

## Increasing Your Organizational Value

This session is designed to help you increase your value and to better assist you to grow and advance. We will explore some of the common traits of highly valued persons. But first, let's define a couple of terms. We frequently use the term success as a measure of personal accomplishment. However, if your personal goals are not consistent with your boss' objectives or that of the college, you may be perceived as being of little value. While your personal success is determined by you, your organizational value is determined by others.

A few years ago, we had a receptionist who was doing a good job by most measures of success. However, she was frequently late. This caused someone else to drop what they were doing and open up the office reception area and begin answering the telephone calls. When confronted with the issue, she didn't see it as a problem. She felt that she was doing a very good job and she was willing to stay late so that she could make up the time. She didn't understand that being "on time" was critical to her job. As you might imagine, after a few more times of being late in attendance, we had to let her go and get someone who could be more dependable. While there were other positions in the organization where you could be ten minutes late and make it up later in the day, the receptionist position required someone who could be timely and dependable.

Similarly, we need to make sure that what we are doing and what others want/need us to do are consistent. For when they are in sync, we are able to add great value.

**Move from the ladder to the rope.** The metaphor of climbing a ladder has been used for many years to illustrate upward mobility in one's progression to success. While there is greater risk of falling as you climb a ladder, a ladder is usually rather stable and allows you to rest as you climb. In this session, I would like you to replace the picture of a ladder with a rope. In my thirty-five plus years of professional experience, I have had very few points in my career when I could rest or coast in a position for very long. Therefore, I prefer the picture of climbing a rope, where even the act of staying in the same position requires you to exert a great deal of effort. Just holding to the rope to maintain your current status requires strength, energy and skill.

**Find your purpose.** Surveys of employee's attitudes towards their jobs frequently identify large percentages of the population who are dissatisfied with their work. Yet day after day, they continue to return to those same jobs. Insanity has been defined as continuing to do the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. Before you go back to your job, I want you to reflect on your level of satisfaction with your current position. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "You look for any excuse you can find to not go to work or to hide from my boss" and 10 being "You spring out of bed each day with energy and excitement for work," how do you rate your satisfaction?

If you are not relatively satisfied in your role, you may be doing yourself and your college a great disservice. You can not do your best when you are spending a large portion of your energy just to stay engaged. Kevin McCarthy, author of the On Purpose Person, states: "Stop looking for the perfect job! Start looking for the position that gives the best expression of who you are."

Benjamin Franklin explained to his mother: “I would rather have it said, ‘He lived usefully,’ than ‘He died rich.’”

Your purpose should also include your passion. What is it that you get passionate about? What is it that you can put your full self into? These are some critical questions in helping to determine your purpose and what you should be doing. But you should understand that the origin of the word passion comes from the Latin word for suffering. Even if you find what makes you passionate, understand that it will include a great deal of effort. Your passion or lack of passion will greatly determine your ability to become a highly valued person.

**Everyone can make a difference.** No matter what your job title or role, you can make a difference. For years I’ve listened to people tell me how much better they could do their job if they had a more supportive boss, a better work environment, or better co-workers. We have a tendency to want to play the victim. It is a lot easier to place some, if not all, of the blame for our shortcomings on someone else.

Regardless of your position, you can be successful and leave a legacy. You can become a more valuable person and member of your organization. You can go from treading water to winning races. But it is all up to you. You must realize that you are in control of your destiny.

To make this transformation, you must be willing to live each day in a manner which will demonstrate that you really care about what you are doing and care about the people around you.

**Strive to exceed expectations.** Just getting your job done will earn you very few accolades. To be viewed as a highly valued person, you need to go above and beyond what is expected. You want to become the “go to” person. You want to be the person that not only your boss relies on for assistance, but others in the organization look to as well. “Go to” people are usually in early, willing to work late, and frequently volunteer for assignments. They willingly make themselves available to help others. No matter how busy they are, they will make time for you.

But even the “go to” person needs balance or he/she will quickly burn out like a bright sparkler on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

**Be a problem solver.** You can always find people who can identify problems, especially in other people’s areas. You can also find people who work on problems, but it is hard to find people who actually solve problems.

Successful people are problem solvers. They embrace problems and thrive on the challenges they provide. They see problems as opportunities, not as threats. Aren’t these the kind of people you see as being valuable?

Highly valued people know that they don’t have a monopoly on problem solving. They also help others around them to become effective problem solvers. They help others become effective thinkers and problem solvers.

