

HITTING YOUR STRIDE

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

ISSUE 2, OCTOBER 2013

Following the first issue of *Hitting Your Stride*, many readers e-mailed me with feedback. Here is a sampling of your comments:

“Outstanding! A resource I will share with colleagues, especially those I mentor.”

- Jeff (high school principal)

“I have been meaning to read most of the books/articles on the list, and I now have an even stronger impetus to dive into them.”

- Gina (operations director with an international nonprofit)

“...inspiring and informative.”

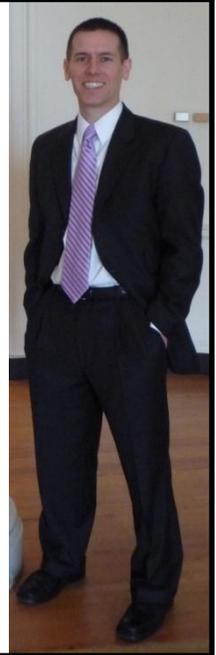
- Dylan (financial analyst)

“Awesome!”

- Sanja (education researcher) & Seamus (college senior)

Please continue to send your thoughts and suggestions so I can make this a more useful resource for you. See you in the new year!

Stride On,
Michael



STAYING IN FRONT

“In reality, knowledge is a very dynamic universe—and what is most valuable is not the body of knowledge, but the leading edge of it.”

- Bill James, baseball historian & statistician

Books to Read This Quarter

[*The Power of Habit*](#)

- Charles Duhigg

[*Give and Take*](#)

- Adam Grant

[*David and Goliath**](#)

- Malcolm Gladwell

* While I'm a Gladwell fan, I strongly recommend checking out [this review](#) before reading his book.

Articles to Read This Quarter

[The Opt-Out Generation Wants Back In](#)

- Judith Warner (*New York Times*)

[The Impossible Decision](#)

- Joshua Rothman (*The New Yorker*)

[Read Fiction and Be a Better Leader](#)

- Sarah Green interviewing Joseph Badaracco (*Harvard Business Review*)

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CATCHING UP

Being on the leading edge of knowledge is important, but it is vital to be familiar with thinkers and ideas from past years as well. This will help you to be more innovative when creating and problem-solving, and also can prevent older colleagues from patronizing you about your age or inexperience.

Books to Read This Quarter

[*The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*](#)

- Peter Senge

[*The Prince*](#)

- Niccolo Machiavelli

Articles to Read This Quarter

[How Exercise Could Lead to a Better Brain](#)

- Gretchen Reynolds (*New York Times*)

[Man Up on Family and Workplace Issues](#)

- Kunal Modi (*Huffington Post*)

REFLECTING

“The single biggest danger in business and life, other than outright failure, is to be successful without being resolutely clear about why you are successful in the first place.”

- Robert Burgelman, Stanford University business professor

A few years after we graduated from the University of Michigan, a friend and I were talking over the phone about our professional lives. She was working at a nonprofit in DC and shared with me her assessment of life after college: “I always thought that once we entered the working world, we’d meet all of these talented people doing amazing things. But now I’ve realized, we are those people.”

Two lessons can be found in her statement. First, it is imperative for you to regularly assess your skill set, work ethic, motivation, and professionalism—and to have a sense of how you compare to your peers and superiors in these areas. There are plenty of opportunities for young professionals to rise quickly in most organizations; the trick is knowing what you are capable of and how to ensure you and your work are noticed. Second, when engaging in this type of reflection, don’t downgrade yourself because you are young or a new hire. If you are exceptional in a certain area, or are better suited for a project or position than someone else, have the confidence to acknowledge it!

WEBSITE TO KNOW

GuideStar (www.guidestar.org)

About: Provides financial data on every IRS-registered nonprofit in the country. Some of the information is free, while some requires payment or subscription.

Usefulness: Download an organization’s 990 (it’s free) in advance of a job interview to better understand its fundraising and cash flow, and to see salaries of upper management (which can give you a sense of what to ask for during salary negotiations).

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PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One key to developing professionally is maintaining a network of mentors, mentees, and others you can talk to about your professional interests, challenges, and goals. To keep your network strong:

- Meet with those who live near you a few times per year. For those in other states/countries, communicate regularly via e-mail/phone/LinkedIn and meet up when possible.
- Selectively add new people to your network. Alumni association events and professional conferences are great places to make initial connections and foster relationships.
- Re-connect with colleagues & supervisors from past jobs and professors & acquaintances from college. You may find that your interests have converged since you last talked.
- Congratulate members of your network after their promotions, and thank supervisors & colleagues when you leave an organization (bonus points for handwritten notes!).

BEING (AND STAYING) INTERESTING

Mary Lowry wrote, “There are very few people who don’t become more interesting when they stop talking.” Taking this idea further, a good way to be seen as interesting by others—and to be remembered by them—is to ask good questions. To me, a good question has two main components:

1. It is specific. Instead of, “How was your day?” try “What kind of feedback did you get after your presentation?” A specific question lets someone tell you about her job/achievements without feeling like she is boasting, and also takes pressure off of the person (i.e., “How was your day?” requires the person to guess what, and how much, you actually want to hear).
2. It conveys your knowledge in a subtle way. For example, “What kind of feedback did you get after your presentation? Did anyone bring up last week’s Gates Foundation report on higher education?” This type of add-on sends your counterpart the message that you are informed and can have an in-depth discussion about a topic.

Of course, once you’ve nailed your first question, it is important to be an active listener and ask follow-up questions that also include the above components.

DID YOU KNOW...

The average middle-age U.S. worker had [11 jobs from ages 18-46](#), the median time U.S. workers have [been in their positions is 4.4 years](#), and members of the “Millennial” generation plan to [stay in their positions for fewer than 3 years](#). In other words, you likely will change roles (or organizations) frequently throughout your life, so it is vital to keep your skill set—and your resume—up to date.

WORDS ON WHICH TO RUMINATE

“One of the most significant facts about human nature may be that we all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of lives and end having lived only one.”

- Clifford Geertz, anthropologist