

Get Offensive, Be Successful

In the business world across the globe there is a distinct breed known as corporate executives whom we love. All of them usually share certain characteristics that mark them out from the others. All of them project an image of obsessive zeal



for goals that they have taken upon themselves, to reach at any cost. All are hard driving at others' expense. When they arrive at work and leave at the end of the day they appear unfazed, unflappable, the creases still in place on their spotless suits. Nice guys? You think so? Virtually always, except when they're angry. At such moments they inspire a kind of fear that gives you the creeps, and leaves a queasy feeling in your stomach, even when they aren't in the room.

Therefore, can we help but have mixed feelings about such individuals? On the one hand I like their style. On the other, I don't like the thought of being in their shoes, operating the way they do. And yet it is hard not to come to the conclusion that in the spawning world of Sri Lankan companies, the more executive, in some way, that

a person seems – and the more obnoxious the higher he/she tends to rise in his/ her career.

Want to be offensive to make it into the big leagues? Offensiveness is not a walk in the park. It's a way of life. The very quirks, foibles, and detestable characteristics that make these people intolerable as human beings are also what make them highly effective managers. If you are even slightly interested in doing that, in measuring up to them, you have to practice. Let me give you a few tips on how to get into form and make some money as well as you go along.

Formula No. 1:

Empower the child in you. Start by putting your mind back, getting into the skin of that child you once were. The irascible and lovable kid inside you contains the greatest potential for offensiveness

And power. This doesn't mean you have to be petulant and grabby all the time. Remember the kind of kid you were, playing games in a circle of your own, keeping out those you don't want, whistling, singing, being jolly, telling insipid jokes and riding high on the feeling that only your world is the all- important one and nothing else. matters? It sends the message that you live in a little bubble of self-regard impenetrable by mortal man. That's a good thing. At other times you only need to get a little rough to get what you want not that you didn't when you were a kid. Anyway feel free to do so. Does the kid you once were want your steak infinitesimally better done at that Hilton conference dinner? Send it back! Didn't you get all so cranky when you had to sit down to do your homework instead of being allowed to go out and play? You seethed and had to teach somebody a lesson. So now here's your chance to have your way!

Formula No. 2:

Oddity is strength. I know of an unmentionable company bigwig who loved to grow his fingernails and hair long. and always appeared in dark glasses to hide the glint in his eyes. If ever he was invited to a meal he had this infernal habit of insisting that there should be neither tomato nor salt added in the slightest proportion to anything served to him, giving his host and the hostess much to think about before he came around. And then it was only wine of a particular rare quality he would have for drinks!

Another in the same class reportedly likes to conduct much of his business between the hours of four in the morning and noon. My old boss, when he wasn't at business luncheons, liked to eat only tuna fish sandwiches which he sent his driver down to fetch from the 'Little Star', an eatery miles away from the city limits. Whatever he ate had to be placed in front of him by his personal peon laid out on a white china plate, on a batik place mat with a coke in a delicate, coloured goblet at its side. My point is, the higher they get, the odder they are. This is no coincidence. Such quirks contribute to the build-up of erratic behaviour, which appears to inspire in some people a rush of ideas and an irrational determination to get them done.

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Formula No. 3:

Have an eye on compensation. Everyone likes money, but truly offensive people can talk about it like politicians who talk about finance but don't understand a thing about it except what's in it for them.

A few years ago, I was the most junior member in a meeting at which a variety of extremely important matters were being discussed. It was in the troubled 80s, there was a dread atmosphere of fear all around, our paradise island, paradise no more. Cut-backs seemed inevitable. Discussions on a range of operating issues took up the entire morning. After lunch at precisely 1:12, we sat down to what I presumed would be a full afternoon's work. There was plenty on the agenda. Talk came around to human resources, with the Vice- Chairman launching into a tirade on evolving a new system for measuring performance awards. Two o'clock rolled around. Then two-thirty. Then three-thirty. I couldn't believe it, Arthur C Clarke would have spent less time figuring out the positions of the planets from his Barnes Place Planetarium, than these guys devoted to working out the point at which increased revenue produced the maximum bonus payout. It was unthinkable! Since then I've gone up six or seven grade levels, and am now eligible for such a consideration. Last week, we had an executive staff meeting where the same subject came up, and I assure you that I found it very interesting. That's offensive, even to me.

Formula No. 4:

Focus works. Normal people have a stream of desultory thoughts running through their heads. Truly offensive people don't have that problem. The higher the executive, the more intense is his/her ability to filter out extraneous material. Just look at any of those spotlessly spruced and perfumed beings and the calm they exude. You may delude yourself into thinking that there is something uncannily supernatural in the concentration zone of such executive creatures. The secret however is their ability to focus totally on one point. Our former Chairman was like that. At one time his secretary, a charming, sprightly little thing who wouldn't even give offence to a fly, had to accompany the man on a business trip to Singapore. Miss Dean that was her name was late for her ride to Katunayake where she was to meet up with Chairman Don Sirimane, and you were never to be more than 30 seconds late for any assignment with Don. Time was money to Don. Not his time, yours. Your time was his money, that was it. Miss Dean was half-an-hour late to the terminal and looked frantically around for Don at the check-in counters. "As I stood there sweeping my eyes among the crowds of tourists and passengers milling about, I suddenly felt a warm spot on my back, as if someone was placing something hot just there", she recalls. "And I turned around and there he was boring me through with his eyes". Not a word had he to say and that did it for the poor girl. She broke down and wept. Focus works, that's the point.

Formula No. 5:

Say whatever the heck is on your mind. All of us have been in meetings where very successful people talked their heads off for hours about what nobody understood. Conversely, guys who are supposed to talk seriously on extremely important subjects, at times express exactly what's on their minds which is nothing. So, they sit there saying nothing for a very long time, until other less offensive people pick up the ball and carry it to the touch line. Either method can soon have you going for big-deal stuff.

Formula No. 6:

Don't get even- get mad. Only small and insignificant people contain their rage, mostly because they have to. Real hitters like Sri Lanka's master blaster Sanath Jayasuriya - go for it. But the comparison ends there. They have good working contact with their anger and use it to get what they want with- out shame, regret or constraints. The practitioners of the angry arts, of course, don't just spew eight

hours a day. No, they keep a lid on their displeasure and modulate it, so that their equals and subordinates can sense when the great mountain is about to blow and act accordingly.

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Formula No. 7:

Keep your jargon fresh. Buy a business book every month. I don't mean those thick volumes with matrix graphs and charts containing concentric circles looking like metric anograms which are meant to send you into a trance. Or those with dynamic pyramids linked with vector arrows that make you feel stupid if you look at them for too long. All these and more are available on those shelves in libraries or at book shops under titles such as Business,

Management, Principles of Economics etc. Avoid them like the plague, all you have to do is remember the 'Seven Formulas' I have worked out for you after a great deal of intense meditation. Follow them and you won't even have to consult those astrological charts run in the weekend papers and magazines, promising you success. Simply cut out the formulas in their correct order and have them under your desktop glass or hang it up in a neat frame in a prominent place in your office. Success will be yours. Anyone who doesn't do this will be subject to a load of miseries running right through his or her executive career. Just kidding!

By the way if any of your friends want to get clippings after seeing the 'Seven Formulas to Success' I have suggested, just direct them to 'Business Today'. As you know the magazine has made it big in the market throughout the island and is a must, for those in business. And in a way that will be good for me too, it will earn me a bit of money. Thanks! Oh! and anybody who thinks it's inappropriate for me to use this space to promote my own crass self-interest, just hasn't been reading very carefully.



by Arthur Hadley
