

Maintaining your career momentum

Last issue, *Michelle Gibbings* showed you how to ‘future-proof’ your career. This time she’s showing you how to keep that momentum going to ensure you never miss a step

History is littered with stories of companies that rose to prominence and then, through complacency, lost their way. It’s the same with career success. The most consistently successful people don’t seek to do the bare minimum. They are always on the look-out for ways to proactively expand their role and to stay ahead of the curve. Even if your career as an EA or PA is heading in the right direction, you don’t want to be complacent. It’s never too early to check in on your progress. Here’s seven tips to get you started.

1 Obsess about presence

Be present, focused and look for ways to distinguish yourself from the crowd so you are known for something. You are always on show. What you do and say and, more particularly, don’t do and say is noticed far and wide across the organisation.

2 Keep building your value

Don’t be limited by your job description and set KPIs. Always seek to do more and expand your scope of activities. Rather than waiting to be told what to do, identify where there are opportunities for improvement and make it happen. This is a great way to show initiative and to consistently demonstrate the value you are adding.

3 Be proactive

Research shows there are correlations between proactive personality types and career success. A proactive personality is defined as having a tendency to seek to change one’s environment, not be constrained by situational forces and to seek out new and different opportunities and show initiative. Career success includes things like salary, bonuses, promotions, career satisfaction and job satisfaction, and a person’s internal and external marketability.

By being proactive, you are taking control and making sure you remain firmly in the driver’s seat of your career. Remember, roles change and come and go, and you always want to be positioned well for the change.

4 Know how to say ‘no’

A key part of avoiding burn-out and maintaining career success is learning to say ‘no’ with conviction. This doesn’t mean you say ‘no’ without careful thought. Rather, it’s about saying ‘no’ with consideration of others and compassion for them and yourself. When you are faced with this dilemma ask yourself - what’s the right thing to do for you, others involved, and the organisation?

5 Continue your learning mission

As an EA, you are already adept at managing internal politics and understanding the organisational dynamics. However, organisational dynamics constantly shift and so remaining alert to those changes is critical. Continue to seek to understand the environment; how it operates, and what may work or not work in this context. Set yourself regular fact-finding mission – where you are seeking out new information, insights and contacts.

Ask yourself

- Are you satisfied with where you are at now?
- What else could you do to add value to your work?
- What further learning do you need to investigate to enhance your career?
- What other relationships could you build to advance your insights and connections?
- How else could you contribute to those around you?
- What does the next step in your career look like?

6 Keep mentally and physical sharp

In your role you will have good days and not-so-good days. Consequently, managing your energy is critical. You may not notice the impact that the working environment is having on you, unless you stop and prioritise taking care of yourself. As you juggle constant demands and pressures, your brain will be on overdrive as it is constantly solving new problems.

Here’s some tricks to get you through.

- Map out your schedule and include time for yourself. Put this in your schedule and commit to it. When you are busy it can be hard to prioritise yourself. However, your body needs time to rejuvenate to ensure it operates at peak performance.
- Don’t waste your energy on things outside your control. In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey explained how you are far better to focus your energy on those matters you can influence. However, we often spend our energy on things we are concerned about, but have little or no influence on. Recognising and accepting the difference is a crucial step in directing your energy positively.
- Establish core rituals and new habits, which may include a weekly massage, listening to music or a daily run. Pick something you really enjoy doing and is revitalising for your body and soul. When you create a habit it becomes much easier to keep doing it.

7 Reward yourself

As you move forward in your career, it’s important to take the time to reflect on your progress. Check in with yourself on what’s working and not working. Identify where you may need to shift, adjust or realign your expectations and behaviour.

However, it can be too easy to just move to the next thing. So take time to celebrate your progress with the people who matter the most to you, and who support you and your career.

As you think about what’s next, ponder the words of Aristotle, “*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit*”.

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THE EXPERT

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