

The Top 10 Career Killers and...



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How To Avoid Them



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The **Top 10 Career Killers** and How To Avoid Them

We've all seen it...

Someone with less experience and fewer skills zips past you on the organizational ladder, leaving you like career roadkill in their dust. You scratch your head. You swear. And you wonder, "What does that person know that I don't?"

I'll tell you. They know how to avoid the career killers that can trip you up, slow your progress, or stop you in your tracks altogether. And so should you. Read my top 10 tips so nothing and no one can derail you on your professional path again!

10 Career Killer #10

You believe that if you do good work, people will notice.

Don't assume that if you're doing a good job, people will magically take note and that next plum assignment or promotion will land in your lap. Not that it doesn't happen on occasion for some lucky folks. It just doesn't happen often. You need to increase your odds.



Shine a spotlight on your accomplishments. This is tricky, of course, and you really need to pick your spots so that what you're calling attention to is of real value to the mission of the organization, not just to you. You need to be thoughtful, gracious, and timely.

For example, if you just led an important meeting or completed a project and it warrants a recap, put it in writing and send it to your boss and others on the team. Be sure to include credit for others where it's due, but don't overlook your own role. Sometimes we get so caught up in being a team player (often a good thing), we diminish our own achievements (rarely a good thing).

9 Career Killer #9

You lack confidence and it shows. If you're demonstrating a lack of confidence in your current position, it's tough for others to justify that you're ready for the next position. You may be giving yourself away with nonverbal behaviors such as lack of making eye contact, nervous fidgeting, or taking up as little space in the room as possible (hint: you can't actually make yourself invisible, even if you shrink into a little ball at the conference table). Interestingly, research has shown that people who are more vocal and participatory - even if their abilities are no greater - are more respected and promotable. And, yes, introverts, even you can learn to flex the confidence muscle with a few key strategies.



Participate in meetings (introverts: speak up in the first ten minutes before your anxiety goes through the roof and "everyone says all the good stuff"), check the headlines so you're not caught off guard if there's big news, and dress for the role you're aspiring to win. Yes, style does matter and if you don't have it, ask your most fashion-forward friend to help you or find a free stylist at your local department store. (You can learn more about confidence in my book *Capture the Mindshare* and on my [blog](#).)

8 Career Killer #8

You take the boss by surprise.

Except for the occasional birthday or closed-a-deal celebration (and even those are open to debate), nobody wants to be surprised in the workplace. In every culture, information is currency, and since your boss pulls your promotional strings, you need to be ultra-sensitive as to how and when you share information so you don't surprise your supervisor, particularly in front of his or her boss.

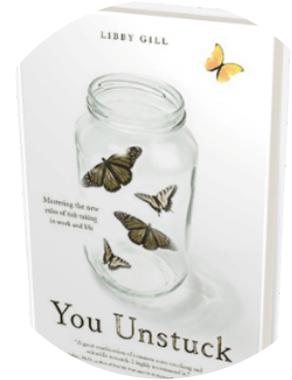


Make sure you share information in a timely and relevant manner. This means even the bad stuff, especially the bad stuff. If you make a mistake, be immediately forthcoming about the details, apologize, and make whatever amends or corrections are necessary. If your boss makes a mistake, point it out as delicately and privately as possible. Mind you, I'm not advocating that you become a yes person, that's a quick route to losing all credibility. But even if you think your boss is an intractable Tough Guy or Dragon Lady, he or she has feelings, too, so be considerate.

7 Career Killer #7

You're too comfortable.

If you've read my book **You Unstuck**, you know I'm all about taking risks, including the ones that put butterflies in your stomach and keep you up at night (once in a while). So even if you like your job, don't get lulled into a no-growth comfort trap where you may never get out. When your boss (or your boss's boss) sees that you're good at what you do but perceives that you have no desire of moving upward or onward, they are often all too happy to let you keep doing it forever.



And after a while, no one will think of you as a rising star. Instead, express interest in learning new skills, taking on new challenges, helping out in different areas so your supervisor and stakeholders have no doubt that you are ready, willing, and chomping at the bit for more.

6 Career Killer #6

You've got a crappy attitude.

'Nuff said, right? Well, maybe not. Because this complaint is persistent and pervasive. If you've ever been told (even by yourself to yourself) that you're a whiner, complainer, gossip, naysayer or any variation on that theme, you need an attitude adjustment ASAP. In fact, in a CareerBuilder study of 2,000 HR professionals, 62% said that people who were



negative or pessimistic were less likely to get promoted than others. Not incidentally, that kind of attitude was the number one reason they cited out of more than a dozen promotion non-starters.

Learn how your corporate hierarchy functions, look around to see who's got the system wired, find a good mentor if someone will have you. Or, at the very least, a good role model you can emulate. You'll get a lot less frustrated and nip the negatives in the bud if you recognize how the work world really works. And for heaven's sake, save your whining for a best friend, therapist, or non-judgmental pet.

