



**JOB INTERVIEW:  
HOW DO YOU LIKE TO MAKE IT  
WORK FOR YOU...  
ALL THE TIME?**

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**ON YOUR OWN™**

Collector cum editor of this article.

## **Job Interview: How Would You Like To Make It Work For You...All The Time?**

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# **JOB INTERVIEW: HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU... ALL THE TIME?**

## ***Introduction***

*Put your signature on your career* - No one exemplifies the concepts in this commentary better than Antonio Stradivari, an Italian violin maker who lived from 1644 to 1737. Stradivari died at the age of ninety-three, at a time when the average life expectancy was a little over thirty-five years. He taught himself his trade. His tools were primitive, and he usually worked alone until later in life, when his sons joined him. Stradivari had a passion. He put the best of himself into every violin and viola. When he was finished and was certain that his craftsmanship measured up to his personal standards, he signed his name on the instrument.

Nearly three hundred years later, his violins sell for hundreds of thousands and even millions of dollars, and Stradivarius is a synonym for quality throughout the world. But far from every man or woman with uncommon standards of excellence become celebrities. At this very moment, thousands or tens of thousands are working unknown and unsung in industry, the arts and the sciences. The public has never heard of them and probably never will; yet they refuse to turn out shoddy work. They are in the minority, but that's where they've always been – playing for a gallery of one, for their own inner applause. Remember, people who consistently do things well set their own standards and make themselves measure up.

In so doing, they:

- \* Give the best of themselves to benefit others, making their work a source of joy and satisfaction while they experience deep self-respect from being uncommon contributors.

- \* Build a kind of security that lasts a lifetime or beyond, because respect for quality always abides and will always command the highest price. If you accept nothing but excellence from yourself and feel entitled to put your name on your work, both will endure. The bitterness of poor quality lingers on long after the sweetness of low price.

Chase Your Passion, not Your Pension!

-- Denis Waitley

A wise saying from a very wise man. Gear up. Let's explore this further.

# 1. Acing the Job Interview

By Scott Reeves

Forbes.com

Want to blow a job interview? It's easy! Show up late for the appointment, dress inappropriately and be sure to tell a stupid joke.

Many candidates don't understand a basic point: You're being sized up from the minute you step into the office, so be quick-witted, don't let your guard down—and don't snarl at the receptionist.

"Many people don't realize that when the interviewer says, 'I just want you to meet my boss,' it is, in fact, an interview," says Dennis Gros, president of Gros Plastics Recruiters in Brentwood, Tenn., a headhunter that seeks engineers, sales representatives and management personnel for the plastics manufacturing and packaging industries.

"The candidate may assume that his material has been passed on to key executives. Maybe it has and maybe it hasn't—maybe that person has read it and maybe not. You should remember that for each person you meet going up the ladder, it's interview No. 1 for that executive. So, start with a brief summary of your credentials and experience, and state your interest in the job."

Your pitch should be simple and direct: This is what I can do for you.

You're not General Electric's Jack Welch, so don't lecture the interviewer on the current failings of the company, and don't be boastful about how you and you alone can fix them. Such buffoonery will get you bounced. Stay on-message with your pitch: Tell the interviewer what you've done, and always return to what you can do for the company. Build your pitch around your accomplishments and your desire to take on new challenges.

Some job candidates talk too much, cutting the interviewer off or talking over questions. But don't make the mistake of saying too little. If you simply nod your head like a bobble-head doll, the interviewer may conclude that you have nothing to say or simply aren't interested in the job. That means you're out of the running.

Giving your qualifications shouldn't be a recap of ancient history. Remember that the interviewer has read your resume. What hiring managers want to know is how your education and experience relate to the company and the current opening. So, use your educational background and work experience as the starting point for why you're the best candidate for the job without repeating what the interviewer has already read on the resume.

Don't fall into this elephant trap: The interviewer's stock question, "Tell me about yourself." It isn't a request for childhood memories or a rundown of academic prizes won since junior high school, but a call for a brief overview of what you bring to the table. Practice your lines, because presentation and style count. Verbal skills are a given. The interviewer is looking for polish and confidence.

