



## CAREER TIPS

# Put the Pedal to the Metal: 12 Career Accelerators



“Self-knowledge is the foundation upon which you can build self-confidence and success.”

—Dr. Kevin Gazzara



As you eye the corner office and the long climb up the corporate ladder, realize that there are no shortcuts to the top.

Your path may zigzag through a combination of strategic lateral and upward moves and the road may have some unexpected curves and detours. But with the right planning and personal development you may be able to smooth out some bumps, anticipate the turns and maintain your speed so that you arrive at your desired destination on or close to schedule.

Assuming you are positioned well in a company where there is plenty of room for growth, or looking to join such a company, here are some tips and strategies to boost your climb.

### #1 GAIN SELF AWARENESS

“Self-knowledge is the foundation upon which you can build self-confidence and success,” maintains Dr. Kevin D. Gazzara, Senior Partner, Magna Leadership Solutions.

To get ahead, you must recognize your personal and professional strengths and weaknesses as well as understand how you interact with others. A self-assessment is an invaluable tool in these regards. It will highlight personal task preferences, as well as pinpoint your learning and communication styles. (See “Assess Your Way to Success,” *DIA Global Forum*, vol. 1, issue 6.)

Awareness makes us better leaders. It enables us to be honest about our weak spots and to hire individuals who fill those gaps and complement our skill sets. Assessments beg us to take an open and objective look at whether or not we’re in the right job and on the right path. Moreover, assessments can help us to discover our passion and align us on a success trajectory.

To the extent that early on in your career you can blend work and passion, the more successful and happier you will be, says Linda Duffy, president, Ethos Human Capital Solutions. She recommends taking the “3P” approach when deciding on a career: find a problem that needs to be solved, make it something you are passionate about and have persistence.

Once you know yourself better and have pinpointed your passion, you may realize that self-assurance is not your strong suit. Here are some things you can do to change that.

## #2 DEVELOP SELF-CONFIDENCE

David Shirey, sales expert and author of *RARE CONFIDENCE: Strategies & Inspiration to Strengthen Your Belief that You Can Achieve Anything!*, singles out confidence as the most important attribute for success. “With it, you can do extraordinary things,” says Shirey, “without it, every day can be a struggle.” Confident individuals carry with them an optimistic view and go through their day doing the things that lead to success.

Few are born with it, for some it has been instilled in them growing up, but, for the vast majority, confidence must be learned. Shirey suggests four steps to help you claim your self-assurance:

- 1. Build a mind/body/soul foundation.** Keep learning and building your skills (mind); concentrate on fitness and health (body); and let what you value most guide you (soul)
- 2. Develop a posse of inspiration.** Surround yourself with people who are

positive, successful, make you feel good about yourself and empower you to act in positive ways

- 3. Develop courage.** Act in the face of fear and don’t be afraid to fail
- 4. Fake it until you make it.** Behave as if you have confidence; positive results will follow and that will reinforce your self-assurance

Leaders need confidence, passion and drive to inspire their teams—and they need to lead by example.

## #3 DELIVER EXCELLENCE

Exceptional performance that goes beyond what’s expected does not necessarily guarantee you C-suite stature. However, it does send a message to higher ups that you are dedicated and have a solid work ethic.

“I’m constantly asked to find candidates with a strong track record of success,” says Kevin Palisi, Managing Consultant at Korn/Ferry FutureStep and a long-time recruiter for pharma and biotech companies. “No one

**TIP TO GETTING TO THE TOP:**  
Track your accomplishments and contributions in a dated log that you bring to performance reviews.



wants to give someone a more senior role if it looks like they haven't hit the ball out the park in their current role. Delivering excellence, whether as a sales rep or director of clinical development, is critical."

If you don't know what's expected, find out from your boss. Ask about the deliverables, the timeframe, the key objectives and what must be accomplished. Then, take ownership of that, execute on it and exceed goals. But, keep in mind that doing a good job is not enough. You also need to demonstrate leadership acumen.

#### #4 ESTABLISH LEADERSHIP CREDIBILITY

The higher up the ladder you go, the more your job transcends day-to-day tasks and becomes about leadership, strategy, guidance and being able to work with cross-functional teams. In other words, "as you move upward, it's becomes less about doing the job and more about leading the people doing the job," says Palisi.

The ideal candidate for Vice President of Sales for a Pharma company will not just be a high sales performer. He is likely to be someone who has successfully mentored and developed his people. Demonstrate strong leadership tendencies and you will advance further and faster—especially, when your accomplishments have been recognized by senior management.

