

CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

A Note From Dave

As we wait for the economy to completely recover, we as leaders have plans in place to weather the storm, both on a company-wide and an individual career-management basis. At the same time, we don't necessarily know what plans our employees have.



Do they intend to remain loyal to the company through the recession and beyond? Or are they already planning their departure?

The findings in a recent poll conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) provide insight into how employees feel about their job security and what they are considering regarding next steps. According to "The Continued Economic Downturn: Employee Perspective," just 10 percent noted plans to begin a job search or step up their search efforts as soon as the economy improves. Seventeen percent said a rebounding economy would make it "somewhat unlikely" they'd seek a new job. The same amount said it was "somewhat likely" that they would explore career opportunities with a new company.

Although most of these respondents are not active participants in the job market, companies must not rest on their laurels and expect these individuals (which likely include 'A' players) to remain with the company long-term.

Now is the time to ensure that you're effectively engaging your key talent and providing them plenty of reasons to want to stay loyal to your organization. If they're not engaged, find out why and work to improve the situation. When the economy does turn around, you want these individuals (still) on your team.

Sincerely,

Dave

Dave Opton

ExecuNet Founder & CEO

www.execunet.com/davesblog

Overcoming Today's Toughest Résumé Challenges

By Marji McClure

Executives in the job market today face many challenges related to their résumés. They want and need to include the most relevant information they can as they strive to make a positive first impression with a potential employer. However, they sometimes struggle as they try to match the content of their résumé with the criteria hiring organizations have in place for new leaders.

Because they fear the perception of being viewed as overqualified, seasoned executives frequently wonder if their entire work experience should be included. At the same time, executives are unsure if they should even send a résumé for a position requiring experience they don't possess — such as an advanced degree.

Overall, the main goal is to be able to effectively communicate an individual's value proposition — regardless of age or experience.

Identify Jobs, Companies and Goals

The first step executives need to take when facing résumé challenges is to gain a solid understanding of what they are looking for in a position, what the end goal of their job search should look like. More specifically, executives should be able to identify the exact type of company and role

What Search Firm Recruiters Think About Executive Résumés and the Job Search Process

- 55 percent say executives with 25 to 40 years of experience should include only the last 15 to 20 years on their résumés.
- 74 percent say if a candidate had a very short period of employment with a company (1-3 months sometime within the past five years of his/her work history), the candidate should briefly list the reason for leaving these short stints.
- 78 percent say if a graduate degree is requested, an otherwise qualified candidate would still be considered for an interview.
- 33 percent say companies are less focused on age than in prior years.

Source: ExecuNet survey

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Career-Enhancing Programs
July/August 2009
Hosted by Dave Opton,
founder and CEO, ExecuNet

- 7/23 — **Finding Executive Jobs in the Current Economy: How to Change Your Strategy Now** — Tucker Mays and Bob Sloane
7/23 — **FREE PROGRAM FOR MEMBERS — Onboarding Q&A** — George Bradt
7/24 — **A Matter of Time Well Spent: A Personal Business Case for Developing Your Team of Leaders** — Leah Hanz Johnson

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July/August 2009
Hosted by ExecuNet Facilitators

- 7/20 — **Boston** — Marg Balcom
7/21 — **Vienna/Tysons Corner Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Peter McCarthy
7/21 — **Wilmington** — Rick Hays
7/21 — **Houston** — Sharon Anglin
7/21 — **Cleveland** — Rick Taylor
7/23 — **Atlanta Sr. Executive Roundtable** — J. Patrick Haly
7/23 — **Columbus** — Janine Moon
7/30 — **Dallas** — Bob Hueglin
7/31 — **St. Louis** — Ken Coleman & Randy Hove
8/4 — **San Diego/Carlsbad** — Mark James
8/5 — **New York City** — Judy Rosemarin
8/5 — **Cincinnati** — Jennifer McClure
8/5 — **New York City Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Judy Rosemarin
8/6 — **Southern Wisconsin** — Clara Hurd Nydam & Tom Senge
8/10 — **Miami/Hollywood** — Jeannette Kraar
8/11 — **Orlando** — Catherine Coates & Mike Murray
8/11 — **Boulder** — Karen Armon
8/11 — **Phoenix** — Fred Coon
8/12 — **Toronto Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Martin Buckland
8/12 — **Stamford** — Linda Van Valkenburgh
8/12 — **Philadelphia** — Mitch Wienick & Ed Kelleher
8/12 — **Portland** — Jean Walker
8/12 — **Cleveland Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Rick Taylor
8/12 — **Philadelphia Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Mitch Wienick & Ed Kelleher
8/13 — **Atlanta** — J. Patrick Haly
8/13 — **Los Angeles** — Eileen Hupp
8/14 — **Parsippany** — Linsey Levine
8/14 — **Rochester** — Arnie Boldt & Gail Smith Boldt
8/14 — **Tampa Bay** — Gina Potito
8/18 — **Wilmington** — Rick Hays
8/18 — **Houston** — Sharon Anglin
8/18 — **Irvine (Orange County)** — Mark James
8/18 — **Cleveland** — Rick Taylor
8/19 — **Chicago** — Gail Sussman Miller
8/19 — **Hartford/New Haven** — Paul Mathews
8/19 — **Toronto Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Martin Buckland
8/19 — **Charlotte** — Merton Marsh & Michael Hall
8/19 — **Raleigh/Durham** — Stuart Levine