5 Career Killer #5

Your 9-5 mentality is showing.

Sure, you're working for a paycheck, but if you're doing the absolute minimum - that is, coming in at 9 on the dot and taking off at the stroke of 5 - your boss is justified in thinking you're a small player who may care about your own job but has little commitment to the greater organization.



Trust me, there's someone in line right behind you who's willing to demonstrate that they care about the company, they have a plan to add value to the team, and they know where they're going professionally. Take a good look around, see what needs doing beyond your cubicle, and get out there and get noticed

4

Career Killer #4

You don't use feedback effectively.

From entry-level to C-suite, you have to know how to get and use criticism to your advantage.

Even if you're in a no-feedback culture (not nearly as rare as you might think), you have to find ways to solicit information about how you're doing. And I don't just mean through your annual appraisal. Get in the habit of asking your supervisor and stakeholders questions that provide feedback without appearing needy or approval seeking. Asking low-key open-ended questions like "Was there anything I might have done differently in that client meeting?" or "Are there any changes I can make that would enhance the status report?" show your boss that you are more than willing to make improvements. And when you get the feedback, make sure you're grateful, non-defensive, and that you use it going forward.

If you're in a feedback blackout or just want more candid information, try my LG 360 Assessment. In a corporate 360, a coach like me might come into your organization and interview folks who work with you, that is, supervisors, peers, and direct reports to give you a full 360-perspective of feedback from your colleagues. But you can do a mini-assessment yourself by asking five or more people who you trust to share their thoughts about your strengths, weaknesses, and how they would genuinely describe you if their best friend/former boss were considering hiring you. Let them know that not only can you handle the feedback, including the negative, but that you really want it. Say thank you and make the appropriate changes, circling back to say thanks again if a particular piece of advice works especially well for you. People love knowing they made a difference.



3

Career Killer #3

Your hard skills aren't up to snuff.

If your hard skills - that is the technical, financial, marketing or whatever abilities you need for your job - are not up to the demands of your current level, you can bet it's going to be tough to get to the next level. While hard skills aren't everything (see Career Killer #2), they're probably what got you the gig. If you have any hint that your skills and services are not meeting expectations, do whatever you need to do - including hiring outside help if it's not offered internally - to correct the deficit. And if it's simply a matter that people perceive your skills as lacking, make sure they know where you shine (see Career Killer #10).



2

Career Killer #2

Your soft skills are less than stellar.

Strong soft skills - that is, communication, collaboration, and executive presence - can often make up for a weakness in hard skills. If you don't believe me, look around and see who's getting by (and getting promoted) on personality alone. Not saying it's right, just saying it happens.



Ramp up these techniques to increase your EQ and people skills:

- Be a life-long learner. Today's talent gold standard is people who can master new skills, develop leadership capability, and flow through multiple functions within the workplace.
- Adapt to change in the workplace and the world. People who are flexible rather than freaked out by change, challenge, and chaos have less stress and more composure when the latest new thing gets thrown at them.
- Learn to manage conflict. Even the warm and fuzziest of workplaces will see conflicts come and go. Be the person who can help others work through disagreements, differing viewpoints, and the occasional argument. Be honest, respectful, and open the door to two-way conversation.
- Become a world-class listener. The best communicators have a special way of making you feel, if just for a moment, that you're the only one who matters. Show respect for others by turning off your devices and plugging in to their concerns and ideas. They're much more likely to give you the same courtesy in return.

And now, for Career Killer #1...drumroll please...



1

Career Killer #1



You don't know how to leverage your network.

If people don't know who you are, what you're capable of, and what you want in your career, they can't very well be expected to help you. Get out of your cubicle (or corner office) to develop and nurture your ties before you need them. While it's easy to get buried in day-to-day challenges and think of networking as a luxury rather than a necessity, this is shortsighted when it comes to the big career picture. It takes effort to make deep and lasting relationships that can create long-term value for you and others. Reach out virtually when necessary, but never forget that nothing can replace face-to-face connection.

Make a specific plan to develop and leverage your network and then work it. I suggest you schedule one internal coffee or lunch date per week to get to know your colleagues on a deeper level. And also schedule one external meeting per month with someone in your field. You want to know everyone who can hire you, or who you can hire, details about job openings, and industry trends. And don't ignore the recruiters - even if you're not looking. Help them out and they'll be much likely to help you when you need them.

One last note of caution: research shows that while men often leverage their networks for a specific purpose - reference, sale, job - women tend to use their network as a general relationship tool. That's okay, of course, but ladies, we can do a lot more asking.

Congratulations!

You've discovered ten top strategies that will serve you throughout your professional journey. I look forward to your feedback and comments at Libby@LibbyGill.com



Libby Gill is an executive coach, leadership expert, and international speaker. She is the former head of communications for Sony, Universal, and Turner Broadcasting, and author of six books, including the award-winning [You Unstuck](#) and [The Hope-Driven Leader](#).

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