#### #5 SPEAK UP AND GAIN RECOGNITION

The workplace is a competitive environment. To get noticed, you need to be heard. Kathi Elster, executive coach and co-author of *Working with You Is Killing Me*, suggests contributing at meetings. Even if it means rehearsing the points you want to say ahead of time. Get comfortable speaking out. The quiet observer, although a hard worker, may simply remain invisible.

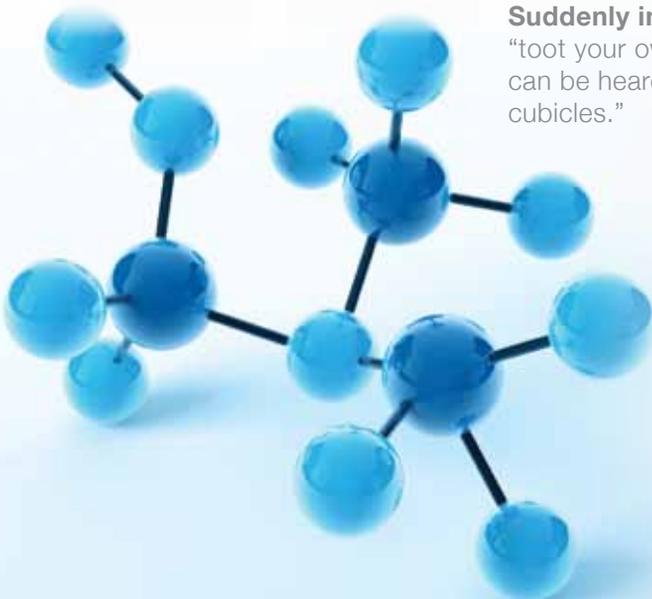
Don't downplay your strengths and achievements—crow a bit. Roberta Matuson talks about strategic bragging in her book, **Suddenly in Charge**, and says "toot your own horn, so that you can be heard amongst a sea of cubicles."

When it comes to being recognized, HR professionals also say to share your goals and aspirations with higher ups. Or, if there's a special high profile team project you'd like to work on, let your boss know. Don't be shy; be the first to put your hand in the air and say: I can do that, I have done that, I'm willing to do that. Duffy did that early on in her career. "It gave me diverse work experience and visibility within the organization. I also garnered a reputation as being self-motivated and a team player."

#### #6 BE AN ANALYTICAL PROBLEM SOLVER

When it comes to problems, the knee-jerk reaction is to rush into finding a quick fix. "People don't spend enough time analyzing the problem and the result is a band-aid approach," says Gazzara. In order to provide a valuable long-term solution, he advises taking the time to thoroughly examine the problem and its root cause. Moreover, use a forward-looking lens to ask: are we solving the right problem, do we have the time, people (support), materials and skills needed to resolve it? If so, then develop and communicate the qualitative and quantitative parameters necessary for its solution. "Analytical problem solvers who work this way are valuable assets that systematically rise up through the ranks," he asserts.

However, even talented problem solvers can benefit from having someone in their corner that has been through the ropes and can show them the way.



## #7 FIND A SUCCESS MENTOR

“Most executives credit their advancement, in large part, to people who took them under their wing along the way,” says Palisi. Why not look for a mentor who can champion your rise to the top?

Finding a mentor is so critical to career success, that DIA featured two articles in *Global Forum* on the topic: “Mentoring 1.0: A Partnership in Learning that Benefits Businesses and Employees” (vol. 2, issue 6) and “Mentoring 2.0: Move Your Career Forward with the Right Mentor” (vol. 3, issue 1).

Remember, you want to find someone who is aligned with your personality and communication style and someone who has achieved a position (far up the line) that you are looking to attain in the future.

A mentor can prepare you for what lies ahead, share some of the detours and stumbling blocks they once faced—and help you avoid similar setbacks. He or she is the voice of experience and can get you through some of the rough patches. Also, if you demonstrate talent and enthusiasm, the right mentor in your organization will campaign on your behalf and facilitate connections with those higher up. Even executives who mentor find benefits themselves, not just for the mentee, Gazzara points out.

Consider surrounding yourself with people outside the company as well. Duffy formed a “mastermind group” of individuals from different specialties who regularly get together to brainstorm, discuss business issues and share advice.

## #8 MAKE THE BOSS SHINE

It’s a smart strategy to help make the boss look good. President of Human Resource Solutions, Roberta Matuson, reminds us, if the boss looks good, you’ll look good--and, more importantly, when he moves up, he is going to remember those people who made him shine and he’ll bring them along.

