



The Fastest Route to Career Advancement



By Kerry Elam

In all aspects of our lives, we are in control of our destiny, whether it is a promotion at work or being in a loving relationship. Many times, we feel as though we are entitled to more money and power. For years I thought working hard, long hours, volunteering for special projects, and being needed was the ticket to success. Although I continued to advance professionally, I was left feeling drained and resentful as I was not feeling sincere internally. I was not being true to my desires. Hard work and dedication are important; however, staying true to ourselves and paving our own path is more fulfilling and inspiring. This article explores the fast track to career advancement on our terms with four guiding principles.

Appreciation

Appreciation is a mindset that sets the

tone for living in the present moment. William James said, "The deepest craving of human nature is the need to be appreciated." Let's pause for a moment and list five aspects we appreciate about our current job.

There are always areas in which we can appreciate, even if simply we are gainfully employed with a stable company or that we like our co-workers. In the book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Dale Carnegie lists one of the fundamental techniques for handling people is to "give honest and sincere appreciation." To be successful, appreciation must span to our employer, boss, direct reports and co-workers—our team. Appreciation, first and foremost is integral to approaching each unique situation.

If we have conflict with a direct report, we start with saying, "I really appreciate your efforts on this project, and I know you are giving it your best." Next, we can give the feedback to help with growth. "I would like to help you

with this project, where could I add value? Have you thought about bringing other team members together for more collaboration?" Versus starting with, "I don't think this project is going well. You need to bring in other team members to help you." Always make the other person feel important.

Imagine going to your boss with the intention to ask for a promotion and instead of taking an entitled approach; starting from a place of appreciation listing why you enjoy your job and how you feel you can add more value in the role you desire. Chances are you will be listened to more fully with this tactic.

Charles Schwab said it best, "I consider my ability to arouse enthusiasm among my people, the greatest asset I possess, and the way to develop the best that is in a person is by appreciation and encouragement. There is nothing else that so kills ambitions of a person as criticisms from superiors. I never criticize anyone. I believe in giving a

person incentive to work. So I am anxious to praise but loath to find fault. If I like anything, I am hearty in my approbation and lavish in my praise."

1. Focus on all aspects of appreciation

● **Accountability:** How does anyone know we are dissatisfied if we do not speak up? The next area is taking accountability in our role at work. Blaming the politics, culture, or boss is not productive. If we are unhappy, it is our responsibility to be clear on what is wanted. Maybe it is time to make a switch, yet many times once we are clear, there is a way to be satisfied in our current organization. By taking the tone of appreciation, we can ask for our needs to be fulfilled. Our managers are busy and prefer us to take the lead. By being proactive, seeking out mentoring, listening, asking questions and giving meaningful feedback, we can set ourselves apart and create the best career

path that meets our needs and the organizations.

For example, you have an idea to streamline a process, instead of complaining to co-workers, develop a proposal denoting what is working now and how it can be enhanced to be more effective and efficient. Or you have a difficult co-worker; try to find ways to relate versus gossiping. Determine the best way to manage the conflict towards a mutual resolution. Additionally, if a mistake is made, take accountability for your part and denote the lessons learned. When we take accountability for each scenario, we are leading by example and taking the higher road and in turn will be more successful.

2. Take accountability for actions and career

● **Acumen:** By developing our skills in an area of expertise, we become indispensable in the workplace. Taking the method of continuous learning allows us to see different approaches and viewpoints outside of the day to day. For years, I was stuck in a "doing" mode and not able to see a bigger picture or different ways of running the internal operations at Actualize Consulting. I was at a point in which I did not feel as though I was adding value. Then I decided to go to seminars, learn from new sources, and read books on leadership and human psychology. Each time, I would find a nugget to bring back to my role and implement and slowly build a culture in which our employees want to be a part of. For example, we had the same goal setting process for eight years with little guidance to our employees. Last year, we streamlined and suggested our employees align goals to accountability, acumen, and aspirations. We were stuck in Einstein's quote, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." In turn, we had our best employee survey in history last year.

3. Seek outside sources to enhance acumen

● **Aspire:** Steve Jobs said, "If you are working on something that you really care about, you don't have to be pushed. The vision pulls you." It sounds cliché to do what you love. We may not love all facets of our jobs, yet if we focus on the areas that bring joy, we will be successful and advance. The first step is to have a heart to heart with yourself to gain clarity on what excites you personally and professionally. Make a list of all of your job functions and determine the ones that bring the most joy and you excel. What brings happiness outside the workplace? Determine if there are themes to pull from to bring clarity to what pieces are best for your career. Next, work with your manager on how you can focus on those areas. For

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instance, you love giving back to the community, so take a leadership role in the firm's charity program. Or you like working with people on career development, so ask to manage more people or develop a leadership program. Get creative to bring more aspiration to your working hours.

4. Aspire to be the best

In closing, a Swish Proverb provides wisdom, "Fear less, cherish more; eat less, chew more; whine less, breathe more; talk less, listen more; hate less, love more; and all good things are yours." From a career perspective, appreciate more, take accountability, strengthen

acumen and aspire to be the best. In turn, career paths are paved to the highest good. As Thomas Jefferson said, "Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude."

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