Good leaders understand that not every problem that is brought to them is a problem they need to solve. Some problems need to be handled by the person who is bringing it to your attention. If you take the problem from them, then you have allowed them to upwardly delegate the problem to you. There are also times that neither you nor the person confronting you with the problem is best equipped to solve it. Don't be afraid to get others involved.

You have probably heard the phrase, "having a monkey on your back." The phrase refers to having to shoulder the burden of a major problem. I sometimes visualize the problem that has confronted me as a small energetic monkey that has entered my office on the shoulder of the person presenting me with the problem. This image of a monkey can be helpful in problem identification and in determining who should eventually own the problem. If all monkeys end up staying in your office, your "to do list" will grow to the point that you won't be able to get your primary job accomplished.

As you learn about the problem, which I frequently refer to as opportunity, you need to first determine whether the opportunity is yours to solve or whether it belongs to someone else. The opportunity may need to stay with the person who brought it to your attention or another person or organizational unit.

In any case, you need to make sure that the monkey ends up on the right person's shoulder . . . the person or persons who are best equipped to resolve it.

Sometimes, people bring you problems which they should rightfully solve. However, they want you to take care of it for them. If you take care of the problem for them and continue to do so in the future, they will not learn to become a problem solver. You will have allowed them to "delegate" the problem to you. You also become an enabler of their inability or unwillingness to solve problems.

A good question to ask when someone confronts you with a problem for the first time is, "how do you suggest we solve it?" This demonstrates some shared responsibility, and reminds them that they have had more time to consider possible solutions to the problem than you have. This also helps to set the tone that you want them to wrestle with the issues and come up with some possible solutions prior to bringing it to your attention. Your ability to ask the right questions can help guide them in a manner that allows them to not only solve this problem, but to be better prepared to solve the next one without your assistance. By allowing them to take ownership of the problem, they can take pride in the successful resolution. In this way you help to empower them to be more successful.

**Make self-improvement a part of your daily routine.** Don't expect your organization to train and develop your skills and abilities. While some organizations have very good professional development programs, remember that you are the biggest loser if you fail to keep up. You need to take personal responsibility for your mental, physical and spiritual development. Most change happens gradually over a period of enduring effort, so do not become impatient and frustrated if you are not developing as fast as you want. Your goal should be to become a little better today than you were yesterday. One baby step taken every day over a number of years will move you much further down the road to success.

Continually seek input from others as to areas where you can improve. Critical feedback should not only be sought from your immediate supervisor, but from those whom you supervise, and others both within and outside of the organization. This is a lot easier said than done. Seeking criticism is not easy to do. It requires you to be open and accepting of other's feedback. It requires you to put down your natural defense shields and listen. And this type of feedback should not be a once a year event, but something that takes place frequently.

Remember the old adage, "luck occurs when opportunity and preparation intersect." Without preparation, opportunities will be lost. Would you rather be prepared for opportunities that never exist or not be prepared for opportunities that will pass you by?

**Without application, there is little value.** To add value we must apply what we know and this requires us to change. There are four critical elements of change, *Personal, Possible, Profitable and Persistence*, which may be referred to as the 4Ps. The first element recognizes that change is *Personal*. You can not change your spouse, your boss or even your assistant. And in most situations, you are not able to change the environment or the problems you are facing. Yes, you can influence others, but you can only change yourself and the manner in which you look at situations.

After you realize that change begins with you, you have to believe that you can change. You have to believe that the change you wish to make is *Possible*. If you can not envision that it is possible for you to successfully accomplish this change, you will have a tendency to give up when the change becomes a struggle. You should also remember that if a change is not difficult, it really isn't much of a change.

Third, you must be able to see the benefits of making a change. The change must be viewed as *Profitable* to us in some manner. If a proposed change is not seen as profitable, we can easily lose our desire.

The fourth element of change requires *Persistence*. Most change takes a prolonged period of time to become a natural part of our behavior. Whether it is an exercise program, a new way of running meetings or a new way of problem solving, persistence is required to erase the old way of doing something and replace it with a new method.

**Develop good habits.** Most people believe that practice makes perfect. But the truth is that practicing something incorrectly only makes you very good at doing things wrong. One thing is for sure, the more you practice something the more natural it becomes. The Greek poet Evanas left us these words: "Habit, my friend, is practice long pursued, that at last becomes man himself." So be very careful what you practice, for over time the behaviors you practice will develop the habits that will define your character.

Your reputation is not built on the things you are going to do. Reputation is built on the things you do. Reputation is also built on the things you do not do.