Both Matuson and Elster agree that it’s essential to help alleviate some of the pressure your boss is under. Step in daily and ask if there is something you can take off his plate or a priority you can help expedite. Sometimes, management’s priorities change so quickly that the leader has no time to communicate to his team. By inquiring, you can become his conduit for communicating to the team and hasten the job’s completion. You make your boss look good and demonstrate professionalism and leadership.

Incidentally, remember to share the credit with your boss. “Naturally, no one wants to do this,” says Elster “but it goes a long way toward building trust and shows a spirit of collaboration that bosses rarely see—and definitely notice.

If you want to move in and take on more of a leadership role, then you’ll need to understand how best to communicate with the team.

## #9 POLISH YOUR INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

In your ascent to a leadership role, one of your aims is to become a persuasive communicator with the ability to influence and motivate people. For that, you’ll need to build a rapport with coworkers.

“Without a doubt, the number one reason careers stall is a lack of interpersonal skills,” says Alan Allard, former psychotherapist, now a life and career coach.

To increase your effectiveness and minimize communication



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problems, Elster suggests: become a good listener; think before you speak; and understand that people can have different interpretations, so be willing to see things from another point of view. It's also important to recognize what kinds of people set you off. Look at these individuals for their work product and unhook from their behavior.

### #10 LEARN SOMETHING NEW EVERY DAY

“Either you're green and growing or ripe and rotting,” beloved motivational speaker and success guru, Jim Rohn, often told his audiences. Whether you're working on interpersonal skills, staying current on trends in your industry, or perfecting new proficiencies, the idea is to keep evolving. “The skills you acquire will make you more valuable to your current employer,” says Duffy, “and more marketable should you choose to leave.”

Take advantage of training when offered and strive to attain both a breadth and depth of experience that you can leverage when seeking new opportunities.

- Find free webinars online
- Read books by the thought leaders in your industry
- Sign up for relevant courses at a local college
- Attend leadership seminars and workshops
- Use networking environments to learn and grow
- Gain experience through outside volunteering

### #11 BECOME A RISK TAKER

In the business world, there are those who stagnate at their job and those who excel. Gazzara compares the former to rafters who just let the current carry them along and the latter to kayakers who take control of where they are headed, navigate keenly and avoid crashing into the rocks.

Kayakers are aggressive and proactive as well as persistent in the pursuit of their goals. They have discipline, drive and passion. The kayaker has a plan and a process in mind and finds a co-pilot (a mentor who is invested in his or her success) to hold him or her accountable and ensure he or she stays on course.

In an environment that is constantly shifting, kayakers possess three critical leadership qualities that give them the courage to push outside of their comfort zone in order to learn, grow, build self-confidence and succeed. They demonstrate resilience, embrace change and are fearless risk takers.

Going into unknown territory can be a wise career move, but it can also be stressful. Learning to manage stress is one of the keys to succeeding.

### #12 MANAGE STRESS WITH POSITIVE ACTION

The fast track and stress are often thought to go hand- in- hand. Yet there are individuals who are on that path who have learned to manage stress—and they are able to handle more challenges, setbacks and surprises, says Allard. What's their secret?

## OTHER TIPS FOR ADVANCING YOUR CAREER:

- Gain international experience
- Build your success story by tracking the positive impact you've had in each of your roles
- Cultivate your competitive advantage
- Line up and train your successor

Darcy Eikenberg, author of *Bring Your Super Powers to Work: Your Guide to More Clarity, Confidence and Control*, tells us that stress stems from the belief that we have no control. "When we take control, we reduce stress and change how we see things without waiting for the world around us to change."

She maintains that we have more control than we give ourselves credit for. And, while we can't control everything, we can control what we say, what we do and what we believe.

Change your self-talk tapes. "Stress is something we create internally," says Allard. Pay attention to what you're thinking. If you're feeling overwhelmed, stressed or angry, you're probably reacting to external circumstances. Instead of building up negative thoughts, generate positive energy through proactive action: be assertive, talk things out and find a solution.

For instance, if your boss is piling more work on your already overfilled plate, instead of getting stressed out, take action by asking to sit down with him to discuss priorities. "If you have a strong sense of self worth and confidence—and value what you bring to the table—then you are bound to take actions that earn you respect and career advancement," Allard says.

## CONCLUSION

Take a good look at yourself and decide which of these twelve steps you need to focus on first. Remember, your goal is to increase your visibility, your value and your leadership potential. If you start now, in time, you will begin to see some remarkable changes in overall job satisfaction, personal empowerment and professional status. ●