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Learnings from Landings ExecuNet Member Beats the Odds

It's against the odds, but for one ExecuNet member, the "cold-call" letter worked. Brett Munroe, a corporate communications specialist, did his research and discovered a nearby small to mid-sized nutritional supplements company without a communications department. His letter came at the right time, and he convinced the decision-makers that a communications department was needed and that he was the person to lead it.

Avoid the Large Job Boards

Too often people, even at the executive level, spend too much time on the large job boards trolling for that one golden kernel that's been waiting for only them. "I found spending too much time on huge job boards like Monster and CareerBuilder to be inefficient and ineffective," warns Munroe. "If I were to do it again, I would avoid the large job boards completely and focus on networking instead." For Munroe, the interviews he received from these postings were mostly screenings for positions similar to what he applied for and did not ever result in serious discussions.

Networking in the Job Search

While Munroe's landing ultimately was the result of a "cold call" letter, it was a member of his network who suggested he pitch the creation of a communications department to prospective companies. "Without my network, I may very well have never come up with the idea that got me in the door of the company I am now with," relays Munroe. In fact, for Munroe, the biggest surprise during his job search was the social aspects of networking. "Nearly everyone who met with me was kind and generous with their time. After most one-on-one meetings, I came out feeling energized and upbeat." It was through his network that Munroe secured some

interviews for positions which were not publicly advertised.

Suggestions for Other Job Seekers

One does not walk into the world of job hunting and feel comfortable and prepared. "I wasn't sure how long my search would take, but I soon discovered that my local job market had more opportunities than I expected. However, I had not looked for a new position in 17 years, so it took me four months of coaching and numerous interviews before I felt like I could control the interviews," says the 53-year-old Munroe.

Munroe also suggests tapping into the recruiting community to assist in one's job search. "I would encourage people to target recruiters who specialize in their field," he says. "I didn't get an offer from my contact with recruiters, but some of the recruiters I talked to had good insights and information." The recruiter contacts made in this job search may not have yielded any leads, but by developing and maintaining relationships with recruiters, Munroe can rest assured that he will be top of mind if he has a new search in the future or if he needs to hire someone.

The job search process has left Munroe a fan of networking. "I would say networking is the best use of your time," he says. "I would encourage you to meet with nearly everyone who is willing to talk to you, even those who, on the surface, don't seem to have anything to offer." Munroe also encourages job seekers to take the time upfront to put together a list of companies to target and then to tap into their network for more companies and for leads into the selected companies. "See the job search as an adventure, as an opportunity," he says. "You don't know where it's going to lead, but have faith in yourself and be excited about the possibilities!" ■

Food For Thought

Thinking Outside the Box

By Stephen Balzac

Shoto Funakoshi, the founder of Shotokan Karate, was famous for saying that in the practice of karate, there is no room for error. During my brief study of Shotokan, my instructor told us that American students and instructors did not have the patience of their Japanese counterparts. They permitted a large number of errors until students approached black belt. At that time, student were expected to perfect their technique. Over time, American instructors noticed something very interesting: They were producing more black belts than the Japanese. Furthermore, although none of the Americans were as technically proficient, they were beating their Japanese counterparts in competitions far more often than expected.

The reason American black belts were winning so much is that they were creative. They knew all the standard moves, but were also willing to think outside the box. They won because they tried things that their opponents never considered. When they were, quite literally, smacked in the head, they learned from their mistakes.

