



# Book Be a Shortcut

## The Secret Fast Track to Business Success

Scott G. Halford  
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### Recommendation

Business consultant Scott G. Halford helps employees boost their emotional intelligence (EI), the capacity to assess and influence the emotions of other people. He coined the term “Shortcuts” to describe emotionally intelligent people – and companies – who make life better for their customers and cohorts. Companies prize employees with strong EI skills because consumers would rather deal with people who treat them well and make them feel good. Halford explains how you and your company can become shortcuts. Much of his information is old-fashioned common sense: Make yourself indispensable, maintain a positive attitude, and treat everyone around you with solicitude and respect. However, Halford blends these venerable verities with timely, in-the-know tips on how individuals and firms can pull onto the shortcut superhighway. He believes that anyone who doesn’t become a shortcut is shortchanging his or her career, and he tells you why. *BooksInShort* finds that his book can help you and your business make short work of your transformation to shortcut status in the shortest possible time.

### Take-Aways

- Human “Shortcuts” are emotionally intelligent individuals who make other people’s lives run more smoothly.
- Employees who are shortcuts do work that others lack the time, ability, talent or willingness to do.
- Being a shortcut means making life better, easier and more profitable for others.
- People often pay well for the valuable services that shortcuts provide.
- In a tight economy, being a shortcut is a good way to preserve your job.
- If you are not a shortcut, you can become one by upgrading your professional skills.
- Concentrate on your “signature strengths,” your primary areas of expertise.
- If people do not like you, even if you are brilliant at what you do, you will never become a shortcut.
- Companies that use a culture of emotional intelligence to make their customers’ lives better also can be shortcuts, but that requires buy-in from the top.
- Companies with “shortcut cultures” emphasize employee education. They try to hire emotionally intelligent people who contribute “collaborative synergy.”

### Summary

#### “The Know-Why”

People love “Shortcuts.” They save time and make things achievable much more quickly and efficiently. Shortcuts help you get from one place to another. They save you steps at home (a lawn care service) and on the job (an assistant). Other “Human Shortcuts” include the people who style your hair, plan your finances, clean your house, do your taxes, or pick up and deliver your laundry. Shortcuts make life easier for others at work or at home, so they are in high demand. People admire celebrities, but they revere shortcuts. Without shortcuts, things would be so much more difficult.

“Shortcuts are there when you need them.”

If you are not a shortcut, you can become one quickly. Being a shortcut is the best possible insurance against job loss. Of course, many shortcuts already work for themselves. They deliver such helpful services that people are happy to pay a premium price. Shortcuts share these traits:

- They pitch in gladly and do whatever is needed at work, even if it does not fall under their job description. Shortcuts are the exact opposite of “high-maintenance employees.”
- Shortcuts are delighted to make you look good.
- They are satisfied employees with consistently positive attitudes.
- Shortcuts make things run as smoothly as possible (as opposed to those other infuriating individuals who seem to act as bottlenecks at every turn).
- Shortcuts never make others feel obligated to them.
- They’re respected and influential.
- Shortcuts are experts at what they do and often at what other people do.
- They endear themselves to others just by being who they are.

“Shortcuts...help others to wade through all of the options available and they are paid handsomely for this service.”

People who don’t have time, lack a needed ability or skill, or face a job they simply do not want to do may hire shortcuts to fill in for them. If you can help in these areas by contributing your time, talent and willingness, you can be a shortcut and, often, increase your earning power.

Shortcuts vary in importance, but you can rank them according to their value, the need for their services and their cost. A “five-star” shortcut has “high value” and fills a strong need for a low cost, like a tax preparation service. A “three-star” shortcut fills a “low need” at a “low cost,” like a valet car parker. A “zero-star” shortcut meets few needs at a high cost, and so isn’t likely to remain employed for long. To find out if you are a shortcut, answer three questions:

1. **Do you make anyone’s job or life easier?** – Can you help people eliminate items from their to-do lists? Can you save them time, trouble or effort?
2. **Do you make anyone’s work or life better?** – Can you make a co-worker look heroic?
3. **Do you help anyone save money?** – Or do you help people make money?

