability. Make sure your career's in the right one.
7. **Lead with style** .....27  
The ultimate test of leadership is the top job. As you progress in that direction you need the people above you and the people below you to admire the way you go about leading your team.
8. **Actions speak louder than decisions** .....31  
If you have taken a decision and informed your boss of what you and your team are going to do, for your career's sake make absolutely sure it happens.
9. **Know what to say to whom** .....35  
A meteoric careerist can't have too much exposure to top people. Think hard about extending your senior contacts.
10. **Don't leave your job behind when you move on** .....39  
It is a great mistake in career planning to assume that the current management structure is the one in which you have to succeed. Indeed the opposite is the case, when you move on, your old job description should be obsolete; and it's also a good idea to create a new one.
11. **How do I look?** .....43  
Like it or not, your appearance and your health are of more and more interest to your employer. Think about what you look like and whether you are paying enough attention to fitness.
12. **Please Sir, can I have some more?** .....47  
Salary is an important component of your brilliant career. It also defines one of the main boundaries of your lifestyle. Negotiate for more when the time is ripe. Make sure you are being paid at least what you are worth and preferably a bit more.

13. **Go on, give them a shock**.....51  
As part of your campaign to gain high exposure to senior people, take any opportunity you can to introduce new information into the organisation.
14. **Send an inside salesperson**.....55  
Your CV is a selling document and the product it is selling is you. You want someone who is trying to fill a new post to reach for your CV and like what they see.
15. **Back the right horse**.....59  
You need to get noticed. Identify who is important to your progress, and get to them.
16. **Try working for a nineteenth-century mill owner** .....63  
Some managers are just plain bastards. They are renowned for it and most people try to avoid them. Only work for them if the pay is better, or if it helps your brilliant career.
17. **Encourage the musician in everyone**.....67  
One of the best things you can do for your career is to deliver projects to your boss on time and within budget. Your team will deliver when you lead it effectively. Pick the right management style for the right situation.
18. **Find out what you are supposed to be doing**.....71  
Your career depends on your organisation meeting its objectives, and your being widely seen as making a big contribution to those aims. Find out precisely what the organisation is trying to do before you work out your detailed plans.
19. **You are totally responsible for you** .....77  
It is a great mistake to think that anyone is as interested in your career as you are. Once you are past first-line management, you have to work out where you want to go and how to get there. Use the annual appraisal to get your boss's agreement to what you want to do.

20. **I'm from head office and I'm here to help**.....81  
Some managers believe that taking a staff job is dropping out of the career battle, since most power lies with line management. A thinking careerist will, however, see opportunity in a stint out of the front line.
21. **Ready, aim, fire** .....87  
Keeping someone in your team who plainly is not going to make it can be very bad for your career. Your business performance suffers by definition and your boss sees you vacillating on an important issue, avoiding doing the right thing because it is uncomfortable.
22. **You've done what?** .....91  
Go-getters take risks and sometimes risks go wrong. When things go wrong people can get upset and angry. Sometimes doing the right thing for your career means that you have to deal with or even provoke someone's anger.
23. **Draw your own map**.....95  
In order to get to the top you need to be seen as a strategic thinker. To get that reputation you need to do some. Strategic thinking, that is. Here's a short cut to a creating a team strategy.
24. **Keep up the good work** .....99  
Some of your best career promoters are the members of your team. If they speak with pride of their department and warmly about you senior managers will notice.
25. **Don't talk so much**.....103  
It is frightening how little listening goes on. Because of this, your boss's team meetings offer an excellent opportunity for appearing authoritative and getting your own way.
26. **What goes around comes around** .....107  
Most people start networking when they are unhappy in their job or have been made redundant. Too late. Put your network of contacts to work on your career at all times. You never know when someone you used to know comes around again.

- 27. **Vain, who moi?**.....111  
Choosing how to interact with senior managers is key to career development. Here are some thoughts about deference, flattery and managing vanity, all vital ingredients of your relationship with the top folk.
  
- 28. **Everybody lives by selling something** .....115  
There is no cynical get-out here. You can take all the short cuts in the world but in the end your career depends on your customers doing business with you and expressing their delight with your performance. Keep them at the front of your and your team's thinking.
  
- 29. **Changing horses mid-career** .....119  
If you make a move to a new company your fellow managers there have an advantage over you. They know the ropes and how to shine in the existing environment. It is therefore a very good idea to do something early on to question that environment and change it in a high-profile way.
  
- 30. **Count your fingers**.....123  
Yep, this one is about the sales force. You have to learn to love them, because using a key customer as their torpedo, they can hole anyone's career below the water-line. Here's a way of understanding them that gives you a fighting chance of dealing with them effectively.
  
- 31. **Make them agree fast**.....127  
What do you want from your brilliant career? It's probably a mix of money, status, fun and finally power or influence. Let's look at the last of these, and find a way you can get agreement quickly to any proposal, big or small. This method is quick to prepare and must be reuseable.
  
- 32. **Help the aged** .....131  
The directors at the top of the organisation are usually older than most of their subordinates. This puts them at a disadvantage concerning new management techniques or technologies that have been introduced when they were already at the top. Their ignorance may be a problem for them, squire, but it's a cool career opportunity for you.