Prepare for the interview by reading as much as you can about the company. If it's publicly traded, such as Microsoft, Intel or Cisco Systems, read the most recent 10-Q filed with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission and the latest annual report. If the company is privately held, start with its Web site and study the industry.

Some job candidates wrongly assume that being critical of their current employer underscores their keen insight into corporate America. It's a huge mistake. The interviewer will assume that you're a malcontent and conclude that if you're unhappy in your current job, you'll soon be unhappy in a new job—and no one wants to hire trouble. So, knocking your current employer during an interview will knock you out of the box.

Never talk money or benefits until you have an offer in hand. If you do, the interviewer will assume your interest in the job goes only as far as the next paycheck. Employers want people who are committed to the company's success and will turn handstands for them—not clock-punchers.

After completing an interview, be sure to follow up with thank-you letters to everyone you met. Get business cards from all of the people you meet during the interview process so you get their names and titles right. Misspelling a name or flubbing a title will signal that you pay no attention to small details—and that says nothing good about you.

In each letter, thank the person for taking the time to discuss the job. The real purpose of the letter is to recap your pitch and restate your interest in the job. Sum up your educational background and work experience, and state how this qualifies you for the job. Don't be bashful, but don't be boastful, and again state what you can do for the company. Send slightly different versions of the letter to each person you met during the interview. Be sure to sign each letter.

Do you e-mail the notes or send them via the snail? The advantage of zapping a note via e-mail or licking a stamp and stuffing it in an envelope varies from interview to interview. An e-mail is quick, but it may become lost in the clutter that piles up each day. A hard copy therefore may be more memorable and create a lasting impact. In either case, get the letter off as quickly as possible, certainly no more than two or three days after the interview.

Remember: Until you have an offer in hand, everything you do should build a favorable impression and position you as the best candidate for the job.

Don't call the hiring manager a week after the interview to ask where things stand. Breathless inquiries will undercut your position. The toughest part of a job hunt is waiting, but decisions always take longer than you'd like. The reason is clear: The employer is going to spend a good chunk of money on the position and needs to hire the right person.

If you made all the points you wanted to during the interview, you have a good shot at getting a job offer. But sometimes you're beaten by another candidate. If so, think about what you can do better in the future, and continue on to the next interview.

If you land the job, congratulations. Grab the opportunity with both hands. Finally, don't tell anyone off as you leave your old job.

## 2. How to Answer Any Interview Question

CareerJournal.com

By Perri Capell

Don't be rattled by your next job interview. It's possible to answer any question that comes your way. How? By preparing and knowing how to direct the conversation to the topics you want to cover.

To start, take a tip from consultants who coach executives and politicians on how to handle media interviews. These trainers say you can deliver the message you want to an employer, regardless of the question you're asked.

"Most people don't realize that their purpose isn't to sit there and hope the right questions will be asked," says Aileen Pincus, president of the Pincus Group, a media interview-training firm in Silver Spring, Md. "They need to develop two or three key messages and make sure their point is delivered."

Unlike some politicians who ignore press questions and immediately introduce a different topic in response, job candidates must respect and directly answer employer's queries, says Jeff Braun, vice president and general manager of the Ammerman Experience, a Stafford, Texas, media interview-training firm. However, you can quickly make the transition from your answer to the important points you want to convey about your qualifications, he says.

He suggests when answering job-interview queries applying the formula  $Q = A + 1$ : Q is the question; A is the answer; + is the bridge to the message you want to deliver; and 1 is the point you want to make.

"If you take the '+ 1' off the formula, then the interviewer is controlling the session," says Mr. Braun.

Diligent preparation also is necessary to effectively answer any interview question, say senior executives. Theirs and media trainers' tips follow:

Study hard. Learn as much as you can about the job, the employer and its executives beforehand. Use this information to answer direct questions and to then segue into a discussion about your qualifications and fit.

Eric Herzog, a vice president of product line management and channel marketing at Maxtor Corp., a hard-disk drive company in Milpitas, Calif., says he always talks to current and former company employees and analysts whenever possible prior to job interviews to gain as much insight as he can into the employer's challenges and culture. If the company is publicly owned, he studies its financial condition by reading U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission documents, such as annual 10-K shareholder reports on the company's performance. He then tailors his interview answers to the company's issues.