“The trick in becoming a Shortcut is to frame yourself in the same indispensable way as the ATM.”

If you can answer yes to all three questions, you are a premier shortcut and you can reap the benefits. If not, begin restructuring yourself, your abilities and your work activities so you can help others win the “easier, better, more money” sweepstakes in your role as an effective shortcut.

## The Shortcut Employee

Often, to become a premier shortcut, you first must become more proficient at your primary job. Review your daily tasks. Can you find faster, more productive ways to handle your duties? Of course, changing your basic behaviors or “standard operating procedures” is not easy, but it’s necessary if you want to be a five-star shortcut. The good news is that your colleagues or competitors may not be willing to do the hard, long-range work it takes to become great shortcuts. That leaves lots of room for you at the top.

“During tough economic times, you must distinguish yourself to secure your job.”

All change starts with a firm thought backed up by a strong desire to attain a specific goal. Repeat to yourself, over and over, that you want to change and become better. Work at one targeted change at a time. Concentrate on improving yourself in this area for 21 days. Think about and visualize the new behavior, skill or improvement. Practice it routinely. After 21 days, it will almost be a habit, but don’t lose focus. Continue to work on it. Making a new behavior part of your basic repertoire takes 60 to 90 days.

“Being a Shortcut is about the positive or negative energy you choose to bring to every situation.”

To achieve – and exhibit – great expertise, first you must be in the “flow,” a state of maximum performance accompanied by absorption, euphoria and timelessness, as described by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Flow depends on concentration, “challenge and skill.” As you face more challenges, your skill level must increase accordingly through a process of constant adaptation and self-correction. Some level of anxiety actually plays a useful part in this self-improvement process. If you feel nervous, reduce that feeling by hastening to improve your skills. However, too much anxiety is always a bad thing. If you begin to feel overly anxious, take a break from your self-improvement activities. Unwind for a few minutes and then get back to work.

“Most of the Shortcut attributes are about how you are, not what you are.”

Another shortcut solution is to focus on the things you do best, the “signature strengths” where you have established expertise or already add to your company’s profits. Concentrate on honing these skills and ensuring that people rely on you for them. To achieve status as an “ultimate shortcut,” become your colleagues’ and clients’ primary source for this expertise. Of course, attaining such a level in a world of specialists and subspecialists requires full mastery of your subject. Developing solid expertise in any area is a daunting job, but the hard work will be worth it when you become a well-paid, five-star shortcut.

## The Shortcut Entrepreneur

Do you want to score big with a new business? One way to do so – and to become a shortcut in the process – is to find a better way to organize information. Can you systematize data, and make it easily and quickly accessible to a large audience? This approach worked for Google and it can work for you. Of course, organizing information requires technical expertise. If that isn’t up your alley, seek another avenue that will enable you to shortcut your way to success.

“Improve just one thing you do in your job every week, and you’ll be astounded at how much more efficient and effective you become.”

You may offer an entirely prosaic service, but if it makes life easier and better for others, you are on the right path. To wit: DoodyCalls, a dog poop-scooping company, is about as basic a shortcut service as you can imagine. But, because it provides a valuable shortcut, and does a job that other people don’t want to do and are glad to pay to have done, DoodyCalls has taken off big time since its inception in 2000. Franchises now sell for \$25,000.

“To be a Shortcut, you have to use Shortcuts.”

To become a shortcut for others, you may need to put some human shortcuts to work for you. Peter Drucker introduced the concept of “back-room” and “front-room” activities. Back-room activities are things that need doing, but do not contribute to the bottom line. Front-room activities make money. Hire human shortcuts to handle back-room activities (like record-keeping) so you can concentrate on essential, productive tasks.

