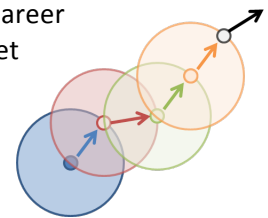
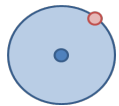


5 Strategies for Staying Relevant

By Janet Gregory

Are you a mover-and-shaker or are you moving toward being irrelevant? The gap between the two is narrow and tightening all the time. If you are not actively working on staying relevant then you are already on your way to becoming irrelevant. Here are five strategies for not just staying relevant but getting ahead.

Strategy #1: Go Inside Out. It may be comfortable inside sitting by the fire and watching TV. But, if you want to accomplish something great, go out and play. Don't just stick with what you know, venture beyond familiar territory and pursue new outcomes. This is even a great career strategy. You are comfortable in the center of your circle of knowledge, yet out there on the edge of your experience is a unique talent. Grab that talent and apply it to your current world, it can expand your possibilities in new ways. Soon that new talent becomes part of your comfortable center of knowledge. Venture beyond familiar territory it will lead to new exciting outcomes.



Take external internal. In every job we need to comply with some amount of external direction from the requests of others - a supervisor, boss or manager. Stay relevant to yourself and your role by applying your internal compass to the external direction. This keeps actions aligned with your moral compass and helps you avoid slippery slopes, dangerous curves and blind alleyways. Your core value system is a very private area of life that is supremely important when you are under stress, face new challenges or are navigating uncharted territory. The result of exercising your core values in a world filled with external demands is a track record and reputation that people trust and value.

Open what's closed. When we are on task we often look to minimize or close off external input to accomplish the task and avoid disruption. It is important to complete tasks and opening up to external contribution, participation and collaboration to improve the outcome. Every task and project can be improved with the involvement of others.

Strategy #2: Create Learning Adventures. It shocked me to think that "twenty percent of what you currently know becomes obsolete every year," according to Harvard Business Review. A quick look at our personal technology confirms this shocking notion with the introduction Facebook ('04), YouTube ('05), Android ('07), Kindle ('07), iPhone ('07), Bing ('09) and iPad ('10), just to name a few. Gee, whatever happened to the pager, MySpace, PalmPilot, Ask Jeeves and Nokia phones? I guess they are obsolete and so would I be, if I didn't continue to learn. Keep yourself informed, try new things and expand your mind on a regular basis.

Professionally, stay informed about your company, your products, your industry and your competitors. Read industry trade rags, get news postings, attend webinars, conferences and talk with colleagues. Stay connected with the buzz of your industry or you'll get busted for lagging behind. If your company offers training, take it. If they don't, suggest it. If they still don't, create your own.

Personally, expand your mind in new directions. Your personal development expands you exponentially. Learn something new (I just learned how to fly). Read some quality literature, travel, pick up a hobby or keep a journal (learning from your own experiences). The result broadens your horizons and creates connections where ones had not existed before. The result enriches you both personally and professionally.

Strategy #3: Embrace the “F” word. No, not *that* “F” word ... Failure. Failure is actually useful. More learning occurs as a result of failure than anything else. Former CEO of Procter & Gamble, A.G.

F Lafley says, “I think of my failures as a gift.” Failures teach us what doesn’t work. Like learning to ride a bike and finding the center of balance. You have to fall over a few times to learn how far you can and can’t lean. Some failures could actually be intentional experiments or calculated risks to explore something new. Like learning how to ride your bicycle hands free or with your feet up on the handle bars so you can show off to your friends or one day join Cirque du Soleil. The more different things that you try, expands the range of possibilities and you actually improve your odds of succeeding. As a rule, most people try things with the intention of succeeding. Yes, look to succeed and embark on that new adventure with the intention of learning. With the intention of learning you will succeed in staying relevant and can distinguish important from unimportant.

Strategy #4: Show Up. Last night I turned on the TV to watch my favorite team against a formidable rival. What if no one showed up on the field what would have happened? The game would never start, or worse it would be a forfeit. You have to show up to play the game. You have to be there physically and mentally, bring new ideas and an open mind. Video games offer virtual reality but business is played in real time in the real world. There are great opportunities for players that show up, practice and participate. How many times have you been doing email while sitting in a staff meeting? Try something different next time. Listen, look for new connections, make suggestions and offer a new idea. The results will be surprising.

Strategy #5: Sharpen the Knife. Yum, a salad with dinner sounds good. Rolling out of the refrigerator onto the cutting board are lettuce, green onions and grape tomatoes. A knife is pulled from the drawer and work begins. UGH crushed the lettuce and can’t slice the green onions. Dinner time is fast approaching so you change direction and start with the lettuce. OOPs squashed a grape tomato and then another. Working harder won’t finish the salad. You need to sharpen the knife. It’s an analogy to a classic tale. We have all been there.



How sharp is your knife? What condition are you in physically and mentally? Staying in good physical condition builds strength and endurance. It provides you with reserves that will help you accomplish whatever you set out to do. You don’t have to be a pro-athlete or the perfect physical specimen. But you do have to eat right most of the time, get some exercise and keep your weight in a healthy range. It makes your synapses fire more brightly. It turns stress into positive energy. The results are looking good, feeling good and the ability to take on more demanding things.

Sharpen the saw is a similar story Stephen Covey tells in “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,” as he introduces Habit 7: Balanced Self Renewal. Okay, that sounds a bit touchy-feely but it’s about staying sharp on multiple dimensions: physical, mental, spiritual and social/emotional. Covey’s book is a business classic that is worth reading if you haven’t or worth reviewing if you have.

Cheers to you getting ahead and doing more than just keeping up or staying relevant.

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