"If the company is having a rough time financially, you can say that not only did you make good products or services, but that you produced things on time and under budget," says Mr. Herzog. "That's a little plus if the company is in trouble."

If you're working with a recruiter, ask him or her about what the company is seeking and its key challenges, says Derek Messulam, vice president of rental market development for GE-Capital Solutions, a financial-services unit of General Electric Co. in Norwalk, Conn. Mr. Messulam says he grills recruiters regarding a job's responsibilities and the attributes the company wants before job interviews. He then makes sure that his answers demonstrate his potential value to an employer.

## 3. Your First 90 Days

By Andy Wang

Forbes.com

You've landed the job you've had your eye on for a while. Now the difficult part begins. Forget the idea of a honeymoon period. It's time to get to the hard work, right now, because the first 90 days of any job can mean everything. They can be the difference between a quick, linear path to a seat on the board of directors or years stuck in cubicle world, lunching at your desk, toiling for little reward. How to make your first 90 days count:

### Before You Start

"You need to hit the ground running two weeks before you walk in," says Michelle Smith, senior vice president and investment officer at Wachovia Securities. Not preparing properly, Smith says, is a recipe for disaster. "At the minimum, did you read last year's annual report? There is no excuse for not having information when you walk in."

At Goldman Sachs, Fiona Erskine-Smith, vice president of learning and professional development, notes that senior new hires within certain departments receive a book about the company, as well as a book about navigating the first 90 days of a new job. She advises studying resources like those, along with company information that can be easily found on the Internet, to help you enter your new job on a good note.

### Get In Shape

Because the early days of any job can be a grind, it's important to be physically prepared. Eat well, sleep well, exercise, do anything you can to keep your energy level up going in. "It's like getting ready for a long race, a marathon where you're sprinting at the beginning," says Laura Berman Fortgang, president of life coaching company InterCoach and author of the book *Now What? 90 Days to a New Life Direction* (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2005). "If there's any way you can reorganize your life to make it easier to get through this, do it."

## **Do Your Homework**

Learn all you can about your new employer. Researching your company and industry can help you predict trends and make your name by delving into areas your co-workers and competitors haven't considered or wouldn't ever consider. "I started thinking about ways I could make a difference, went to the company Web site, talked to people in the company, read all I could," says Gloria Johnson Goins, vice president of diversity and inclusion at The Home Depot. The key is also to get help from the right people and put yourself in the position to get these opportunities

## **Lunch, Lunch, Lunch**

The first weeks of a job can be difficult because you don't know what you don't know. What are the company's unofficial policies, how do you weave your way through politics that predate you, how does most communication occur in the company? Make sure you understand how things work before you try to change things. "We encourage people not to do too much too soon," says Erskine-Smith of Goldman Sachs. "It's a very strong culture here, and it's working as a team that will get someone ahead, as opposed to acting in a counterproductive way. You don't want to come in and try to change the world until you know what the world is actually about. We want people to ask lots and lots of questions."

## **Get a Mentor**

It's vital to have an ongoing dialog with somebody who knows the company well. Within the first month of her job, Johnson Goins reached out to The Home Depot's longest-tenured senior officer and asked him to be her mentor. "I have met with him monthly for two and a half years," she says. "He's really made the difference in my career in terms of navigating a very large company." It's imperative to quickly identify the people at your business who can help you and figure out how to get in front of them.

## **Say it Right**

It's also important to know what to say and how to say it. If you're not a good speaker, practice or get coaching. "Men are more likely to invest the time and money to develop speaking skills and seek out opportunities where they can gain visibility," says Catherine Kaputa, founder of brand strategy company SelfBrand and author of the new book *U R a Brand!: How Smart People Brand Themselves for Business Success* (Davies-Black Publishing, April 2006). "I've worked with a lot of executives. Men have a much better network in place. Women generally don't have the same kind of network."

## **Know Your Strengths**

Know what your strengths are and how you can use them to quickly make an impact. "One thing that can set you apart immediately is taking charge in just the right way," says Laurel Touby, founder and CEO of media networking and job-search Web site mediabistro.com. "It's a fine line you're walking, because too often people take charge and overstep, and they look like an idiot when they don't deliver." Touby recalls one salesperson who came in, promised to sell hundreds of thousands of dollars in banner advertising, barely sold enough to cover his salary and is no longer employed at mediabistro.com.

