

## Your Career Advisor

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the financial self — who understands and manages money for the long haul.

Addressing each of these life elements assures you will address, think through and plan for all critical areas that, ultimately, intertwine. While the goal is moving your career ahead, doing so at the expense of your personal life is a hollow victory at best. Use your Personal Action Life Plan to ensure you are creating a life which is successful on all fronts.

### Challenge Yourself

Even if it feels like your life and career are going well, it's difficult to assess how

much better it might be if you have never taken the time to determine what a "perfect life and career" would look like in a well-considered and actionable Life Plan.

The most successful people create goals for themselves that push them to work hard, while still being attainable. They give themselves specific time deadlines which are just as demanding to achieve those goals. A good-rule-of-thumb: each of your goals and target dates should have about an 80 percent chance of success if you push yourself.

Be your own boss...and a strict one at that. I've found that the really satisfied people take the approach of, "I am my own business plan."

### Keep Tabs

The Personal Life Action Plan should be updated on an annual basis to keep it evolving and, like insurance, you should review your life plan after any major life event. Getting married or divorced, starting a family, moving, being promoted or experiencing significant illness — such events can render your life plan out-of-date.

Since a life plan is one of the most important tools to achieve your goals, make sure it remains current. Don't treat it as a static document, as it's much too critical to be relegated to the bottom drawer. Rather, it's a fluid, continuous work in progress — as are you. ■

## Books Worth Your Time

# The Next Level: What Insiders Know About Executive Success

By Ellen Stuhlmann

A failed senior-level hire can cost a company up to \$2.7 million. So why are organizations allowing nearly half of all new executives to fail? Perhaps they don't realize that most new executives are set up to sink or swim — and that what it takes to succeed can be taught. This is the conviction of author Scott Eblin, a former Fortune 500 HR executive turned executive coach.

*The Next Level: What Insiders Know About Executive Success* addresses Eblin's bottom-line message to new leaders: What got you there won't keep you there. You must learn new beliefs and behaviors and, more importantly, let go of old ones — even though they've driven your success up until now. The basic tenet of Eblin's been-there, done-that advice for achieving "executive presence:" Convey confidence, no matter how you feel inside. Insecure

executives, he says, make lousy leaders.

Arriving in the executive suite does not have to be a daunting move if you prepare to show up strong. In a recent interview, Eblin acknowledges that success comes when you deploy new beliefs and behaviors appropriate to your new level and embrace and establish executive presence.

**Q ■ You say the failure rate for new executives is as high as 40 percent. What makes it so difficult for new leaders to succeed?**

**A ■** Most new executives fail to realize that what got them there won't keep them there. In other words, the skills and strengths that sent their career soaring aren't the same ones they need to succeed at the next level of leadership. This phenomenon really shakes new leaders up, though it also helps force them out of their comfort zone — where they

cling to old habits — and drives home the realities of this whole new game.

One specific mistake many new executives make is to remain being the functional expert instead of developing their team and building relationships with peers. One senior leader I interviewed summed it up well: "At the executive level, it's business first — function second." To survive and thrive in the executive suite, newly minted execs must recognize they are leaders for their entire group or organization, not just their piece of it.

**Q ■ You interviewed some 30 prominent executives while researching the book *The Next Level*. What are some of the common themes to their success stories?**

**A ■** The most successful executives understand it's not all about them. They get their ego out of the way and focus on "we" instead of "me." They build up their team — not compete with them — and realize the team agenda comes first. They frequently ask, "What are we trying to accomplish?" rather than

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“What’s best for *me*?” And they encourage everyone to take an “outside-in” perspective by constantly scanning the external environment — to learn more about customers, suppliers and competitors — and considering ways to be better.

### **Q** ■ According to *The Next Level*, success for new executives is about opposites — picking up new beliefs and behaviors, and letting go of old ones. What are some examples?

**A.** One key example is to let go of the urge to run flat-out until you crash — and pick up the habit of regularly renewing your energy and perspective. The reason is that most leaders bear down and speed up in the face of a challenge or crisis — viewing each new situation as one more hurdle to clear. Yet, the problem with this approach is that executives contend with one challenge right after another. So, if your immediate response is to work 24/7, you will eventually burn out.

Like a lot of new executives, I personally had to learn to let go of self-reliance — and pick up team-reliance. I also had to come to the realization that my way was not the only way. One executive I interviewed is a retired Navy admiral who, early in his career, went from commanding one nuclear submarine to inspecting more than 30 subs a year. His big surprise was there is more than one way to run a nuclear submarine. The same principle applies in business. As an

## Establishing Executive Presence: 10 Strategies to Show Up Strong

Eblin says that peak performers are often promoted to the senior ranks and then left to sink or swim on their own. Successful leadership at all levels — self, team and organization — is “do-able” if you embrace and establish executive presence.

- 1. Trust your gut.** Heed your instincts. When that inner voice sounds a warning signal, be sure to look and listen.
- 2. Take action.** Plan the work and work the plan — yet be willing to execute before you feel completely ready.
- 3. Develop a routine of renewal.** Running flat-out until you crash comes with a high price. Schedule regular recovery time — or your body and mind will do it for you.
- 4. Repeat:** “I am not my job.” Be true to you. You are an executive because of what you do — and who you are. Realize your potential at work, at home and in your community.
- 5. Bond with the boss.** Talk early and often with your boss. Come up with a plan for ongoing communication that is easy and effective for both of you.
- 6. Focus on “we” instead of “me.”** Get your ego out of the way. Spend time and energy boosting your team — not competing with them.
- 7. Be a master of the what — not the how.** Don’t be a micromanager. Talk objectives and outcomes, determine what “good enough” looks like, and then let your team run with it.
- 8. Make changes quickly.** Don’t waffle. If you don’t have the right people on your team, take action immediately — and respectfully.
- 9. Tap into the leadership pipeline.** Partner with peers to reach broader organizational goals. Success — yours, mine and ours — hinges on interdependence, not independence.
- 10. Mind your messages.** Political savvy is a must. Be visible and accessible, but stay mindful of everything you say and do.

executive, you must focus on the “what” and let your team figure out the “how.”

### **Q** ■ You are a champion of “peer-to-peer” learning. What is it, and why is it especially effective for new executives?

**A.** I regularly conduct group coaching programs to help first-time executives and high-potential managers frame the experience of leading at the executive level and exchange thoughts and ideas for being more successful. “Wow, I thought I was the only one who’s trying to figure

this out,” says each and every participant. In my experience, this happens because new executives face big expectations, but little guidance. By coming together with peers, they have a built-in opportunity to support and learn from one another.

Insanity has been defined as doing things the way you’ve always done them and expecting different results. In the whirlwind of change, it’s often difficult for new executives to step back and really look at what’s working and what’s not. Creating opportunities to do this amongst peers is a powerful route to development. ■

## CareerSmart Advisor

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