

10 things YOU SHOULD BE

DAVID SMIEDT
DISCOVERS THE BIG
MOVES AND LITTLE
CHANGES THAT WILL
HELP YOU ON YOUR
RACE TO THE
CORNER OFFICE

Work environments are by their very nature competitive. We all dream about offices where rivalries are non-existent (yeah, right!) and the hardest workers always reap the most rewards (ha!), but here's the truth: getting ahead requires some fancy footwork. There will probably always be a colleague or two who thinks they deserve that promotion you're trying for, just as you can almost guarantee at least one teammate will never quite warm to you, no matter how much concern you show for their personal problems (or how many baked goods you try to win their affection with).

Most of us are wise enough to know that's just life – and we just let those annoyances roll off our shoulders. But it's never too late to adopt some new and simple strategies to help you stand out from the pack.

1. PLAY THE NAME GAME

Everyone in your team may know who you are, but unless you're the CEO, chances are others in the company don't. Increase your cachet with a contribution to the company newsletter or website. Or submit an article to an industry journal. Focus on an area you are passionate about, detail the challenges and cover strategies. Once your opinions – even if they are the ones you express every day at work – are in print in an independent medium, your perceived level of expertise will skyrocket, not just within your own organisation but among competitors who read the trade press. As a result, your name will stick in the minds of the very people who might just be your next employers. Think of it as a PR campaign without the hard sell.

2. SHAVE A DAY OFF EVERY DEADLINE

The next time you're presented with a deadline, enter it in your diary – for a day or two prior. Much like keeping your watch set 10 minutes early to ensure you're never late for an appointment, this tactic provides extra time for you to polish the edges, whether it's fixing spelling mistakes or adding a few more flourishes to that PowerPoint presentation. Your final product won't feel like a piece of work that just made it over the line – and your attention to detail will be appreciated.

3. KEEP YOUR DESK CLEAR

There's always one person in the office whose desk is so cluttered nobody is certain there's even a piece of furniture under that pile of junk. And too bad for them: studies show those staff with neat and tidy desks are promoted to positions more rapidly, and messy desks can actually impair performance. Says Melbourne psychologist Michael Burge: "The right clothes can make you come across as competent, professional and capable. A tidy desk does the same thing. Bosses notice a clean desk and it carries an implication of being in control."

4. PUT A PLANT ON YOUR DESK

This is about more than just incorporating a natural element into a sterile office environment. A recent 15-year study in Delhi found that the introduction of three types of plants – areca palm (which converts carbon dioxide to oxygen), mother-in-law's tongue (which converts carbon dioxide to oxygen at night) and money plants (which remove chemical toxins from the air) – to a large office helped employee productivity increase by more than 20 per cent. Eye irritation also decreased by 52 per cent, respiratory issues by 34 per cent, headaches by 24 per cent and lung impairment and asthma by 12 per cent.

5. TAKE A PILL ALREADY

3 Instead of reaching for that umpteenth latte to help retain energy and focus, step back from the caffeine and take a natural supplement.

Naturopathic nutritionist Jan Purser of Perth's Food, Body + Health says, "You can't go past the combination of ginkgo biloba and fish oil when it comes to boosting areas such as cognition, concentration and memory. Although the benefits of these have been known for some time, there is emerging evidence that bacopa extract not only improves brain function but alleviates stress."

You may also want to consider magnesium. Although this is yet to be proven with humans, in a study published in the journal *Neuron* in 2010, researchers found that higher levels of magnesium in the brain improved learning and memory in both young and old rats.

The researchers concluded that supplementing with magnesium may reduce impairment of cognitive function.

DOING AT WORK RIGHT! NOW!

DON'T WAIT TO BE MANAGED

6 “The number one thing business owners and managers are looking for is people who take responsibility,” says Linda Sultmann, principal consultant at Sydney business management company White Room. She suggests discussing your role in detail with your manager so you both have exactly the same interpretation of tasks and deliverables. “When you’re clear about what is expected, it’s easier to exceed the expectation,” she says. “It’s also important to say yes to things, trusting you will be able to figure out how to accomplish them and then asking for proactive feedback once the task is done.” If executed correctly, says Sultmann, you’ll have a far better chance of ending up with “a performance review where all there is to talk about is your pay rise, promotion or your next development opportunity”.

ACT LIKE YOU OWN THE COMPANY

No, we don’t mean four-hour “networking” lunches or ignoring everybody as you sashay through the lobby in your Louboutins. Sultmann simply suggests asking yourself how you would do things if you actually owned the firm. “Imagine your bosses are clients you have to keep happy,” she says. “Then imagine that your subordinates are the suppliers whose skills and products keep your ‘clients’ coming back for more.”

How to put this plan into action? Let’s say you have to make a presentation to higher-ups. View this as a first-time pitch for their business. Apportion each member of your team – “suppliers” – with the task of providing you with the specific tools/information they specialise in. Each will be able to see the part their skills played in bringing “the pitch” to a successful conclusion, and you’ll get the credit for bringing it all together.

SHUT UP AND LISTEN

9 So, you’ve been hired to oversee change in a department or company that badly needs it? Congratulations. Now take that handful of strategies you can’t wait to implement... and stuff ‘em. For a while, at least. Instead, take a leaf from Hillary Clinton, who branded her first overseas trip as secretary of state a “listening tour” to repair the image of the US abroad. This isn’t about “making nice” with your new colleagues, but talking personally to each person on the team. (Group discussions are tricky – many people won’t speak up, often because of politics that existed long before you arrived.) Address any concerns they have, discover where your respective ideas for improvement might coincide and make that personal connection.

SING YOUR PRAISES

8 Those who succeed in business know their shortcomings (which they make up for by utilising people whose strengths make up for said weakness) and their victories, which they aren’t afraid to share when review time rolls around and promotions are up for grabs. It’s in those latter instances that modesty can be your enemy. So if you have trouble tooting your own horn, might we suggest adding a *tres* handy accomplishment sheet to your work arsenal?

You probably only have the chance to big note yourself to the bosses once a year, and it’s easy to forget just how much you’ve attained for the company. So keep a log of important initiatives you’ve enacted or decisions you’ve made – and note how they impacted on the firm’s bottom line. Did your push to change website hosting firms save \$10,000 per quarter? Jot it down. Even if it’s what you deem to be an insignificant amount – say, a couple of grand on stationery costs – add it anyway. It’s worth the brag when you need it most. And when hitches and hiccups have bruised your self-esteem, you can pull it out of your filing cabinet and sneak a peek for a quick mood lift.

CRITICISM: DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

10 Everyone makes mistakes. Some even do it on a daily basis. Those who advance simply realise that retreat is not an option. Withdrawing into your shell can actually do your career more harm than the slip-up itself. Lessen the potential damage by manning up and seeking feedback – even if it’s going to be tough to hear. In *Nice Girls Don’t Get the Corner Office*, author Lois Frankel suggests asking an open-ended question, such as: “Can you tell me what I did in that meeting that helped me or hindered me from achieving my goals?” Not only will this help get things back on track quicker in the eyes of your boss, but there may be positives you were unaware of – and some minuses that you could have overlooked, as well.