



## Book Outsiders on the Inside

### How to Create a Winning Career...Even When You Don't Fit In!

David Couper  
Career Press, 2010  
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## Recommendation

Do you look different than your colleagues? Think differently? Act differently? You're probably an outsider. Possibly you suffer for it. Maybe your co-workers disrespect you. It's tough to have a good day at work. Perhaps you can't change whatever makes you different – your skin color, your accent, your body type. And why should you? *BooksInShort* recommends professional outsider David Couper's book, which explains to all self-professed outsiders how to accept their own uniqueness. Couper says glory in who you are, and turn your otherness into an advantage. He teaches outsiders how to be satisfied at work, present themselves in new ways, get the jobs they want and move inside.

## Take-Aways

- Square pegs stuck in round holes usually are not happy at work.
- Insiders – round-peg people – regard those who are different as outsiders.
- Insiders can make outsiders feel uncomfortable and unwanted.
- Outsiders should not let insiders bother them; let the insiders be bothered instead.
- Outsiders must learn to be bold and big, not bland and boring.
- Outsiders should turn their differences into their personal brands – their “unique selling propositions.”
- Outsiders who leverage their differences achieve more job success.
- Sometimes, outsider happiness requires a new job or location.
- Plan your job search around what makes you different.
- Honestly evaluate your skills, knowledge, behavior, experience, attitude and personality.

## Summary

### Don't Fit In?

Are you a square peg in a round hole? A misfit with your colleagues? Whatever makes you unusual also may make you unhappy at work, particularly if your colleagues don't accept you. You may hate your job, yet constantly worry you're going to lose it. The five most common outsider traits, along with coping strategies to bridge the gaps you face at work, are:

1. **“Outsiders look different”** – Looking different – skin color, gender, weight, and so on – affects your work satisfaction and status. Unusual-looking people do

- not get hired easily. *Coping strategy*: People conform at work. Blend in by dressing like your colleagues.
2. **“Outsiders sound different”** – Those who speak differently learn that others find them odd. Some quit talking altogether, which leaves them even more on the outside. *Coping strategy*: Don’t be self-conscious; laugh with others at your special sound.
  3. **“Outsiders act different”** – Maybe you read on your breaks while everyone else gossips. You don’t mean to irritate your colleagues, but they get offended anyway. “An aggressive female executive might be called a shrew and made to feel like an outsider, even though aggressive male executives are praised for their shrewd leadership qualities.” *Coping strategy*: Explain why you do what you do to promote understanding.
  4. **“Outsiders feel different”** – You look, act and sound like everybody else, but on the inside you feel unlike others and it torments you. *Coping strategy*: Identify the attitudes and ideas that you do share with others. Talk to people to find commonality.
  5. **“Outsiders are made to feel different”** – People can be cruel to misfits. *Coping strategy*: You are who you are. If others don’t like it, that’s their problem. Be proud. People admire those who are comfortable with themselves.

## Being Different Is All Right

Make your outsider status a badge of honor, and take pride in what separates you from everyone else. Consider Nicolaus Copernicus. During the 16th century, Copernicus claimed that the Earth spun on its axis and journeyed through space around the sun. Common wisdom held that the Earth was the center of the universe, and that all revolved around the planet.

“The average workplace outsider is usually unfulfilled, unhappy and desperate for a change. Or even worse, they’ve given up hope of a better work life.”

The Catholic Church decreed Copernicus sacrilegious. Yet Copernicus stuck to his guns. He said: “If perchance there should be foolish speakers who...should dare to assault this my work, they are of no importance to me, to such an extent do I despise their judgment as rash.” Be like Copernicus. Transform yourself from an “unsuccessful outsider” to a winner. Apply the following “Unique U Principles” to your life:

- **“Exaggerate your eccentricities”** – Author David Couper attended the University of Wales, where most students studied engineering. Couper was an English and communications major; his fellow students thought that was snooty. These students loved beer so much they founded a club: the Real Ale Society. Couper and his outsider, liberal-arts-major friends formed their own club. They visited ancient pet cemeteries, drank alcoholic fruit cocktails (like characters in Agatha Christie novels) and attended celebrity lectures. They reveled in their uniqueness, and their club became one of the most popular on campus.
- **“Master yourself”** – Early in his career, Couper worked briefly in the United Kingdom for Arthur Andersen, the international accounting firm. He did not fit in. Couper dressed more colorfully than his conservative colleagues; his boss described one of his ties as “career-limiting.” Eventually, the company “counseled out” Couper – asked him to leave. Later, he worked again at Andersen, in its Chicago office. Although still a “fully certified square peg,” Couper thrived. His new boss even complimented his “startling red socks.” The difference between these experiences? By the time Couper returned, he had mastered himself and become a “successful outsider.”
- **“Be bold and big, not bland and boring”** – In the 1980s, Couper created a TV program with two other outsiders for Andersen’s private broadcast system, which transmitted to Andersen offices across the US. The show explained how employees could improve their work by using the Internet, then known as the “Information Superhighway.” The program featured a cab supposedly traveling this highway, and Couper played the cab’s passenger. The program proved unusually irreverent for the staid firm, yet won a national award for “Best Program Produced by a Private Network.” Square pegs can outachieve round ones who do everything by the book.
- **“Find your release in relocation”** – Corinne, a Latin American woman, worked in Chicago as an instructional designer. She spoke numerous languages and was quite cosmopolitan. Sadly, most of her colleagues knew little of life beyond the Chicago suburbs. Corinne did not fit in and was unhappy. She investigated other job openings within the firm and relocated to Paris. There, her love of languages and different cultures proved an asset, not an oddity. Corinne became a successful outsider.

