



HOW TO SURVIVE AND SUCCEED IN YOUR JOB

Having access to information, both about how to perform your job and also about the state of the company you work for, is crucial to your survival. I love to read the business section of the paper each day. While I am not an investor, I think someone who is familiar with the field could make a lot of money just by what they are reading in the paper each day, by looking at what the people who have information inside various companies are doing with (1) their careers and (2) their money. I am certainly not mentioning anything that others have not; however, the information I am sharing with you is relevant to your career and is solid career advice.

Every week in the paper there is a story about the CFO of one company or another resigning from his or her job. Often these CFOs resign when their companies appear to be in trouble. If the CFO has been in the position for several years and is resigning without another job lined up, it is generally an indication that the company is in some sort of serious financial trouble. Throughout the years while I have been observing this pattern, the companies in question have generally filed for bankruptcy, undergone mass layoffs, or experienced something of the sort not too long after the CFO's departure. I have seen this pattern over and over again.

You need to understand that the CFOs are most often leaving their jobs because they have information about the company that they believe is extremely relevant to whether or not they should stay with the company. In leaving the company, these CFOs are often saving themselves from being laid off or being held accountable when the company goes down later. Information is the key to your survival and ability to do a good job in any company or organization that you join and want to remain part of. You absolutely need access to information.

I would like to walk you through the process of how to get access to information when you [start a job](#), and how to use information to keep your job. If you follow this advice, you will be suited to do well in just about any work environment.

Over the years I have had the opportunity and privilege to work with some very intelligent people, people who went to the very best schools and have gotten jobs with the very best employers. A lot of this has to do with the fact that my main career has been working as a recruiter in the legal field and also as an interviewer for a top college. In the legal field, I have worked with people who were among the top five students in their graduating class at places like Harvard Law School. In working with people like these, I have noticed some commonalities among people who do exceptionally well in the schools that they attend and people who are able to get excellent [jobs](#); the two are not always one and the same.

I want to add first of all that I think intelligence is overrated. I have seen people who scored in the 50th percentile on standardized tests be among the top students in colleges. I know of many happy and successful people who never even finished high school or who barely speak English, who came to the United States from other countries and have become extraordinarily successful. I think virtually anyone can be successful if they follow certain rules and develop certain habits. Success leaves clues.

What I have noticed almost universally about the most successful people is that they are very good listeners. These listeners find the right people and ask the right questions so they know exactly what they should be doing, whom they should stay close to, and whom they should stay away from. In an academic setting, the good listeners will listen to their teachers so they know what is expected of them and what information is most important. In a business setting, these listeners will know what work is expected of them, who to avoid, and what their employer likes best.

Listening and getting information from your employer or potential employer are crucial.

When you are [researching](#) a firm, it is important for you to know exactly what the firm is looking for. The company has a job available and, in order to do the job, you need to understand exactly what that job entails. When you interview for the job, you need to be very clear that you are willing to do the job. I know that this sounds like a very basic piece of advice; however, believe it or not, I have seen many people completely blow their interviews, based on doing very poorly in this category during an interview. Below are a couple examples of this:

Several years ago, I was interviewing a senior [copywriter](#) for a [marketing position](#) with our company. The copywriter had a résumé that was excellent in all respects, and he did quite well in his interviews with various people inside the corporation. After his interviews, I took him out to lunch. I was prepared to make him an offer either at lunch or, at latest, the next day.

The job of the copywriter was going to be to simply writing letters and emails that we could send out about our various products to potential users. This was something for which I needed someone with relevant expertise, since at the time most of the work in this category was being executed by people whose only prior experience had been writing résumés. I was very excited to have someone with this man's level of expertise to assist with this task.

Having so much experience, the copywriter actually came across as arrogant during lunch. I suddenly got the impression that he would be very difficult to manage. None of this was fatal, however, until he said something along the lines of the following:

"I have so much experience at this point that I am not really so interested in writing anymore. Instead, I see myself more as someone who will walk around and supervise the younger writers in the company, and provide them with solid management and input on their writing."

This was actually the last thing that I needed someone to do. I needed someone who would sit down and write emails and letters—nothing less and nothing more.