33. **Fail rich** .....135  
A high-flying career by definition means taking some business risks. If you don't try you can't fail, but you can't succeed either. As you get higher up the organisation protect yourself against making a wrong decision yourself or suffering from a bad decision made by someone else.
34. **I'm alright, it's the others** .....139  
You can't build a career by blaming those around you for any failure to perform. Assuming leadership implies taking responsibility for what your team delivers. You lose credibility with your boss if you blame your team, and it's hugely demotivating. Break out of the blame culture.
35. **The multi-headed decision maker** .....143  
In your career you'll have to sell yourself and your ideas to little committees. The challenge here is to see the situation from the various points of view of the members. Here's a way of getting many heads to nod at once.
36. **Two heads are better than one** .....147  
Top people need to have two heads. You won't get to the top unless you pay attention to your operational goals, and you won't get to the top unless you think way, way ahead.
37. **A triple-whammy career boost** .....151  
Taking an innovative idea to a customer and helping him implement it has three positive impacts in career terms. It gives you high-level exposure as loads of the customer's managers take responsibility for the initiative. It sells you and your products and services to your customer. It gives an opportunity for your lot to get on the bandwagon too.
38. **Check what it's all about** .....155  
There are two career reasons for reminding yourself what a manager is for. It is useful in operational performance because it checks that your focus is still lethal. In interviews it acts as a backdrop, as you illustrate what you have done to date, and what you will do in the new role.

39. **Two, four, six, eight.....**159  
Who do we appreciate? A snappy career depends on a number of factors – performance, of course, but also reputation, what people say about you and whether they look forward to meeting you. Giving recognition to people’s successes works at both levels.
40. **Be a dedicated follower of fashion .....**163  
There is a delicate balance for the careerist – how much of the latest management jargon and fads should you use and how much should you pooh-pooh them as so much business school tosh?
41. **You only need 20 per cent of them, you know .....**167  
Careerism involves looking for more ways to shine than simply meeting your operational goals. Senior managers want to see you helping to improve the whole environment in which you work. This means managing change projects. Here is a way of checking on the likely success of such a project before you agree to do it.
42. **Nothing can go wrong, because nothing is planned .....**171  
In days gone by, project management was the business of engineers who had techniques to control complex sets of activities. Nowadays, careerists need to treat a fluid list of activities as a project. Make sure you don’t have one arm tied behind your back before you start.
43. **It’s a bargain!.....**175  
Negotiate for everything! Your career will benefit in two ways. Negotiating to reduce your costs and increase your sales is good for performance, and this experience helps you practice for the most important negotiation of them all – your job and salary.
44. **Get your own way with a consultant .....**179  
External consultants present both an opportunity and a threat to your career. Exploit the opportunity and avoid the threat by planning how and when to get involved with them.

45. **It's how you tell 'em**.....183  
Getting people to agree to your plan of action often requires you to make a presentation. Here's a good tip for making the most important part of the presentation, the opening, effective.
46. **Of course it's risky**.....187  
You must assess the risk of any project you have volunteered for. Remember, you're assessing the risk of the project to the business, but also, more importantly, to your career.
47. **Be successful whatever your gender**.....191  
It's easier to get to the top if you are a man than a woman. Here are some women's thoughts about how to deal with discrimination.
48. **Make me an offer** .....195  
Once you get into a senior position much of your time will be spent in negotiation. Thinking about how you negotiate is key for your performance and for the terms and conditions of your post. Here are some insider tips on the delicate art of negotiation.
49. **Make your team your wings and soar** .....199  
The brilliant ideas you take to your boss and higher are only as good as the team which comes up with them, and your ability to exploit it in high places.
50. **Well read** .....203  
You need talent, artistry, political awareness and opportunism to enjoy the best your career can offer. You also need knowledge. This knowledge is much wider than your own industry. Here's how to get what you need to know.

# Introduction

**Your career needs the sort of care and attention that a passionate gardener gives to her plants. As high fliers perform their day-to-day activities, they also keep a weather eye on their careers. They cultivate good relationships with powerful people who can help them and they cultivate the skills and techniques that improve performance. That way they bring their careers to glorious fruition at the top of their chosen organisation.**

So what distinguishes those who make it to the top, and those who languish in a job that doesn't stretch them, or give them the rewards they crave? Yes OK, it's skills and knowledge but it's also flair and you can develop flair.

Flair increases with the number of times you exercise it: so take risks and think outside the square. Throughout my conversations with top people I have found this to be a theme. Remember this mantra:

*'It is easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to ask for permission.'*

Ambitious people do not wait for a sluggish management to come round to their way of thinking. They make things happen, and then if the risk goes wrong they own up and ask for forgiveness. The risk-averse and craven manager asks for permission to act. If this is denied he is stuffed. Either he goes ahead anyway against specific instructions, or, more likely, he leaves well alone and misses out on a chance to shine.

Just think for a moment about how much of your career is left to chance. It depends on who happens to be your boss when you get promoted, for example, and who likes or dislikes him or her. It depends on the exigencies of the products and services you deliver and the markets you deliver them into. It depends on the economic climate and even who is in political control of the country. All of these are, to say the least, chancy. You have some control over some of these elements, but certainly not over them all.

So what do you do when you're seeking to achieve a difficult business objective with a fair degree of uncertainty? Why, you make a plan of course. You look at other people's experience and develop a career strategy.

This book is about such a strategy and how top people have found the key to different aspects of building careers. It does not pretend that the world is just, or that it owes you a living. Rather it takes on the world as it is. It looks at how you get as much control as you can over a world where life is mostly froth and bubble.

I do not ignore the fact that success is built on success. If you want a promotion you have to perform to specification in your current role. Some of the ideas, therefore, are to do with improving performance; but they are all illustrations of how others have nurtured a humble acorn into a mighty oak standing head and shoulders above the rest of the forest.