A common refrain from corporations is that they value “out of the box” thinking, but how does one do that?

Finding the Box

There is a secret to creative, outside the box thinking: finding the box. Until you know where the box is, you cannot tell if you are thinking inside or outside of it. Most of the time, these “out of the box” approaches just don’t work. While it’s possible to get lucky, everyone knows what happens when you depend on luck.

So how do you find the box? As Hungarian psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi points out, you need to understand the domain, without being trapped by it. The American Shotokan students knew their material: They had mastered the domain. They also were not

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You can’t force creativity; you can only create an environment that makes it likely.

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afraid to step outside what they knew and see what would happen.

By the same token, many companies successfully create products that are outside the box, such creativity comes from a detailed study of the market and the specific area of technology. Google revolutionized search. When Home Depot first opened its doors, it was a young, innovative company that had devised an innovative approach to selling hardware. Amazon.com was one of the first companies to take advantage of selling over the Internet. Apple’s iPods have completely changed the music industry. In each case, the founders first studied the domain: search, hardware, retail, and music; then, they developed an innovative approach to entering that market.

Identifying Solutions

The fact is, that box exists because it works. There are many tried and true inside the box solutions that work reasonably well. There are also plenty of outside the box solutions to any given problem. However, when you restrict yourself to solutions that will actually work, the number is considerably smaller. Unfortunately, there’s no way to tell which is which until you try. Quite simply, being creative means being wrong a great deal of the time. It means constantly refining and adjusting your plans. How many people remember IBM’s microchannel architecture or the Apple Newton?

How a business handles mistakes, especially flashy, expensive mistakes, says

a great deal about how creative that business will be over time. Creativity is a process of ranging: sometimes you overshoot; sometimes you undershoot, and sometimes you fail miserably. Eventually, that moment of inspiration comes, and after years of hard work, you become an overnight success. Thomas Edison is frequently quoted as saying, “I learned a thousand different ways to not make a light bulb.”

That’s easy to say. It’s hard to live.

Fostering the Creativity

So how do you foster an environment that encourages creativity and outside the box thinking?

Start with education. What are you doing to learn and become engaged with the knowledge of your domain? What are you doing to look outside your areas of expertise? It’s hard to be creative without a constant stream of new inputs and perspectives.

How do you handle mistakes? Are you encouraging experimentation or punishing failure? Does your organization value taking educated risks? If people are afraid to take a chance, it’s highly unlikely that they’ll produce a whole lot that’s really outside the box.

Take breaks. Whether it’s spotting the solution to a problem you’ve been wrestling with all week, or experiencing a truly innovative breakthrough, creative flashes happen after you’ve taken a break, not when you’re stressed out and mentally exhausted. Hard work is important, but so is knowing when to let your subconscious work on the problem.

You can’t force creativity; you can only create an environment that makes it likely. ■

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Challenges

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they seek. “By starting with the end in mind, executives can craft the résumé that will position them appropriately for the jobs they are targeting,” says Louise Kursmark, president of Best Impression Career Services Inc.

“Executives must be very focused on not only the target company and type of role or position they wish to pursue, but also their own quite specific areas of value they are pitching,” adds Jacqui Barrett-Poindexter, owner of Kansas City, Mo.-based Career Trend. “Then, they must further whittle down their value proposition statements to fit squarely upon the pain points of target companies. Many executives have such depth and breadth of value that they cannot see the forest for the trees, and therefore overwhelm the reader with information, much of which is not relevant.”

How Much Experience Should You Feature?

Opinions of résumé writers are mixed as to whether an executive with more than 25 years experience should include all of that experience on his or her résumé.

Jan Melnik, president of career management and résumé writing firm Absolute Advantage, argues that all work experience shows how an executive has developed his career into its current state. “Typically, these individuals present a progression of advancement and contribution that frequently began with the foundation of their first professional work experience,” says Melnik. She suggests including that early experience in a “very concise, collapsed fashion” by combining it into a four- or five-line paragraph within a “Professional Experience & Achievements” section in the résumé.