“Once we’ve accepted that we don’t fit in, we need to analyze what makes us different.”

If you are an unhappy outsider at work, maybe you should explore other opportunities. Examine what makes you different. Rate yourself along these basic parameters, and imagine how you might leverage your unique qualities into a new job:

- **“Skills”** – What can you do that your colleagues cannot?
- **“Knowledge”** – Maybe you make perfect pasta, or read the classics in Greek or Latin.
- **“Behaviors”** – You smile when others don’t, or get up at 4 a.m. to exercise.
- **“Experience”** – You were a Las Vegas showgirl. You conducted séances in Belgrade. You cooked meals for a homeless shelter.
- **“Attitude”** – You make everyone around you feel good about themselves. You are a glass-half-full person who always looks on the bright side.
- **“Personality”** – You are quiet and reserved, or exuberant and extroverted.

“Workplace outsiders are always worried about losing their jobs.”

Whatever makes you different makes you special. Accept yourself and your uniqueness. Apply these “four principles for gaining self-acceptance”:

1. **“Stop the chatter”** – “Gremlins” inside your head can drive you nuts with their admonitions on how you should fit in. Pay them no attention.
2. **“We are all the same”** – People are the same – in their “energy, souls and love,” or however you define the human essence. Stop judging books by their covers, including the special book that is you.
3. **“Give and receive”** – Do you send out negative vibrations because you’re different? Or positive ones – also because you are different? Thinking and acting like a successful person can help you become successful.
4. **“True passion”** – Passionate people focus on what matters to them, not on supposed deficiencies that others might see. They never ask themselves this self-defeating question: “What do other people want from me?”

“Some of us may not even realize we are outsiders until rude or insensitive co-workers or policies make it quite obvious.”

**Follow these “four outsider bridge-building principles”:**

1. **“Let people know that you embrace your uniqueness”** – Don’t let others define your worth or who you are.
2. **“Invite your co-workers to sample your worldview”** – The stories you tell show your colleagues what you think and feel. If you don’t own your own narrative, others will make up stories about you and discuss those.
3. **“Teach people about your eccentricity”** – When you do, they will understand you.
4. **“Make your uniqueness your trademark”** – Your differences should be your brand.

“Learn to make your outsider uniqueness work for you instead of against you.”

To find the job you want, “market yourself as an outsider.” To promote yourself, follow the examples in these “four principles of marketing”:

1. **“Product”** – You are the product. You are marketing yourself. During the 1980s, a Chinese woman who was an outsider due to her heavy accent leveraged her knowledge of Chinese language and customs to enhance her employment status at the advertising agency where she worked. She became instrumental in helping her firm handle advertising for Chinese organizations.
2. **“Pricing”** – The Chinese woman’s ability to spark new business led to a raise and a better position.
3. **“Promotion”** – A European actress who also had a heavy accent began to win roles when she used her accent to create a “sexy European persona.”
4. **“Placement”** – Look inside your own firm. Try to connect with whoever does the hiring, transferring or promoting. Often, outsiders who are unhappy in their jobs can find satisfaction by handling other work within their company.

“If we’re always trying to please other people we don’t have any time left to be ourselves.”

Honor yourself, but get along with insiders to become “an outsider on the inside.” These five factors will make the difference:

1. **“Successful outsiders realize the power of infrastructure”** – Pop art genius Andy Warhol was a complete outsider, but he understood the importance of infrastructure in the art world – rich patrons, art galleries, and so on. Warhol worked to develop the right contacts so he could sell his outsider’s art. His work became the ultimate insider’s purchase.
2. **“Successful outsiders live in the present but remember the past”** – Classics become classics for a reason. Coca-Cola learned this the hard way when it introduced New Coke and discovered that its customers did not want old Coke changed. Coca-Cola quickly went back to “classic” Coke. Lesson: It is tough enough being an outsider without trying to reinvent the light bulb.
3. **“Successful outsiders do not create worlds that are closed”** – You have a passion that thrills you, but you indulge it only during evening or weekend hours. What a waste! Spend the lion’s share of your time doing what you love. Give yourself a chance to succeed at what you most enjoy.
4. **“Successful outsiders do not avoid the world”** – You aren’t so different that the common rules of success don’t apply. To realize your employment or income-producing dream, get out and meet other people. Recluses get nowhere: “You cannot stay at home and talk only to your cat.”
5. **“Successful outsiders do not live on an island”** – Be careful when you transform yourself into a successful outsider. You may become an insider and lose your special cachet (your “unique selling proposition”). Stay true to who you are.

**Your Employment Action Plan**

Knowing yourself and what you want will improve your work situation:

1. **Discover who you are** – Write down what makes you different.
2. **Develop your “outsider story”** – Create a brief (two to three lines) outsider story detailing how you feel about your differences and how others treat you.
3. **Own your vision** – Write down your vision of your future. For example, “I want to have fun, be respected and be appreciated.” List your most important values.
4. **Establish your mission** – Identify your “benchmarks for success.” Write out “what you want to do based upon your outsider qualities.” Be specific. For example, one outsider wrote: “I’ll want to get up on Monday mornings eager and looking forward...to work.”
5. **Break your barriers** – List the personal obstacles that may get in your way. Put yourself in a better position to deal with your self-made hurdles.
6. **Commit** – Make a personal commitment to your action plan.

“You are perfect as you are.”

And remember: “For many outsiders, the best possible career change involves self-employment.”

**About the Author**

Career coach **David Couper** is the co-author of *50 Activities for Developing People Skills* and *George Sees Stars*.

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