## “The Know-How”

Do people like you? If not, it will be difficult for you to become an effective, in-demand shortcut. You may have a lot of expertise to offer, but if people don’t find you likeable, they will never get close enough to learn what you can do for them. In business, likeability is everything. Likable people exude a magnetism that makes others feel positive about themselves. For a basic approach, look to Mohandas Gandhi, who said, “Treat others as if they already were who they wish they were.”

“There are few things in your life that will help you in your life and job as much as likeability.”

You can have brainpower, talent and ability enough to power a battleship, but if you lack “emotional intelligence” (EI) you will get nowhere in business or in life. Many professionals and specialists need to work harder in this all-important area. Being smart is great, but being smart and nice is the shortcut’s fast track to success. The greatest shortcuts always leave their clients and colleagues feeling that helping them was an honor. Your attitude defines the experience others have when they work with you or hire you to work for them. Great shortcuts strive to create an experience that others want to repeat.

“Shortcuts have a good attitude...They make it easy to be around them.”

To be instantly likeable, show respect to everyone you encounter, regardless of status. Additionally, likeability depends on these four basic factors:

1. **“Physical attractiveness”** – Being handsome or beautiful goes a long way in breaking the ice and opening doors with other people. But it is not everything. Indeed, a nasty disposition or an unpleasant attitude quickly outweighs any physical attributes.
2. **“Similarity”** – The “me-too” element is crucial. People feel more warmth toward those who resemble them.
3. **“Recognition and complimenting”** – To be more likeable, offer sincere praise.
4. **“Cooperation”** – Too many people are difficult obstructionists. Be the opposite. If you are always willing to meet people halfway, they will meet you all the way.

“Let everyone sweep in front of their own door. Then the whole world will be clean.” [ – Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe]

Who are the people you depend on the most, personally and professionally? Do you routinely check with them? When you are with them, do you focus on them and not on yourself? Are you solicitous of them? In business, as in life, attitude makes all the difference. Employees steer clear of colleagues with bad attitudes, but flock to those with positive outlooks.

## “The Shortcut as a Company”

Everyone wants to do business with shortcut companies, but people avoid anti-shortcut companies that breed disappointment and discontentment. Be sure your firm operates as a shortcut company by focusing on:

- **“Executive buy-in”** – If the CEO and senior managers are not on board with the goal of performing as a shortcut company, it will never happen. Attitudes within any corporation flow downward from the executive suites. Senior executives can’t just talk the shortcut talk, they must also walk the walk.
- **“Education”** – Everyone in an organization needs to learn and live the “Credo of the Shortcut Organization.” It sets out the philosophy that the company centers on its customers. Each customer of the company is a customer of every employee. Colleagues are “each other’s customers” and treat each other with respect. Competence is everything. Everyone within the firm should devote 20 hours annually to upgrading his or her professional abilities. Additionally, a shortcut company should provide 10 hours of training each year to help its people improve their emotional intelligence skills.
- **“The hiring process”** – At Google, being technologically savvy can get you an employment interview, but you have to be comfortable in the company’s “shortcut culture” to get hired. This requires showing a level of sincere excitement about collaboration, a “cooperative synergy.” In other words, being a shortcut – a characteristic based on emotional intelligence – is a job requirement. To find such employees, companies with shortcut hiring practices (Google, Microsoft, GE) often have several different insiders interview candidates and ask them probing, scenario-based questions, such as, “If you had to pick one specific thing that you do that you believe would increase this company’s success, what would it be?”

## “The Long and Shortcut of It”

While becoming a shortcut provides a strong career and life achievement path, ironically, many shortcuts are not aware of who they are or of the good they do for others every day. Being a shortcut does not require a special title or job status. Shortcuts do not always make the most money. You will find shortcuts in every walk of life and every level of work. They are easy to spot. They are always the center of attention; their colleagues and clients hover around them. Indeed, they simply can’t get enough of the shortcuts in their lives who help them do what they need to do and make them feel good about themselves.

## About the Author

**Scott G. Halford** is a business consultant, speaker and author who specializes in the field of emotional intelligence.

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