## **After 90 Days**

Yes, there's a lot of sizzle involved in the first 90 days, but ultimately it's about the steak. Women looking to advance their careers can't simply wait for things to happen. They have to make things happen. "We all know smart, talented people who are not successful and who are maybe unemployed," Kaputa says. "It's about people who harness their assets." And if your first three months have already ended, then now is the time to begin.

## 4. Bully for You

By Andrea Coombes

MarketWatch

### **Hair-raising bad-boss stories, and tips on how to cope**

Meryl Streep's cold-hearted character in "The Devil Wears Prada" has nothing on real-life bosses gone bad. Consider the boss who gave an employee a written reprimand for "leaving work without permission" -- after she passed out in the bathroom and was whisked by ambulance to a nearby hospital.

Or the school principal who forced a teacher to work through the day even after the teacher said her arm was throbbing after slipping on ice outside the school. "He decided there was no way I could have broken my arm, probably just bruised it," the teacher wrote in an e-mail to MarketWatch.

"During first period, my arm hurt horribly, but I continued teaching. But when I reached for chalk, and my fingers would not move, I did go [to the hospital] where my broken arm was set."

Those are just two of the "bad boss" stories MarketWatch readers e-mailed in. But does your demanding boss really fall into the category of a bully?

That depends, said Dr. Gary Namie, a psychologist and senior consultant at The Work Doctor, a consulting firm that helps companies deal with workplace bullying. Bullying is "repeated, health-harming mistreatment," Namie said, and it usually includes "verbal abuse, behavior that's threatening, intimidating or humiliating, or work interference."

When the behavior perpetrates the boss's own agenda at the expense of the company's goals, you've got a boss who's going too far, Namie said.

It's likely the sales manager who encourages her workers by firing a stun gun behind their heads as they enter a weekly sales meeting would qualify as a workplace bully.

"The crackle of a stun gun firing still crackling in our minds, we sat there mutely staring at our boss as she launched happily into her meeting. The next meeting she tossed candy at us, literally, and told us she was trying a different way to help us make sales," the worker wrote.

That's just one of the horror stories posted at WorkingAmerica.org, a worker advocacy group that is running a "bad boss" contest. Workers e-mail their stories for the chance to win a vacation.

Working America is running the contest because, in its door-to-door membership drives, "we heard the most astonishing stories about what's going on in workplaces," said Karen Nussbaum, the group's executive director. "That inspired us to say we need to get this out in the open."

Working America is not verifying the stories it receives, but "you couldn't make up this stuff," Nussbaum said.

### **At least one-in-four firms**

How pervasive is workplace bullying? That's hard to pin down.

About 24 percent of companies said workplace bullying had occurred "within the past year," according to survey of 516 firms in 2004 by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. In that survey, bullying is "repeated intimidation, slandering, social isolation, or humiliation by one or more persons against another." It includes workers who bully other workers.

But that's a survey of managers, so it's likely an understatement. The survey respondents "may not be aware of what is going on, or they might want to present the company in a positive light," said Paula Grubb, a research psychologist with NIOSH and researcher on the study. "If they're managers, they tend to identify with management."

Between 10 and 16 percent of workers say they are currently experiencing "regular bullying" by their supervisor according to a separate series of studies focusing solely on supervisors who bully subordinates (rather than workers who bully their colleagues), said Bennett Tepper, in an e-mail message. Tepper is a professor of managerial sciences at Georgia State University in Atlanta.

When you ask workers to look back in time, however, that figure skyrockets: 50 percent of workers say they've had an abusive boss at some point in their working career, Tepper said.

Meanwhile, a separate survey finds that workers' top pet peeves hint at some forms of bullying: 44 percent said "condescending tones" are the most annoying workplace situation, followed by 37 percent who said public reprimands are the top pet peeve, according to a survey of 2,318 U.S. adults in February by Harris Interactive for Randstad USA, the staffing firm.

## **The revenge-seekers**

Workplace bullies might want to take note that workers who feel abused don't always take it lying down.

"About six out of 10 people who are abused by their bosses plan revenge," said Harvey Hornstein, professor emeritus of psychology at Columbia University and author of "Brutal Bosses and their Prey". Hornstein bases that estimate on interviews with workers who say they've suffered with an abusive boss. He's working on a book about workplace revenge.