Make sure that there is consistency between the things you say and the things you do. When your words and actions are in sync, people know that they can trust you. When you treat people with respect and spend time with them to develop shared experiences, you will be in a position of trust.

Consistency is the key. And don't be afraid to show your own vulnerability. Admit when you are wrong. Being wrong doesn't mean that you are less of a person or less of a leader. Admitting when you are wrong demonstrates that you are human.

**Creating the right environment is important.** Organizations who can figure out how to excel and do it in a fun filled environment will be the ones that attract and retain the best talent. This is especially true as more of our workforce is comprised of GenXers and Millennials.

People tend to do what they perceive as most rewarding to them. It is a leader's job to set the stage and create conditions where superior performance will take place.

People are also looking for organizations that make a meaningful impact on society. We want to feel that we are not just doing our job, but having a positive impact on the world around us. The closer we can link what we do for a living and the accomplishment of some betterment to society, the happier we will be with our jobs and our employer.

Remember that people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. People are looking for caring leaders. Caring leaders build work environments with high morale. While happiness is an individual choice, it can be nurtured in a supportive work environment.

**Attitude isn't everything, but it impacts everything.** While I'm a strong proponent of keeping a positive attitude, there are other attitudinal issues which you also need to be aware. The manner in which you view yourself and others is extremely important. If for example, you view others as tools to be used to accomplish your goals, then they will see this in your behavior and communications. If on the other hand, you see everyone you work with as a person of value who knows things and can do things that you are not able to do, they will feel validated and supported. The way you see yourself and the way you see others become major determining factors.

Remember that attitudes are contagious. People are like elevators - they can take you up and they can take you down. By providing a positive, caring and friendly attitude, you will help to establish a tone and a culture that will help to elevate everyone's performance and feeling of accomplishment.

Well-adjusted, energetic and motivated employees who take pride in themselves and their work, and exude that pride and commitment with others, are heavily sought after. Happy employees deliver sincere, high-quality service. They build better teams, foster an environment of unequalled camaraderie and create an esprit de corps that can become a competitive advantage.

**Do not hide from stress.** While most people cringe at the word, stress is a very important factor in our growth and development. Jim Leohr, author of Stress for Success, states that stress is the

catalyst for growth and development. Consider what would happen if you placed one arm in a sling, where it would be completely immobilized for two months. Without the routine stress of activity, the arm would begin to atrophy. At the end of the two-month period, you would find that the muscles would have weakened and lost mobility. However, the other arm, which would have been required to take on additional activities to compensate, would have gained strength and possibly additional agility. This would be particularly true if your dominant arm was in the sling causing you to eat your meals, brush your teeth, brush your hair, and dress yourself with your other hand.

As you assess the stress that is generated by your position and the perceived stress of others in your organization, you will note that in most organizations stress increases as you move up in the organization and take on additional responsibilities. There is a close correlation between responsibilities, stress and compensation. You can't expect to take on additional responsibilities without being prepared to take on more stress.

Effectively dealing with stress helps to showcase successful people. They don't whine, complain, belly ache, or run from the stress presented to them. They grow and mature, some even thrive from stress. People who deal well with stress stand out from the crowd.

Successful people, however, understand that constant stress without recovery time is not healthy. Even the heart, which is our most utilized muscle, rests between each beat. Stephen Covey uses the metaphor of a saw to stress the importance of recovery and re-energizing. If you continue to use a saw without periodically stopping to maintain and sharpen the saw, the tool will deteriorate and so will your effectiveness with its use.

You will find that your ability to effectively deal with stress will be critical to your ability to have sustainable energy and add value. Organizations are looking for people who can take the heat and have mental toughness.

**Real relationships really matter.** Most have heard the statement, "it isn't what you know, it is who you know." Actually, the phrase gains more meaning when you say, "it isn't what you know, it is who knows you." The statement illustrates the importance of relationships. Knowledge and skill are not the only factors used in determining who gets the job. The ability to develop good and enduring relationships is critical to becoming a valued leader. Your ability to relate to people is critical to your success and your ability to add value. We need to accept people for who they are not what we want them to be. We also need to remember that it is more important for us to be interested in others than it is for us to try to get others interested in us.

Tim Sanders' book, The Likeability Factor, provides statistical evidence of the importance of being perceived as likeable. Sanders defines likeability as your capacity to produce positive attitudes in others about you. Likeability impacts everything from how you get treated by your waiter to how much time your doctor is willing to spend with you. It determines whether you get that promotion you've always wanted or if you get passed over.