“Your résumé is a marketing piece — an advertisement — it is not an autobiography,” says ExecuNet résumé writer Michelle Dumas, owner of Distinctive Documents. “You don’t need to, and shouldn’t try to, include everything.” Meg Guiseppi, a C-level branding

A Résumé Toolkit: What It Should — and Shouldn’t — Contain

Communicating your value proposition in a résumé can be a daunting task. We asked résumé experts for their list of résumé do’s and don’ts to help guide executives as they create the most impactful résumé that showcases their skills and qualifications. Here’s what they said:

Do Include:

- Specific educational degrees and certifications.
- A knockout professional headline, followed by your personal or leadership brand and three or four short (3 or 4 lines) brand-driven statements of the value you offer, including the quantifiable results you can be relied on to deliver.
- Relevant key word phrases throughout your résumé; and keep each chunk of information short and surrounded by plenty of white space. (Make it easy to read and digest for people reviewing your résumé on their PDAs).
- Special attributes in communication style, such as innate ability to persuade, influence, buy-in and follow the lead without bullying to earn long-term (sometimes career lifetime) allegiances of peers and staff.
- Abilities in taking calculated and boundary-pushing risks that ultimately provide financial wins for the company.
- Abilities to crystallize and communicate complex, technically burdened subjects for ease in evaluating and decision-making.

Don’t Include:

- Subjective claims. Avoid using adjectives or adverbs, such as “creative and “results-oriented.”
- Personal information, such as hobbies, marital status, health status, political/religious affiliations, number of children.
- Extracurricular activities.
- GPA — if an executive has been out of school for many decades.

Sources: Jacqui Barrett-Poindexter; Rachelle Canter, PhD; Meg Guiseppi and Jan Melnik.

strategist at Executive Résumé Branding, agrees: “A résumé is not a comprehensive career history. It’s a career marketing document that needs to showcase *just enough* about you to generate interest and compel decision-makers to contact you.”

It’s important to ensure that the most crucial information is closer to the top of the page, where readers won’t miss it. “Your personal brand should be immediately evident above the fold, or within the top third or half of the first page,” says Guiseppi. “Because hiring decision-makers may allow your résumé only 10-15 seconds to capture their attention, and the top of the first page is what they’ll see first. Craft this section to stand on its own as your calling card.”

Executives must be careful not to be deceptive as they attempt to diminish references to their age within their résumés. “Executives run into serious problems when they try to dumb down

their résumés to make themselves look younger,” notes Rachelle Canter, PhD, president of San Francisco-based executive development firm RJC Associates. “The minute they walk into an interview and are not 30, the interviewer feels conned. Instead, I recommend that executives focus on quantifying accomplishments, including showcasing big things they’ve been able to do fast (generally a way to show how experience can save time and money) so prospective employers can see that they can potentially get more from a seasoned employee.”

Explaining a Gap

Another challenge executives face is determining what they should do if their job history includes several short-term positions. They want to display their vast experience without recruiters or hiring managers questioning their commitment.

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The best way to do that is to highlight the longer-term positions, while not diminishing the value short-term positions also bring to an individual's career.

Paula Weiner, president of New York-based executive search firm Weiner & Associates Inc., says that when she examines a résumé that includes many short-term positions, she first looks for stability at some point during a candidate's career. "Then I look at reasons for the short stints," such as a company being sold or a candidate was working on a consulting assignment that was meant to be short-term."

She notes that some short-term assignments might represent new employers but not new bosses, as some candidates follow bosses from one company to another. "So you might not have consistency of company, but who you worked with," adds Weiner.

It's equally important for executives to communicate how short-term positions were valuable components in their overall careers. "In those circumstances [of short-term employment], you want to see that somebody learned something, applied it and did better next time," Weiner says.

The amount of space reserved on a résumé should be in line with how long an executive held each featured role, suggests Weiner. Short-term positions should be included in a small section on a résumé, while longer-term roles should command a more prominent position on the page. If a candidate has a history of many short-term roles within the same industry, Melnik combines them into an "Interim Management Experience" section within the résumé. She says they can be connected through language, such as: "Selected for series of high-profile interim management positions with such firms as XXX wherein key objectives were exceeded, new distribution channels were identified."

"If your résumé is well designed, the emphasis should always be on the value and results you produced while in that position," says Dumas. "If you present

Expert Resources:

- Jacqui Barrett-Poindexter, Career Trend (CareerTrend.net)
- Rachele Canter, PhD, RJC Associates (RJCAssociates.net)
- Michelle Dumas, Distinctive Documents (DistinctiveWeb.com)
- Meg Guiseppi, Executive Résumé Branding (ExecutiveResumeBranding.com)
- Louise Kursmark, Best Impression Career Services Inc. (YourBestImpression.com)
- Jan Melnik, Absolute Advantage (JanMelnik.com)
- Paula Weiner, Weiner & Associates Inc. (pweiner@weinerassoc.com)

these in a strong enough way, the length of time you held a position will make little to no difference."