Workers' revenge ranges from the minor, such as not sending an e-mail when told, to the major, such as calling the boss's spouse to divulge the boss's extramarital affair, Hornstein said.

## **Wide variety of problem bosses**

MarketWatch readers shared a variety of bad boss tales, including managers who constantly yell, consistently ignore just one worker, or those who waste hours by micromanaging.

One of the most haunting stories came from a former auto-parts plant manager who said that, years ago, a fire broke out in a restaurant near the factory. "I received a panicky phone call that one of my employee's wives was trapped in the burning building," the former manager wrote in an e-mail.

"That employee ran out of the plant to get to the fire. My boss wanted me to write him up for 1) leaving the plant without proper approval, 2) running through the plant, and 3) running through the plant without his safety glasses on (he left his safety glasses on his machine and took off running as soon as I gave him the message)."

The worker's wife died in the fire. Yet, "after the funeral, my boss put a letter in my file because I failed to take action against an employee who violated work rules," the manager wrote.

## Steps to take

In that situation, most workers would probably just want to quit. But workers who face an abusive boss should consider taking three steps before they quit, Namie said.

**1. Acknowledge the problem.** "If you name it, you externalize the problem and reduce self-blame," Namie said.

Hornstein agreed, noting that workers should talk about the problem with trusted family and friends. "Don't pretend to be thick-skinned about it," Hornstein said.

Hornstein finds that people who say, "Oh, I can take it" fare much worse over time than those who talk to friends and family. Those who talk are "much less likely to be anxious and depressed, and much more likely to look sensibly for a new position," Hornstein said.

"It allows you to start to come up with ways of managing the problem, rather than holding it in and finally exploding."

**2. Take time off if your health is at risk.** "Make sure you don't slide into anxiety, panic attacks, depression," Namie said. Get a physical, he suggests, and then start looking into company policies that might offer a solution.

"See if you have any recourse within the company based on laws and internal policies. The antiviolence policy may apply," Namie said.

While you've got time off, gather any data on how your boss's behavior is hurting the company's bottom line, such as turnover rates and absenteeism, he said. That generally requires calling fellow workers to find how long they've been on the job and how often they call in sick.

**3. Present your case to the company.** Once you've gathered some data, take your case to a higher-up not connected to your boss. "Don't go to the bully's boss. That's the one that supports him or for years has done nothing," Namie said.

That might mean quitting if you work at a small or family-owned firm where everyone is likely to support your supervisor. At a larger firm, he said, "you can make a rational, cost-based argument that this person is a threat to the bottom line."

## 5. How to Play to Win in Your Career

by Jim Citrin

*She's a real team player. He plays hardball. We're only in the second inning of the game. It's time to drive the ball over the goal line.* Sports metaphors are common in business discussions. As General Electric's CEO Jeff Immelt said, in its recruiting GE looks favorably on candidates who have played team sports because the experience in competitive, collaborative activities is directly transferable to working and winning at GE (see "GE's Jeff Immelt: Learning Is a Leader's Edge").

For this reason, I've been on a quest to speak to the world's most inspiring sports leaders. I aim to derive insights that can be applied off the field (or court, or track, or out of the pool), in everyday work and life.

### **Basketball Star and a Rhodes Scholar**

One inspiring leader with whom I met recently is Bill Bradley, former U.S. senator from New Jersey and Basketball Hall of Famer from the New York Knicks. Bill began playing basketball in fourth grade and was a basketball star at Crystal City High School in Missouri. An honors graduate and three-time NCAA All-American and the 1965 Player of the Year at Princeton, Bill was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford University. He also served as captain of the gold-medal-winning U.S. Olympic basketball team in 1964.

In the NBA, Bill played guard and power forward for 10 seasons with the Knicks and was a member of the 1970 and 1973 NBA championship teams, along with legends Willis Reed, Dave DeBusschere, and Walt Frazier.

### **Important Lessons From Sports**

Not surprisingly, Bill is a strong believer in how sports help develop the attitudes and knowledge for a healthy, balanced, and successful life. Hard work and dedication is one of the most important lessons learned from sports, he believes. Bill's basketball coach once shared words that made a lasting impression: "If you're not practicing, just remember -- someone, somewhere is practicing, and when you two meet, given roughly equal ability, he will win."