With this statement the man immediately painted himself as someone who wanted to be a manager and did not want to do the work he was being interviewed for. The man had actually been out of work for several months, and I knew the job we had open was very important to him. Despite this fact, he ended up saying something that was fatal to his obtaining the position. I did not offer him the job and learned a valuable lesson in hiring that day: never hire someone for a job who does not take the time to understand what the job actually is.

When you are [interviewing for a job](#), it is extremely important that you understand exactly what the job entails. You need to be very good at asking questions early on in your interviews so that you can tell your interviewer and future interviewers exactly what they want to hear, and avoid saying what they do not want to hear. It is important that you do everything you can to [get the job](#) when you are being interviewed (but always be honest), including shading your information towards what the employers want to hear.

At the interview stage you can gather this information from the advertisement you saw for the job; incidentally, your résumé and [cover letter](#) should be geared towards exactly what the employer is seeking. When you get into the interview you should be asking lots of questions about what the job requires, if at all possible, until your interviewers start asking questions of their own.

Remember: good listeners always end up doing the best and getting ahead. Excellent listening is absolutely crucial.

With the information you gain, you can then go on to perform up to par in interview after interview. Let other people do as much talking as possible.

Once you are hired you need to continue being good at getting access to information. When you are hired in a new job, you will never know anything about your expectations and what is required of you until you get access to information. Knowing what each employer requires is absolutely crucial to your survival in the company. I want to tell you a quick story about one of my first jobs and how I was able to learn by getting access to information in the company.

My first job as an attorney was with a [law firm](#) that has since gone out of business in New York City. I write about this firm in a negative way only because it no longer exists; (here's another word of advice: never say anything negative about a past employer if they are still in business). It was a [summer job](#) between my second and third years of [law school](#). Specifically, it was a 10-week job that required me to do various legal tasks and then report on the work I had done via a billing system. Essentially, I was given various types of assignments and then needed to bill my time for each assignment to the firm's clients, by writing down the client number and documenting the hours I had worked on each task.

After five weeks on the job, I was given a formal review. I had worked very hard on my tasks but none of them had taken very much time. I was billing on average about 7-8 hours a day to the clients. When the partners and others who assigned me tasks received my work, they were almost all pleased with the quality. However, when I got into my review it went terribly. I was told that I was not working hard enough on tasks. I was told that I did not produce enough work and so forth. It was very crushing to me because I thought I had been doing an excellent job. The firm told me that I had done so poorly that it was

unlikely that I would receive an offer from the law firm at the end of the summer to work there after graduation.

I knew an attorney in the law firm who had been practicing for around four years and was a really nice guy. I had become friendly with him throughout the summer and he had taken a liking to me as a younger attorney. I remember telling him about the horrible experience, and as I told him this he began smiling.

"You have nothing to worry about," he said. "I know how to solve this. All you need to do is start turning in your time sheets and working at least 12-15 hours every day. Just bill whatever you possibly can and they will beg you to come to the firm. This is 10 times more important here than even your work quality."

Since this was the only information that I had to go on, I followed it. Sure enough, in my final review at the end of the summer, I received absolutely stunning and glowing recommendations. I was told I had a future at the firm, was loved by the management, and all sorts of other positive things. I was even taken out for a few drinks by a partner, and the most important partner in the firm ended up taking me on a trip with him to Washington, DC to watch a congressional testimony in my last week. I was one of the only people in the summer program whom the firm wanted to return after my summer there.

This was all because I had access to information about what was required at this firm. Sure, the quality of my work did matter; however, foremost on the employers' minds was the number of hours I billed, and how hard I worked.

If I had not had access to this information about what the job required, I would have failed. I am 100 percent sure of this. I would not have gotten a position at the end of the summer, and I would have had issues with my [legal career](#) and getting other jobs for years to come.

Your job, no matter where you work, also has a set of rules that can result in you succeeding or failing. There are also people inside your company or organization who know exactly what you need to do to succeed, and they might tell you if you just get close to them and ask. When you are doing your job, you need to ask lots of questions. You need to find out what your predecessor did, and what did or did not make that person successful. You need to understand every piece of information about your job that you can.

Getting access to information is important in good times and in bad. Knowing where your company is making money can allow you to apply your efforts in this direction. Knowing who is about to lose their job can potentially save you from "guilt by association", and knowing who is succeeding can also help you.

You need information to get a job and to succeed in your current job. Be information conscious!

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