

## Ten Things Every Employee Should Know: How to Increase One's Personal Value at Work (February 17, 2014)

It seems like every employee today is worried about job security, regardless of whether the economy has improved or not.

As I walk the floors of client companies I hear concerned employees who are stressing about their future. Most feel helpless, believing their destiny is in someone else's hands. They think there is nothing they can do to protect themselves from being laid off.

This may be true in some cases where poor management decisions have left companies with no option other than massive downsizing. But in most cases, management makes a decision of who stays and who leaves during bad economic times based upon a value judgment of the worth and contribution of the individual employee. High value employees are more secure in their employment than employees whose worth is questionable.

Therefore, every employee needs to fully grasp this simple concept: In most situations, **the future of an employee's job security rest squarely on the shoulders of the employee, not their manager.** The key to maintaining one's employment is to ensure one is *employable*. This applies to both one's current job and one's future employment possibilities.

Employable employees will always have a job. Wise employees realize this. Astute employees know there are very specific things they can do to guarantee they remain employed or employable. Sadly, most employees never learn these basic precepts. These principles are seldom, if ever, taught in public schools or business management courses. Some people may be lucky enough to learn about them from a mentor. But most people either learn these principles the hard way — through experience — or they never learn them at all.

Listed below are ten important axioms I believe every employee must fully understand and internalize in order to better position oneself for success in the business world. These ten principles come from my more than 37 years of observations as a business executive and management consultant. They are ten unspoken axioms that apply in any organization. They are ten keys to an employee's current and future success.

Axiom #1: **Your work is a commodity.** What you do as an employee only has value if someone is willing to pay for it. If you want people to value what you do, you need to deliver on the "implied promises" that are inherent in your job description. It's implied that you will be honest. It's implied that you will be on time to work. It's implied that you will work hard and provide an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. It's implied that you will do exactly what is expected of you by your boss. It's implied that you will never exhibit inappropriate or off-purpose behaviors or act contrary to the good of your employer.

The better you are at delivering on the implied promises, the greater your value will be

as an employee. And the greater your value is as an employee, the higher the odds are that you will always be employed. Do what your company needs you to do, serve your customers, obey your boss and work hard -- that's how you stay employed.

Axiom #2: **The value of your work is determined by others, not by you.** As an employee you cannot tell others how valuable you are. You cannot declare how hard you work. You cannot determine the worth of what you do based upon your own perceptions of worth. Your boss – and more particularly, your customers – determines the worth of what you do as an employee.

You need to find out what others expect from you in the workplace. Focus on your “customers” and what they want. Ask your subordinates, peers and superiors what their expectations are of you. Learn their definition of success for you so you can work toward it. Don't assume you know what it takes to succeed. Solicit the input of others and then match your performance and behaviors to the feedback you receive.

Remember, in the workplace other people determine the criteria for your success, not you. You will succeed when you deliver what others expect from you.

Axiom #3: **You get out of life what you give.** Make sure you give your honest best effort at work. Show more interest in meeting the needs of the business, rather than your own needs. When you do all that you can at work to achieve the company's objectives – while suspending your personal agenda – you will find that your personal needs, more than likely, will also be met. When you watch out for others, they usually watch out for you.

Axiom #4: **Be supportive of your boss.** Do everything within your power and ability to make your boss a hero. Discern his or her needs and objectives. Do your part (and more) to meet those needs and achieve the boss' objectives. Be responsive to the directives and commands of your boss. Express appreciation and show your support of your boss whenever possible. Very seldom in the business world can one succeed without the support of one's boss. The more supportive you are of your boss, the more support you can expect in return, particularly in tough economic times.

Axiom #5: **Be supportive of your teammates.** Help out whenever possible. Chip in when work needs to be done. Never engage in gossip, back-biting, or criticism of the members of your work team. Talk positively about your colleagues. Offer encouragement and support to your coworkers at every opportunity. Recognize the accomplishments of others and praise them liberally. Be a team player in all of your actions, words and deeds.

Axiom #6: **Recognize where and how other people have contributed to your success.** Few great achievements were ever accomplished individually. Someone helped you get to where you are. People around you are contributing to your success. Give credit to those who support you directly or indirectly. Take only a small piece of the credit for team accomplishments. Don't toot your own horn too loudly. When you recognize and praise others for what they have done for you, more than likely they will

sound your praises in return.

Axiom #7: **Speak up.** Be a contributor. Share your opinion and views. Provide input. Offer your perspective. Don't be a "yes man" when no is the right answer. Help everyone to succeed by identifying and sharing where improvements can be made. But do so wisely and kindly. Know when, where and how to offer suggestions or provide critical analysis. Have sound, valid reasoning behind your statements and never push your personal agenda. Always offer your suggestions in a kind and respectful manner.

Axiom #8: **Be receptive to and a champion of change.** Change is inevitable in every job. Work processes continually evolve. Good workers are always looking for ways to accomplish their work easier, faster or cheaper. Never become complacent in your work. Always look for opportunities to improve. Never resist change. When changes come accept them eagerly and adapt to them quickly. Be an early adopter of change and help others to change as well. Show management that you are willing and able to do whatever is necessary to guarantee success in the new business model.

Axiom #9: **Tolerate the idiosyncrasies of your organization.** Every company has something strange about it. Usually there is some trivial (or significant) thing about the way a company operates that bothers the employees. Good employees are able to look past it; and it is this tolerance that makes them especially good employees. Bad employees whine and let it affect their attitude; and it is their bad attitude that makes them bad employees. The more employees complain or fight against the idiosyncrasies of their organization the less they become a part of it. Good employees seek to build up their organization, while bad employees tear it down. Do all you can to be a non-complaining, non-criticizing employee.

Axiom #10: **Be a model of excellence.** Produce quality results. Provide exceptional service. Model the appropriate attitude and behaviors. Make it happen. Get it done. Do it right.

High value employees are always "go-to" employees. They are the ones who managers know will get the work done on time, on scope, and within budget. Be an employee that can always be counted on. When you are viewed as the highest value employee, you will either be the last on the list for layoffs or off the list completely. But, more important, high value employees can easily transport their high value to any organization for whom they work. There is always a place for high value employees.

Employees who consciously remember these ten axioms, and model them daily, will find their value to their company increasing. High value employees are seldom let go. Even during severe economic downturns, most companies will do all they can to retain their highest value workers.

I wish to stress that these ten axioms should constitute "normal" behavior for all employees at all times. Clearly they are important during a downturn in business, but, even in the good times, employees who model these principles, for in good times high value employees are the most likely to get promotions and pay raises. Management tends to reward employees who deliver on the implied promises, meet expectations,

and focus on business results. Management appreciates those employees who support their boss and their fellow workers. Management prefers employees who speak up and offer suggestions for improvement in a kind and respectful manner. The best candidates for promotion are those who are receptive to change, tolerate the company's idiosyncrasies, and model the appropriate performance, attitude and behaviors each and every day at work.

Wise employees realize their employment future is within their own hands. To a great extent they control their own destiny in the workplace. They can choose to accept these ten axioms or reject them; and, by so doing, either reap the rewards or suffer the consequences of their choice.

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