If Your Résumé is Missing a "Required" Qualification

Oftentimes, executives will uncover a job posting that fits their expertise with the exception of one or two requirements; one of the most common is the employer's desire for a candidate to possess an MBA. Most résumé experts agree that while some recruiters and hiring managers will only consider candidates who match a job description perfectly, otherwise qualified executives without an MBA should still apply for positions requesting an MBA. "Whether it is a graduate degree or undergraduate degree that is sought, if the individual has a proven track record of experience and accomplishment spanning several decades or more, this *usually* trumps formal education when presented properly," says Melnik.

How exactly can a résumé help an executive communicate that, despite the lack of advanced degree or other desired criteria, he or she is still qualified for a particular position?

"Consider what it is about that advanced degree that stands out as important to the decision-maker and then map your experiences to those traits," says Barrett-Poindexter. "An executive may wish to position his most riveting abilities as a leader to stand shoulder to shoulder with other candidates who hold an MBA."

Communicating Your Message

Canter says that one strategy which all job seekers should use during their job search is using their network to uncover inside information on target companies and to gain personal introductions and recommendations. "It is always wise to

have at least a 70 percent fit with the job qualifications, but if you are missing a crucial one, a personal introduction can outweigh any missing qualifications," says Canter. "Many mature candidates that I have worked with recently have gotten good jobs in a relatively short time, but always with a strong accomplishment-oriented résumé and the use of contacts."

Melnik agrees that executives, particularly over age 50, need to network and become visible thought leaders in their field. And, they should be active participants in the social media world, including links to LinkedIn and/or Twitter profiles in their résumés, and have the profiles "updated and contemporary sounding/looking. Embrace current trends," Barrett-Poindexter encourages.

If you're the best candidate for the job, age shouldn't be a factor, some experts say. Dumas notes that employers seek "the candidate who can deliver results — the candidate who has clear and demonstrated ability to make them money, save them money, increase efficiency, and/or solve some challenging problem. In today's job market, a top-notch, impeccably professional résumé that clearly communicates the value you have to offer in the workplace — value that you will deliver to your employer in a more profitable way than your competition (other job seekers) — is essential.

"If your résumé accomplishes this, the actual number of years of your experience will play little to no role in the hiring decision," Dumas adds. "If you are under 30, but persuasively make your case that you will deliver a higher return on the employer's investment in hiring you than the next candidate, your age simply won't matter. Likewise, the same is true for the over-50 candidate. It is really all about the bottom line." ■

Reducing Work Stress in a Downturn

By Kerry Patterson

What happens to people's emotions during an extended downturn in the economy? According to a survey we recently conducted, 80 percent of respondents feel that their stress levels have increased because of the recession, and more than half say that, as a result of that added stress, the intensity level of daily business and family conversations has increased dramatically.

Does this added stress motivate or help people to hold important business and family conversations in a professional and calm manner? No. When you're stressed, your body sends blood to your extremities, so you'll be able to either take flight or engage in a fight. This physical response makes you ill-suited for complex human interactions.

By taking a few steps to keep your emotions in check and ensure that others feel safe to talk, you can prevent yourself from getting angry and escalating important conversations.

Tell Yourself a Good Story

When you find yourself getting angry with others, it's because you've told yourself a story about their intent. "They don't care about cost cutting; they're selfish." Or, "They don't care about the situation; they just want to get their way." While there may be a germ of truth in any story you tell, starting an interaction with accusations and recriminations leads to anger and loss of control. In addition to your words, your nonverbal communication reflects your negative conclusion. You appear uptight, even angry. With this as your starting point, it won't be long until the other person becomes defensive and you find yourself in the middle of a verbal battle.

Reverse this common tendency to vilify others by asking a simple question: "Why would a reasonable, rational and decent person do that?" Rarely do we know others' complete views on a topic, so take care to not think the worst. It

may be that a harsh assumption is indeed valid, but starting the conversation with a negative conclusion poisons your view and only weakens your ability to have a professional and controlled experience. If you lose control, you become the center of attention instead of the person who committed the original infraction.

