

Human Resource Associates

Employment Consultants

The Skills of Top Managers Part III

In part I and II, we reviewed the first 9 of what *Harvard Business Review* identifies as the 13 skills that set top managers apart from others. Those nine were:

1. **Setting Goals That Inspire Others**
2. **Hiring the Best**
3. **Keeping the Best**
4. **Delegating With Confidence**
5. **Managing Your Time**
6. **Managing Teams**
7. **Appraising and Coaching**
8. **Handling Problem Employees**
9. **Dealing With Crisis**

In part III, we will focus on the tenth skill — developing your career (and theirs).

10. **Developing Your Career (and Theirs)**

The world of work is changing fast. Not too many years ago *computer* was a job classification. People with paper and pens and good math skills did the math required to fill the actuarial tables and calculate artillery trajectories. These jobs no longer exist. Computers do them now and we have advanced beyond this work.

The job of management has also changed. It's no longer about being authoritarian, demanding, and uncommunicative. It's now about collaboration between managers and employees. Decision making is being pushed down to lower levels, and most tasks are now handled by teams. Companies are expecting everyone, including managers, to produce more with less.

Beyond all those external changes, *you* are also changing. You are acquiring skills, experience, and judgment and probably have a greater understanding of your values, strengths, and personal aspirations. You should have become more valuable to your employer.

Career development is the process of accessing where you are in your work life, where you want to be and beginning to make the necessary changes to get you there. But before we start, let's understand this; career development and advancement no longer mean just advancing up. They mean moving up or over to what you want to and should be doing. Success to a sales person may mean moving over to product development or public relations; to a business executive, it may be about

starting up your own business or taking a leadership position representing and serving your industry. Or very often success may mean broadening and improving yourself in the work you do now.

First know yourself

What are your passionate business interests? What are your deepest work values? Can you identify your strongest skills? Try to assess:

- The types of work you like to do
- The activities that give you the most satisfaction
- The environments in which you prefer to work
- The types of people you like to work with
- The abilities you possess that you'd like to develop

You have three sources of information for making this self assessment; you, your colleagues-friends and family, and formal evaluation tools such as the Myers-Briggs assessment test series. Look deep within yourself to identify your key interests, values, and skills. What do you like about yourself? What is most special about you? Imagine that you are stepping into retirement and looking back over your entire career. Then finish these sentences:

I am most proud of _____

I wish I had done more _____

What do these answers tell you about your business interests, values, and skills?

Also talk to the people who know you best. They can tell you things about yourself you don't know. Imagine that you are the CEO of your own professional growth (because you are). Think of these

people as your "board of directors." Ask them, "What's my reputation in the company? What am I best known for?" Then talk to your friends. Pick five or six people who know you well. Prepare the following questionnaire for them:

1. What four words best describe me?
2. If your best friend asked you to tell her about me, what would you say?
3. What appears to motivate me?
4. What would be the ideal job for me?
5. What seems to make me most excited and fulfilled?
6. What work should I stay away from and why?
7. What about myself do I have trouble seeing?
8. What aspects of myself do I need to change to be more successful?
9. What aspect of myself should I not change?

Collect all the responses and look for common themes. The themes will provide clues to your interests, values, and skills.

There are of course more formal assessment tools that can help you clarify these things. (Also see the *Personnel Notebook* issue, "People Dynamics," on the association's website.)

Identify your basic business interests

We said that to know yourself you will want to focus on your business interests, work values, and skills. A study of 650 professionals from many industries over a 10-year period identified the following 8 categories as representing the basic business interests that encompasses all work.

1. Application of Technology
People in this category are interested in how things work. They seek better ways to use technology to solve business

problems. They like planning and analyzing production and operating systems, and redesigning business processes.

2. Quantitative Analysis

In this category are people who are good at running the numbers and see the mathematical certainty of things as the only way to figure out business solutions. They also see mathematical work, such as cash-flow analysis, methods of forecasting sales, and other number-based activities as fun exercises.

3. Theory Development and Conceptual Thinking

This category involves dealing in abstract ideas, creating business models, and explaining or analyzing the competition in your industry and/or business units.

4. Creative Production

This category includes imaginative, out-of-the-box thinkers. They are comfortable and very engaged during brainstorming sessions and are usually your R&D scientists and engineers; many have an interest in the creative arts and entertainment.

5. Counseling and Mentoring

Feeling genuine satisfaction from the success of others they counsel and enjoying the process of coaching people are important elements in this category.

6. Managing People and Relationships

In this category are those who enjoy dealing with people on a day-to-day basis. They derive satisfaction from workplace relationships, like to motivate, organize and direct others, and focus more on outcomes than people in the “counseling-mentoring category.”

7. Enterprise Control

Having decision-making authority over their part of the universe, whether it's over a high school class or a division of a corporation, makes those in this category happiest.

8. Influence Through Language and Ideas

Public relations, journalism, and advertising are some of the careers enjoyed by those in this category. They are often good storytellers and negotiators, and good at persuading through the written and spoken word.

Identify your work values

Your work values are the values you place on the rewards you receive in return for performing your job. They are the values that motivate you and make you excited about your job. We all have many different value systems. For example, we speak of family values, national values, or spiritual values.

If you know and understand what your work values are, you can greatly increase the likelihood that you'll choose the work that satisfies you. These may include your opportunity for wealth, an intellectual challenge, affiliation with the people you admire or respect, or a satisfying work-life balance.

A company's or department's culture, the way people do things, what they expect, what they think is important, etc., also represent work values. Know what your values are, and you'll be in a much better position to decide who and where you choose to work.

Ask yourself, “What motivates me? What would I be willing to give up to pursue more satisfying work?” Don't get misled by what you think you're *supposed* to value like altruism, and to avoid listing values you think you *shouldn't* have like desire for prestige or financial gain. Be as honest as you can possibly be when you do this exercise. These answers might

guide you into the best or the worst career choices.

A useful exercise is to list all the true work values you can think of on index cards; one per card. These might include:

- An environment of openness, camaraderie and friendliness
- Access to experts in the industry
- Good health and childcare benefits
- Stock options, pension plans, and profit sharing
- Scheduling options such as flex-time, telecommuting, and sabbaticals

On each card write a short statement about what that value means to you. Then arrange the cards on a table in their order of importance to you. Eliminate any you now feel have no real importance.

Now take a look at the order of the cards. These reflect your preferences. Set them aside for a week or two. Repeat the process of organizing them by your order of importance until you feel confident in the ranking. Focus on your top three values when considering which career you want to develop.

Identify your skills

Skills fall into a number of categories and there are different ways to describe them. Here are some examples:

- Using your hands — to assemble things, operate machinery, repair things
- Using words — for reading, writing, speaking, teaching
- Using numbers — to count, compute, record
- Using analytical thinking or logic — to research, analyze, prioritize
- Using creativity—to invent, design

- Using artistic abilities—to fashion or shape things, decorate
- Using leadership—to initiate new projects, organize, direct, make decisions

List the skills you believe you have and those others have told you about. Which are your strongest? Which are transferable to other work? Transferable skills, for example writing, managing people, organizing data and selling, have value regardless of the business you're using them in. It's easy to alter, improve, expand, or adapt skills. What skills do you need to attain the interests and values you also identified? Focus on those skills to develop.

Know your people

What's good for you is also good for the people who work for you. One of your jobs as a manager is to develop their capabilities. Do what you are doing for yourself for them.

In our next issue of *Personnel Notebook* we will continue with *Harvard Business Review's* 13 skills of top managers.

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