Another invaluable benefit from playing sports is learning sound values. "To have imprinted on you things such as courage, discipline, respect, responsibility, and imagination is really a remarkable thing," Bill told me. "Not that you couldn't get it playing the trumpet or going for the physics prize. But for me it happened in basketball, and for many others it happened in sports as well."

In his book, "Values of the Game," Bill wrote that "The noble spirit of athletic competition and achievement can reflect the highest values of our collective life." When I asked what he meant by that, he said, "Where there's tremendous individual sacrifice for the benefit of the collective, it shows what's possible for groups of human beings when they're focused, unselfish and talented. In other words, it can show you what collective excellence is."

He explained further, talking about the importance of working as a cooperative member of a group. "Parents always tell their kids to make good grades, right? But most don't really tell them how to get along in groups. They don't really teach what you can achieve if you're unselfish. Basketball and other team sports show you how unselfishness is the key to success."

### **Who Is the Team Leader?**

It's easy to determine who the leader is on a basketball team. According to Bill, he or she is the one to whom the team looks to take the last-second shot. Sure, that's also usually the best player. But it has to do as well with trust and the assumption of responsibility. Being a leader means that you have to be willing to step up, take the risk of leadership, and be held responsible for the outcome of your actions.

One of the key patterns of highly successful careers is building upon experience in one role and applying that experience in new ways to a new role. Whether in sports or business, exceptional performance at one stage opens up opportunities in the next. How did Bill take his experience from the basketball court and then apply it in the U.S. Senate?

## **From the Locker Room to the Senate Cloak Room**

"I essentially came from the locker room to the Senate," Bill said. "Within a year, I was a little disoriented. Then one late night around 11 o'clock, I looked around the Democratic cloak room. I noticed one senator writing something, another senator telling a joke, another senator walking back and forth in contemplation, another talking on the phone, and another senator reading quietly. At that moment I thought, 'you know, this isn't a lot different than the Knicks locker room.'"

Soon Bill realized that he could apply the lessons he learned as a player of goal setting, teamwork, and dedication to working effectively as a senator. "We had to get people from disparate backgrounds to come together and cooperate to achieve a common end. It turned out that how I conducted myself in the interpersonal dynamics of the Senate was the same as when I was on the Knicks."

His guiding principle was, "Don't worry about the credit." "We used to have a joke about how to succeed in a Republican Senate -- let them steal your ideas! The point is that there are plenty of players on a team in the locker room who want to talk to the press. And virtually every senator wants to be in front of the camera as well. So if you were interested in the success of your endeavor, then the credit for the idea was something that easily could be traded away in order to achieve the result you were looking for."

For Bill Bradley, one of the world's most inspiring athletes turned leaders, this attitude of working with and succeeding through others is a direct carry-over from his life on the basketball court.

### **Three Questions on Sports, Leadership, and Success**

1. Who are the sports leaders you find most inspiring?
2. Which renowned business leaders were great athletes?
3. What do you think about the connection between sports and business success?

## 6. How Promoting Your Boss Promotes You

by Jim Citrin

To underscore the quality of its kosher hotdogs, Hebrew National famously advertises that it "answers to a higher authority."

Similarly, if you want to build a reputation for quality and be successful in your career, one of the keys is to establish a productive working relationship with your own higher authority -- your boss.

Whether improving performance in your current job, moving into a role of expanded responsibility, or taking on a new position altogether, how you establish and sustain your relationship with your boss is a crucial element in your short- and long-term success.

### **Beware of Backbiting**

The best place to start is to understand your boss's motivations. Most managers will say that their driving goals are to grow revenues, control costs, develop a winning strategy, make sound investments, and manage people effectively.

While these ambitions are usually genuine, they generally represent only a portion of what bosses really think about. Experience suggests that managers have additional underlying motivations that, while less idealistic, turn out to be no less important.

Of course, your boss wants you to fulfill your responsibilities well and meet your objectives. But that's not all. According to David D'Alessandro, former CEO of insurance giant John Hancock Financial Services and author of the best-selling book *Career Warfare: 10 Rules for Building a Successful Personal Brand and Fighting to Keep It*, "What bosses want more than anything else is loyalty, good advice and to have 'their personal brands polished.'"