Establish Mutual Purpose

Most high-stakes conversations during an economic downturn have the same punch line — somebody is going to have to go without something. The natural reaction to this nasty reality is to work hard to ensure that you're not the one who is going to suffer. It would be nice if someone would volunteer to make the sacrifice, but most watch how others are responding and follow suit. This usually means that everyone is fighting to keep all of the resources for themselves because "they're central to everything and can't afford to cut anything."

To cut this process short, start with a statement of mutual purpose. Ask: "What can we do that will best serve all of our needs over the long run? What can each of us do to serve the long-term financial stability of our business or family?" Say this and mean it.

Two years ago, my brother-in-law was laid off from one of the only well-paying jobs in the small community where he lived. He eventually found another job, but he knew it would call for dramatic cut-backs. The family could live with the restricted wage and make extreme budget cuts, or move to a larger community where he could earn more. They began a financial regime that would make a miser proud. None of them complain about their financial challenge because they started with one goal in mind — to do what was best for the whole family.

Quell Rumors through Contrasting

Another tendency humans have is to pass on rumors when they are stressed. For example, if a company is laying off 10

percent of the workforce, it usually won't be long before the word on the street is that 30 percent will be leaving. As you prepare and make statements about the future, don't make promises you can't keep. But also take care to ensure that you nip any false rumors in the bud. Do this with a contrasting statement. For example, "You may have heard _____, but in truth _____ is what will really happen."

Encourage Honest and open Communication

Finally, as you gather teams together to discuss what projects need to be eliminated and even what jobs might be cut, make sure everyone speaks his or her mind. You don't want a vocal few to dominate the conversation. Here's what you can do to ensure maximum involvement.

As you gather people to discuss the future, take care to call on everyone. Ask employees what they think should happen. Don't criticize their suggestions. Simply listen carefully and then check with the group. "Do others agree with this point-of-view?" By making it safe for everyone to share their views, you gather the best information available and then you and others in positions of leadership can make the best choice. Explain this process up front and make sure they know that you are making a consult decision, not a consensus decision. By allowing everyone to take part in the dialogue, you're getting the best ideas and including everyone in the decision-making process.

Tough times call for tough crucial conversations. Avoid falling under the influence of stress-related hormones by telling yourself healthy stories, establishing mutual purpose, quelling rumors and encouraging honest communication. ■

*Kerry Patterson is coauthor of *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*, and *The New York Times* bestseller *Crucial Conversations*. He is also a speaker, consultant and co-founder of *VitalSmarts*. He can be contacted at VitalSmarts.com*

Insider Insight

Five Aptitudes for Female Business Success

By Catherine Kaputa

Ever since a certain assertive female decided she wanted to eat from a certain forbidden tree, influential women have been loved, hated, glorified, vilified and misunderstood.

Our modern time is no different.

Yes, we've come a long way from the 1950s and early 1960s, when career women were viewed as a lesser version of men and urged to pursue service-oriented "pink jobs," such as nursing and teaching. However, today the ranks of women in the corporate workforce still thin out above mid-level. Today, women comprise less than 3 percent of senior executives in Fortune 500 companies. So, whether we are Boomers, Generation X, or Gen Y, we're still not where we want to be.

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When people feel listened to and understood, they will pay you back by liking you and supporting you in return.

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Do you know this woman? She could be in your office; she could be a friend; or she could be you. She doesn't lack talent or work ethic, but her life and career aren't on track. It can be hard for her to strike the right tone in the office. If she's too nice, she's viewed as weak and not up to the job. If she's too assertive, she's criticized for being severe. She seems to work harder than the men — for fewer rewards. She's suffering from an ailment that mainly affects women that I've dubbed "Female Behavior Confusion Disorder."

So what's a woman to do? Well, for one, we have to stop trying to act like men in the workplace. Strong brands — products or people — are always built on authenticity. Don't fight your nature. Instead, build on your innately female strengths and inclinations.

Research in gender studies points to key aptitudes that can propel career success for women — what I call "The Top 5 Female Aptitudes for Branding and Business Success." Not all women have these qualities, and many men have these qualities as well. However, these are areas in which women tend to be stronger. You can use these five aptitudes to help you in the workplace.

