

Top tips for getting on in the workplace

1

Getting ahead in business means getting noticed, but working hard makes you almost invisible. Therefore it's a lot better to work hard at getting yourself noticed. What senior management likes more than anything else is junior managers who show signs of initiative and volunteer to do things. Most of the reason for this is that the more junior managers volunteer to do, the less senior managers will have to do themselves. Of course, volunteering for things and doing things are two different matters. Once you have got the credit for volunteering for a project, it's best to get as far away as possible from the project before the work kicks in. The best way to do that is to volunteer for another project.

2

Working in the post room is not generally a career choice for most people. Yet with the epidemic of email most people spend half their working lives slaving away in their own personal computer post room. Most emails are biodegradable, however. If you let them sink to the bottom of the pile and go unanswered they will eventually become irrelevant. To some people, doing this might seem like just about the most daring and suicidal thing you could possibly do in an office but, if something really matters, the person who sent it will eventually call you to ask you about it.

3

The difference between a boss and a high street bank is that a bank sometimes gives you credit for things. Bosses give you things to do and then blame you for doing them. What they never understand is that if they didn't give you things to do in the first place, you wouldn't make so many spectacular foul-ups. Naturally there are good bosses and bad bosses. Some take the trouble to get interested in what you are doing, encourage your personal development and generally provide you with a stimulating and challenging environment in which to work. There are also good bosses who lock themselves in their rooms, have five-hour lunches and leave you completely alone.

4

Since the collapse of communism, dress-down Fridays have done more than anything else to impair the smooth running of capitalism. Business suits are for doing business in. If you are wearing a welder's helmet people expect rivets; if you are wearing a suit people expect business. But if you are wearing shorts and sandals, people expect you to be on your way to San Francisco with flowers in your hair. On the other hand, never look too businesslike. This marks you out as someone who works in organized crime or as an undertaker, if not both.

5

An appraisal is where you have an exchange of opinion with your boss. It's called an exchange of opinion because you go in with your opinion and leave with their opinion. When you have had a bad year, the best approach is a balance between cringing apology and grovelling sycophancy, something like: 'My respect for you is so intense that it sometimes distracted me, thereby causing the continual string of major cock-ups that have been the main feature of my performance this year.' Interestingly, giving appraisals is actually as hard as getting them. The secret is to mix criticism with recognition. For example: 'You've made a number of mistakes Martin, but we recognise you made them because you are a total idiot.'

6

Reports are the office equivalent of cones in the road. They are not actually work themselves but they are a big, clear sign that real work might be done at some stage. In the meantime, they slow everything down and cause anger and annoyance all round. The quickest and easiest way to write a report is to change the names in the last report. When you do this, be aware that there will always be one name that escapes your changes and that will be in the sentence, 'We are committed to personal service to ...' The other thing people always forget to change in reports are the headers and footers which you only notice are completely wrong in the lift on the way to your presentation.

7

If you put all the country's chief executives in one room, all they would produce would be a range of jammy share options for themselves and some meaningless corporate waffle for the City. Give them one good PA and they might get some useful work done. That's why it's very difficult for PAs to become managers. It's not that PAs couldn't do management jobs, it's because management couldn't do management jobs without PAs. Remember that for every senior executive on the golf course, there is a PA running the business back in the office.

8

You would think that lazy people would form an inert mass at the bottom of an organization. On the contrary they are found at all levels in business, right up to chair person. The reason for this is simple: when something goes wrong in business it's generally because someone somewhere has tried to do something. Obviously, if you don't do anything, you can't be blamed when it goes wrong. People who sit all day like a lemon, busily straightening paperclips, are therefore the only people with a 100% record of success, and with that sort of record, promotion is inevitable.

9

Half of every working day is spent in meetings, half of which are not worth having, and of those that are, half the time is wasted. Which means that nearly one third of office life is spent in small rooms with people you don't like, doing things that don't matter. The only reason people have so many meetings is that they are the one time you can get away from your work, your phone and your customers. People say that the secret of a good meeting is preparation. But if people really prepared for meetings, the first thing they would realise is that most are unnecessary. In fact, a tightly run meeting is one of the most frightening things in office life. These are meetings for which you have to prepare, in which you have to work and after which you have to take action. Fortunately, these meetings are as rare as a sense of gay abandon in the finance department.