

Expert Advice on Taking Your Career to the Next Level

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Not many people wake up on a Monday and think, “My career is perfect where it is. I have no desire whatsoever to climb to the next level.”

It’s only natural for people to want to take their careers to the next level, whether that “next level” means a promotion within the company they already work for, a job at a similar organization, a pay raise, or a more radical change. But just wanting to advance isn’t enough. Sometimes, a person needs help on mapping out a plan for [career advancement](#).

[Business.com](#) recently spoke with Joel Garfinkle of [Garfinkle Executive Coaching](#). He’s one of the top leadership coaches in the

United States and the author of seven books about attaining the career and the life you’ve always wanted.

We asked Garfinkle — who has nearly two decades of successful career coaching under his belt — to share with us some of the wisdom he has acquired regarding helping people take the steps necessary to ascend to the career they really want.

Q. We all know that it’s important to stand out in order to be recognized for our contributions at work and be considered for advancement. However, some people aren’t comfortable in the limelight. How can the shy — but committed — person learn to overcome some of that fear of heightened visibility and learn to accept — and even enjoy — well-deserved recognition?

A. The reality is those who are shy and try to avoid the limelight often get looked over when it comes time for promotions. For those who truly aren’t comfortable receiving recognition for their efforts, it’s important for them to first make the connection between recognition and career advancement. If they truly want to move forward in their career, they are going to have to make that mental decision to work past the discomfort they feel when the limelight shines.

Once you’ve made this decision, there are ways to get the recognition you deserve without being the one necessarily tooting your own horn. Offer to take on responsibilities that represent your department or find cross-departmental project opportunities. You not only expand your experience, but also gain recognition from a wider sphere of others in the organization. Getting involved in your professional or trade organization can also help draw attention to your accomplishments and skills, in a less conspicuous way.

In the end, it often comes to simply making a decision that your career advancement is important enough to you that you are committed to working past your shyness. Don’t wait until you feel comfortable with the limelight. Take action and know that even if the attention is uncomfortable at first, the benefits for your career are well worth it!

Q. At the other extreme, there are people who go beyond loving visibility to becoming egotistical and arrogant. What happens when that causes a person to start believing all the hype about himself or herself and eventually results in alienation from the people he or she works with or supervises?

A. There is definitely a line between arrogance and confidence. The reasons why a person crosses that line and takes increasing visibility to a level that is counter-productive are as unique as the people within an organization. It can be a snowball effect. Once you begin to have increased visibility within your organization, and people begin to value you more, chances are you’ll be offered more opportunities to shine. This further increases your visibility, and before you know it, you’re one of the go-to people in the organization. This can be quite a heady experience, but it’s important that we always try to remain grounded and keep our egos in check.

Q. You've been in the career coaching business for a long time. What is different about career coaching in an economy where many companies are still reluctant to hire versus coaching in an economy where employees have an easier time finding jobs?

A. Interestingly, it's always difficult to find good candidates. In a booming economy, good candidates are in short supply because there are so many open positions. In a troubled economy, good candidates are in short supply because companies quickly grab up the best people as they try to make do with less. For this reason, coaching in both economies boils down to the same thing – helping people develop into those highly sought after “good candidates.”

The primary difference in coaching would be the increased need to stand out from the plethora of candidates companies will likely receive for a position. There will definitely be more competition for positions in a poor economy; however, if you create value for the company and demonstrate this potential value, you're sure to be at the top of their hiring list.

Q. How is job coaching different with a 25-year-old client who hasn't been in the workforce very long versus a 50-year-old who has been downsized out of a good job and maybe has kids in college?

A. Job coaching for these two clients is surprisingly similar. We determine where they are in their career, determine what their career goals are, and then develop an actionable plan to reach their goals. Now, the key difference is the quantitative and qualitative skill sets these two types of clients have to work with when working toward their goal.

The 50-year-old is likely a senior-level candidate, who has decades of real-life work experience to offer an organization. This person brings a seasoned perspective to the table, as well as a whole host of skills garnered from a long career. He or she can bring suggestions to the company based on past experiences on what solutions or processes worked best for other organizations.

In contrast, the younger candidate does not have the vast amount of real-world experience, but has likely received more education in newer theories and technologies that a company would find important. This person also has the benefit of just starting their career, allowing the company to mold them into the employee they truly want.

With both coaching clients, it's important to discover the skills and benefits they have to offer, and then develop areas where they may be weaker. This is the same, no matter what stage of career a client is in, to develop their unique skills and areas of development.

Q. Nobody's job is perfect, but for those who are generally satisfied with their work, what can they do now to prepare for the unexpected? Should they work on strengthening their professional network? If so, how should they go about it?

A. It's great to hear when someone is generally satisfied with their work; however, it's always important to prepare for the unexpected, especially in more challenging economic times. This definitely includes strengthening and expanding their professional network, as well as continuously developing and improving their skills.

To strengthen your professional network, make sure you have a variety of types of people in your network, including people who have achieved the level of success you desire and who can help lead you on your career path; people you can rely on when you need help making critical decisions; people who are experts in your industry who can help you make important connections with others; and others outside your industry who are active in their own spheres of influence.

Joel Garfinkle Bio:

Recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in America, [Joel Garfinkle](#) has worked with many of the world's leading companies. He has first-hand experience working closely with thousands of executives, senior managers, directors and employees. His more than a decade of [executive coaching](#) experience has provided him insight into the secrets of what turns business professionals into influential leaders, making him one of the nation's most sought after personal leadership coaches.