Aptitude No. 1: Social Perception

Women are wired for empathy, the ability to read and identify the emotions and feelings of others through a sense of similarity — to walk in their shoes, as it were. MRI studies show that most women use both hemispheres of the brain to process emotional messages, while most men use only one hemisphere, giving women an advantage in picking up subtle non-verbal clues. Many women are also strong in intuition — it's called women's intuition for a reason.

How to use it in the workplace.

Intuition can give you another source of information beyond rational analysis. Pay attention to what's going on behind the scenes. In meetings, for example, if something feels incomplete or not talked about, act on your hunch and initiate a follow-up, clarifying phone conversation. Empathy can be particularly helpful in business during tough economic times. Work on listening to others and asking questions. When people feel listened to and understood, they will pay you back by liking you and supporting you in return.

Aptitude No. 2: People Power

A lot has been written about the fact that women have the social gene, and it's

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Women are born to network and make strong emotional connections. Use your social skills to build as many professional alliances as possible.

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something that starts early. In one study, even 1-day-old baby girls were more fascinated by faces (or organic things) and boys were more fascinated by inorganic things, such as mobiles. Playground studies of boys and girls point to interesting differences in how boys and girls play and relate with each other. Girls tend to pair off and play together one-on-one or with a small group. Boys tend to play with one group and then move to another larger group.

How to use it in the workplace.

Women are born to network and make strong emotional connections. Use your social skills to build as many professional alliances as possible. Leverage your "social gene" to get well-known around the office. Be a mediator and an influencer. In terms of your personal career goals, you can use your strong people skills to land new opportunities and positions in your company — and get noticed, recognized and rewarded.

Aptitude No. 3: Communication Agility

The female verbal edge is strong across the board. Girls, on average, start talking a month earlier than boys. Girls use a larger vocabulary at an earlier age, are better spellers and readers, score better on

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Insider Insight
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verbal memory or recall of words, and are markedly stronger writers. Women generally have better listening skills.

How to use it in the workplace. Use your wordsmith mastery to develop a virtual identity for yourself and for your company: blogs, websites, wikis, online newsletters, and so on. Solicit feedback early and often at work and find mentors with whom you can discuss your ideas and development. Be an idea sharer and a meetings facilitator. Become known as someone who can grasp — and re-state — others' points-of-view. Get practice as a presenter and use your communications agility as a valuable business tool for promoting your great ideas and accomplishments.

Aptitude No. 4: Vibrant Visual Identity

Brand managers use product design and packaging to develop a strong visual identity for their brands, and women have more tools available to them than men do for creating a strong visual identity in the workplace. While men wear a relatively boring uniform to work, women have a variety of “imaging tools” in clothes, colors, accessories, hairstyles, jewelry and make-up.

How to use it in the workplace. Michelle Obama is the poster girl for what a powerful tool visual identity can be. She has a casual, American elegance, yet her clothes convey subliminal messages, too. Her striding self-confidence,

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fit body and clean American designs with bold colors result in inspirational magic. She favors immigrant American designers, a choice that reinforces the President's political message. You can do the same. If you don't have the body of a fashion model, then do something wonderful with your hair and clothing. Work on your posture and gait. Think about what your visual image conveys, and find visual “props” that add originality and a confident, powerful statement.

Aptitude No. 5: Leadership that Includes and Empowers

One study of male and female group dynamics involved groups of pre-pubescent boys and girls, segregated by gender and given tasks to accomplish cooperatively. The girls used their social skills and worked together to form a kind of committee. The girls all took part in discussions about how to accomplish the task, while the boys jostled about and

picked a leader, who then directed the group on how to get the job done. Both had positive outcomes, but each gender used very different models. Women's inclusive, collaborative style of leadership is increasingly valuable in today's complex and interconnected global business environment.

How to use it in the workplace. Recent episodes of *Celebrity Apprentice* pitted women against the men — and displayed how their unique group dynamics gave the women a decided advantage. In the real workplace, we can see the effect of these different leadership tendencies, too. Men tend to have a more directive management style, and women tend to have a collaborative style with shared decision-making. Leverage your more inclusive leadership style so you can lead in a way that doesn't seek to have power over people, but empowers others instead. Consult others on important decisions. Create teams and a “personal board of directors” who can advise you — and be sure to include men, too. Conduct brainstorming sessions. Give public credit to people when they contribute. Such a leadership style will result in loyal, committed, hardworking colleagues and employees and will give you a distinct advantage and reputation as a problem solver. ■

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