It’s a Question of Attitude

Overcoming the feeling of inadequacy is the key to Personality Development. Successful people are not any different from any one else. They simply have skills and outlooks that others may not have but can get.

In the good old days (up to mid-1985 in my assessment), being smart, hard-working and competent in your job would be enough to assure career success and advancement.

But these days, in an increasingly competitive job market and with more and more companies “Rightsizing” (the buzz-word for laying off staff. I had to execute one for my previous employer, during the Gulf crisis in December 1990, letting go 20% of the staff, from my boss the chief of staff downwards), as a way of turning things around in a slow economy, a person can have the required technical skills and still get fired, or get stuck up hopelessly in a dead-end job.

In 1988, during my first year of employment in Dubai, the commercial capital of the United Arab Emirates my very dear friend Hana Ibrahim a senior journalist with the Gulf News lent me books to fill my idle time and to keep me out of mischief.

Recently, unpacking some of my packages I came across the notes I had taken from one of the books lent by Hana titled ‘*Lions Don’t Need To Roar*‘ authored by Debra Benton, consultant to US Blue Chip businesses on the powers of “*professional presence*.”

In the following paras, I take the liberty of quoting from my notes on Benton’s book, highlighting practical tips to succeed in your career. Benton contends that the development of “people skills” appropriately matched to one’s character and personality can make the difference between making it big in the corporate world and not making it at all.

“It would be nice if all you had to do was work hard, keep your nose to the grind stone and be intelligent to get ahead”. Those things are necessary, but you need to have the kind of personal presence that will impress and persuade the people you work for and cause them to trust and appreciate you”, says Benton.

“What you had when you were young is what you need to succeed. Look at five-year-old kids. They are curious. They ask questions. They are not afraid to see some humor. They initiate conversations. They don’t take things personally.”

“But a lot of us unlearn those things along the way, with poor teachers and lousy bosses who say you’re supposed to be this way or that way and wipe that silly grin off your face.”

“It is easy to get frustrated when you are in a bad work situation, but it’s upto you to take the responsibility for doing what you can do to change things”, she said.



“I was intent on being very serious and professional, and the importance of relating well to people did not occur to me until I was fired for not doing it.”

Losing that job had made an immense impression on Benton. After going through counselling, job hunting and career placement, she set up her own one-woman business, providing executive development and career counselling services and private consultations to executives, politicians and media personalities interested in enhancing their “personal presence.”Her customer base includes American global giants such as AT&T, Citicorp, Dupont, Pepsico, American Airlines and Union Carbide among others.

In the many successful executives in business, industry, government and mass media, Benton discovered that “these people are not magical, blessed or dramatically different from any one else. They simply have skills and outlooks that the rest of us may not have but can get. Successful people stand out to get in, fit in to get ahead and then stand out and fit in at the same time to get to the top”, she

says.

Successful people in corporate hot spots tend to share certain traits, Benton noted. “An attitude of good cheer is more prevalent with the successful than it is with the adequate where people are trying to take themselves more seriously”, she said. “Top performers are not afraid to inject levity, to laugh at life and themselves, be the butt of a joke.”

“Also, achievers tend to take things a little slower not in the sense of dragging out, but their imagery is more controlled, their gestures are more purposeful, their modulation more deliberate. They don’t have to shake hands, they are not so anxious and unctuous in trying to please. They know that the more time you give of yourself, the more people give you”, writes Benton.

In Benton’s view, the most important first impression consists of subtle doses of little things a pause upon entering a room, a smile, a touch, a gesture, the correct handshake, the right posture, the right body language and dress code. When she talks about “using your head” I think she means it quite literally.

“The relaxed ready position is the natural expression for the human face, not the zombie-like, stone faced expression we call business-like”, she writes. (Heard of the corporate smile?)

Benton agrees that all elements of her formula for “Success” won’t work for everybody alike. “You have to adapt it to fit your own style and personality, modifying until it becomes you”, she said. (In cricket they say play your own game). “And don’t be afraid to try things even if they don’t feel comfortable. Uncomfortable doesn’t necessarily mean unnatural, and other people won’t notice your discomfort nearly as much as you do, because they’re too foccused on themselves and how they are coming across.”

Do you think there are successful whiz kids who get their way and stay that way without heeding any of Benton’s suggestions for success? “Of course, there are”, she says. When you are rich and powerful enough you can be as feisty and outlandish as you want. Or if you develop a cure for cancer, you don’t have to worry about people skills.”

“For most of us though, the highest level we can aspire to is feeling adequate. That may not sound like much of an achievement, but when you think about the

problems people have just trying to overcome and overcompensate for feelings of inadequacy, feeling adequate is pretty good”, Benton concludes.

The key differentiators, which sets successful people apart from the rest are: • People skills relating well to others. • Positive cheerful attitude. • Relaxed and confident approach, even in a crisis.

So, if you feel you are technically fully competent in your job, and are still not getting ahead, develop and practice your ‘people skills’. It can do wonders for your career.

My experience has shown that the people who get ahead and are successful are those who strike the right balance between technical competence for the job and ‘people skills. Look at the successful people in your organization to understand if this is true.



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