Sanders states that there are four questions that people are asking every time they meet you. Are you friendly? Are you relevant? Are you empathetic? Are you real?

When attending a function with a group of strangers, don't you think that way as well? Don't you look for someone who appears to be friendly before you approach them? And if they prove to be friendly, don't you then look to see if they are somehow relevant to your life? Do you have similar jobs, interests, children, backgrounds, etc.? Does it appear that they can relate to you demonstrate empathy, and express understanding? And if these things are going well, don't you look to see if they are truly real and authentic?

In reality, this same process of questions continues every time you have contact with another person. And it is through consistent behavior that each person who connects with you at work or home will determine your authenticity.

The bottom line is that leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. You will only be able to leave a lasting legacy if others choose to be in a relationship with you. All leaders should want to be liked, trusted and respected.

**Trust is critical.** In Stephen Covey's book, The Speed of Trust, we learn that trust has the potential to create unparalleled success and prosperity in every dimension of life if we are willing to develop and leverage it. It further points out that trust affects two outcomes: speed and cost. When trust goes down, speed goes down and cost goes up. Consider what happened to service time and cost of airport security after 9/11. Security was greatly enhanced, which slowed down the boarding process and increased cost through additional layers of security personnel and equipment.

The corollary is also true. When trust goes up, speed increases and costs go down. Think of how our trust in the traffic signalization system allows large numbers of vehicles to move quickly through intersections. How would that change if there were only stop signs at each intersection? How well would traffic move if there were not signals or signs at intersections?

Covey takes the traditional business formula: Strategy x Execution = Results and inserts Trust as a key component. He points out that an organization can have an excellent strategy and a strong ability to execute, but the net result will be greatly diminished if there is a low level of trust within the organization. However, if there is a high level of trust, the results will be accelerated. According to Covey, the new formula is Strategy x Execution x Trust = Results.

You may want to think of trust as the rippling effect that occurs when a pebble is dropped into a pool of water. The waves move from inside out across the pool. Even if your boss, the college president, and the board of trustees are not highly trusted, you are not powerless. The decision to trust begins with you. Like love, trust is given and requires us to take risks.

The best way to gain or restore trust is by giving trust. Remember that those who are trusting are more apt to be trusted.

**Networking.** Don't try to fly solo. It is a receipt for failure. You can't be the best you can be without the help of others. They have knowledge, skills, insights, and perspectives which you do not have. They can help you, and more importantly, you can help them.

Each of us has blind spots that impact our ability to excel. By seeking the assistance of others, you can greatly enhance your ability to add value and succeed in a manner which you choose.

Within months of becoming the V.P. & Chief Business Officer (CBO) for the college, I helped set up a network with five other CBOs from area colleges who get together 3-4 times a year to share experiences, seek answers and look for ways that we can add value to our colleges.

**Make it fun.** This is the Year of a Million Dreams at Disney. Disney is offering “dream jobs” in a competition to be held in conjunction with CareerBuilder. Disney and CareerBuilder engaged Harris Interactive to poll American workers to determine the attributes of dream jobs. And while money is still an important factor, having fun was three times more important. The Harris Interactive poll, which included more than 6,000 participants, said that American workers put fun at the top of the list of rewards they would want from a dream job. Fun dramatically topped money and making a difference in society as the one thing workers most wanted from work. Key dream job attributes: Having fun at work, 39%; Making a difference in society, 17%; Money, 12%; Traveling, seeing the world, 5%; and Being creative, 5%.

Only 16% of the survey participants said that they are currently working at their dream jobs.

A truly valuable employee not only wants to have fun for themselves, but wants to do everything they can to make it a fun environment for everyone else.

What is your dream job? Are you currently working there? If not, when do you plan to have your dream job and are you doing everything you can today to make it a reality?

**In summary,** you can enhance your value, but it requires you to determine your goals and make sure they are consistent with the organization’s goals and to those to whom you report. If not, you must determine how much you can impact them to change or whether you should look for a position, either inside or outside of the organization, where your definition of success will make you a highly valued person.

**A little about the presenter.** Keith Houck is the Vice President for Administrative Services and Chief Business Officer for Valencia Community College. He has served as a college trustee and as the lay representative for the state of Florida to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. His prior work experience includes: Chief Operating Officer of a large law firm; and Director of Administration and Practice Development for a professional accounting and consulting firm. He is also very involved in a variety of community organizations, where he has served in leadership roles including chair of more than a dozen local, regional or state-wide organizations. He can be contacted at 407-582-3408 or khouck1@valenciacc.edu.

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