

Personal Excellence

The Magazine of Life Leadership

PROFESSIONAL • MYTHS

Career Myths

Where do you stand?



by Beverly Kaye and Mike Stromes

WE ARE CONTINUALLY AMAZED AT HOW MANY people operate out of old mindsets and myths. We write to clear out those cobwebs and move those individuals into the present!

To test your mindset, read each of the seven true-or-false statements below.

1. Career success is primarily achieved by moving in a vertical direction. T or F

2. Investing energy in alternatives to vertical movement (including special or temporary project assignments) is a waste of time and should be avoided. T or F

3. Most available career opportunities are advertised in newspapers or posted on the open-positions board. T or F

4. It's who you know that counts. T or F

5. Networking is something you only do when you're not working (out of a job). T or F

6. Working harder, maintaining a good relationship with my boss, and achieving or exceeding my goals are all I can do to earn the career opportunities I deserve. T or F

7. Politics is a bad thing practiced by selfish people to get what they want at the cost of others. T or F

While there might be a grain of truth in these statements, we suggest that all are more myth than reality. Holding any of them to be mostly true will only hinder your ability to see or act upon opportunities for career growth.

When we ask groups to brainstorm the question: "What can individuals do to overcome these obstacles?" the wisdom of the group provides practical solutions that negate all seven of these statements. Always, a few participants who enjoy career success express their amazement at the restrictions that others impose on themselves. This minority never embraced these beliefs as the truth in the first place.

Debunking Myths

For each of these seven beliefs, we offer seven alternatives that

shape the actions taken by those enjoying higher levels of career satisfaction and success.

Myth 1: Career success is primarily achieved by moving in a vertical direction. Career success is an ongoing life-long process, and is not the result of a single move in any one direction (vertical, lateral, or growing in place). Success is achieved through the realization of a series of career goals that will take you in multiple directions.

Career success is predicated

on selecting career goals that fit your interests and values, and enables you to develop your abilities to their fullest potential. When you reframe career success in this way, you empower yourself to move beyond the all-

or-nothing thinking about one position and think more strategically about your future. You are now free to think of career success in terms of enjoying the 2,000 hours you spend at work each year developing your capabilities, and staying marketable and resilient.

Myth 2: Investing energy in alternatives to vertical movement (including special or temporary project assignments) is a waste of time and should be avoided. Lateral moves, temporary project assignments and job enrichment opportunities promote cross-functional knowledge,



expose us to new career possibilities and create opportunities to build our network.

Myth 3: Most available career opportunities are advertised in newspapers or posted on the open-positions board. Personal contact or networking accounted for 75 percent of all jobs found by the job seekers studied. Advertising accounted for 10 percent, employment agencies for 9 percent and other sources for 6 percent. Likewise, when you are seeking a new position within your organization, the internal job market behaves similarly. Most openings are not filled as the result of having been posted, or with the help of the HR department. Internal positions are filled by candidates who are known to the hiring manager by their positive reputation (by the stories people tell about the candidate); known through previous contact with the manager (via networking or having worked together on an ad-hoc basis); or referred to the manager by a trusted ally.

Myth 4: It's who you know that counts. It's not whom you know that counts, but who knows you and what they know about you. Career success requires taking steps to become more visible, perhaps by volunteering to work on a highly visible project that can showcase your talents. Career success requires managing your reputation by proactively seeking feedback from multiple sources (boss, peers, clients and direct reports).

Myth 5: Networking is something you do when you're not working (out of a job). Many

people see networking as something only done by people out of work or those worried about being laid off. Career success requires a vibrant network of people who can provide ongoing coaching, advice, information, connections, or direct sponsorship to opportunities.

Myth 6: Working harder, maintaining a good relationship with my boss, and achieving or exceeding my work objectives are all I can do earn the career opportunities I deserve. Having a good work ethic, maintaining a positive relationship with the boss, and achieving or exceeding work objectives are important, but are not always enough to earn the career opportunities you



deserve. While your boss should be included in your network, it is unrealistic to expect him or her to have all information, connections, and sponsorship capability that you need. Expand your network in ways that give you the breadth of knowledge, political support and visibility you need to achieve your goals.

Myth 7: Politics is a bad thing practiced by selfish people to get what they want at the cost of others. Politics is utilizing your personal power to effect positive change. All organizations are political, and everything that happens is the result of people being political. Being political can mean taking steps to work on a highly visible and important project, or moving laterally to gain new knowledge while adding value to another part of the organization. It can mean developing relationships with employees outside of your area and finding

out how you can help them be successful. Being political also requires being keenly aware of the cultural norms—the unwritten rules of behavior that often dictate acceptable behavior and how things get accomplished (e.g., how disagreements are settled, what it might mean to arrive late to a meeting, or be a team player, or participate in company social events).

Change Isn't Easy

If you're not getting what you want from your career, and you're not willing to change the rules that govern your efforts, your results won't change.

Here are two To Do's:

- **Start small.** Examine the seven beliefs/myths and pick one that you had indicated was a reality for you (or pick one that might be the least stressful to start with). Reread our comments that relates to the belief you chose and write down three actions you will take.

- **Don't go it alone.** Find a friend or colleague who will exchange aspirations, concerns, and strategies, and support you by debriefing experiences and offering encouragement. Or, seek a mentor. Share your aspirations and strategies, ask for feedback, and ask, "What would you do if you were me?" Keep in touch to debrief your experiences.

It's hard to change a mind-set. Your personal lens governs how you pursue career opportunities. Stop and pay attention to the way you've looked at issues in the past, and the way you want to intentionally change that perspective. If you can shift even one of your myths, that shift will open new possibilities for you. **PE**

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