There is nothing a manager disdains more than the subordinate who goes behind his back. Never make yourself look good at the boss's expense. Since the rules of the game in organizational life are governed by hierarchy, if you circumvent your boss you'll be seen as breaking the chain of command or, worse, betraying him or her.

This reflects badly on you even if you're in the right on a particular issue about which you disagree. And not only will it ignite the wrath of your boss, it likely won't curry favor with other members of the management team, either. They're likely to be concerned that you could do the same thing to them.

### **Striking the Right Balance**

Bosses also want good advice, not yes-men or -women who offer insincere flattery or downers who can only play the devil's advocate.

All intelligent bosses instinctively separate the people they manage into three distinct categories: the sycophants, the contrarians, and the small percentage of their employees who are the balanced players. You definitely want to be seen as a member of the third group.

You might be surprised at how influential you can be by becoming known as a source of good ideas, thoughtful perspectives, and creative solutions. Even if you're many levels removed from the top of the organization, CEOs and other top executives will often gravitate to the thought-leaders across the organization who are known to have sound, balanced judgment.

### **The Benefits of Letting Go**

Most important, since your boss cares as much about his or her career as you do about yours, what managers really want is for you to make them look smart and successful. "Understand that it's your job to polish the boss's reputation," D'Alessandro states unequivocally.

One of the best ways you can do this is to compensate for his or her weaknesses. If your boss is a creative visionary who can't run a meeting, stick to a schedule, or produce consistent performance information, take it upon yourself to help bring managerial discipline and operational excellence to the group.

On the other hand, if your boss is more process over substance, then the employee who is able to generate creative new ideas is likely to be the one who is most valuable.

To make this tactic work most effectively, you may need to "let go," allowing your boss to get the credit for what you do and claiming some of your work as his or her own. This might entail swallowing your pride of authorship and putting up with

your boss acting as if he or she actually is a creative person, even if that's the case only when you've supplied the ideas.

What you'll get in return is your boss' support and loyalty, the freedom from being micromanaged, and the first shot at prestigious and important new assignments. Ultimately, these are the very things that will enable you to continue developing.

### **Build Momentum -- and Success**

To put this "be successful by making your boss successful" strategy into effect, it's essential to sit down with your boss and talk about how he or she likes to work. How are objectives and priorities established? How (and how often) should you provide updates? Are formal written updates required, or are more fluid progress reports sufficient? Is email or voicemail preferable? What special rules apply for communicating with people outside of the department or the company?

In addition, talk to other people in the company who have experience working with your boss. What do they observe about what works well and what works poorly? How is your boss perceived outside the department? What kinds of results and initiatives would enhance your boss's reputation inside the company?

Develop your own point of view on how to make your boss successful. Come to an agreement on how he or she likes to work and what is expected of you. Then revisit these assumptions periodically and see what needs to be changed or can be improved.

**Remember, there's no single person who has more direct influence on your short- or medium-term career success than your boss. Figure out how to support his or her success, and then tailor your efforts accordingly. Doing so will create and sustain your career momentum.**

## ***Conclusion***

I recalled the story from Master Salesperson Brian Tracy, told in one of the Success Mastery Academy about the two construction workers having lunch. As they open up their lunch boxes, Joe totally "flips out" that his lunch is a sardine sandwich and goes on about how much he hates sardine sandwiches. In turn, Bob offers to share his tuna sandwich with Joe, but Joe insists it will be okay; but he just can't stand sardine sandwiches. Well, the next day at lunch as they open their lunch boxes, Joe again gets upset that his lunch is a sardine sandwich. He can't believe it since he hates sardine sandwiches! Then, believe it or not, on the third day as they open up their lunch box, again there it is, a sardine sandwich. By now Bob has had it and says to Joe "If you hate sardine sandwiches so much tell your wife to quit making them and to give you something else," at which time Joe then tells Bob, "Oh, I'm not married, I make my own lunch every day." Uh huh, we all get the point, we all make our own lunch each day.

This week invest some time and take a hard look at what you've been serving yourself every day and then remember, you get to create your own new menu.

Bon appetit!

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