



## Two Left Feet

I'll come right out and admit it. I'm clumsy.

Yup, it's nothing for me to take a tumble.

I've done it walking down the street (and, no, there were no glaring ridges, bumps, or pavement breaks).

I've done it on the tennis court (but, I did get the point!!!).

I've even done it mounting the stage to speak to a couple hundred conference participants (and, yes, there was a collective gasp until I jumped up and did my now famous "ta-da" move to show that I was unscathed -- outwardly anyway).

Indeed, I've had my share of tumbles. My conclusion for this heightened rate of physical tumbling is simple -- two left feet. Okay, so I don't *literally* have two left feet; it just...well, you know.

You can laugh with me about the "two left feet theory" behind my physical tumbles. But, truth be told, I've had my share of professional tumbles as well. (And, if you're being honest, you probably have had some too.) Some have been of the two left feet, nobody could have seen that coming, variety. The causes of others, in hindsight, were squarely my own doing.

So, join me for Part II of our **EA Insights** look at self-sabotage. Oh, and by the way, here's one important lesson from my tumbling history: You may fall, but what matters is if, and how, you get up!

All the best,

June

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## Self-Sabotage (Part II)

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Let's continue our look at behaviors that can send your career south...quickly. (In case you missed the first leg of our journey, feel free to go back to [Self-Sabotage/Part I](#).)

Often, people assume that sabotage is solely a challenge for those without dreams or ambition. However, as you'll see from these next four self-defeating behaviors, that can be far from true.

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### Quotes

*"Each time one of those (milestones) happens, you appreciate it more because you know when you look back [at] how much effort went in[.]"*  
~Rick Adelman

*"What you see is what you get. \*\*\* I don't have the time nor the energy to live up to some persona..."*  
~Marc Anthony

*"The hardest tumble a man can make is to fall over his own bluff."*  
~Ambrose Gwinett Bierce

*"Don't learn to do, but learn in doing. Let your falls not be on a prepared ground, but let them be bona fide falls in the rough and tumble of the world."*  
~Samuel Butler

*"We definitely can't look ahead. You have to take it one game at a time and stay focused."*  
~Essence Carson

*"I think he's done a great job of positioning himself in terms of his persona and conduct."*  
~Jerry Colangelo

*"For I am not so enamored of my own opinions that I disregard what others may think of them."*  
~Nicolaus Copernicus

*"What you saw is what you got[.] He didn't have a stage persona. He was a very honest, open guy and he used to drive me crazy."*  
~John Denver

#### **Behavior #4: Extreme, Extreme, Extreme Kissing Up**

This behavior goes beyond a desire to work well with the one who signs the checks. We're talking here about "brown nosing" on steroids. You've probably got this bug if your mantra is: "My *ONLY* responsibility here at work is to make \_\_\_\_\_ happy." Now, that's fine if you're a team of two -- just you and that person whose name appears in the blank above. It's far more likely, though, that you function on a team of 5, or 10, or 20. And, if that's the case, be forewarned; excessive efforts to win over your boss are likely not winning you many friends elsewhere, and THAT can hurt you.

**How do you fix it?** First, don't be naïve. Points you may earn through extreme kissing up are tenuous at best. (And, I say "may" because sometimes this behavior doesn't even work with the boss. But I digress.) Just ask anyone who's come to work only to find a new body in the seat of honor and no friends among those who are left. When you fix your gaze exclusively on landing in the good graces of one person, you've just bought a one-way ticket on the self-sabotage express.

That leads to my second point. By ignoring the many people who may impact your journey to, and your continued experience with, success, you limit yourself. Recognize that true success takes a 360° effort. It takes learning how to interact effectively with those higher than you on the food chain, with peers in your own area and throughout the organization, and with those who are at more junior levels than you are. The better you're able to engage with and support those all around you (not only your boss), the better your prospects of achieving your goals...and of helping others to accomplish theirs as well.

#### **Behavior #5: Shameless Self-Promotion**

A kissing cousin to kissing up is shameless self-promotion. It may be subtle, as seen in a person who, 9 times out of 10, just happens to show up wherever the boss is. It may be more blatant, as evidenced by an interesting overuse of the word *my* - - "my team", "my project", "my idea" -- in any discussion with anyone who'll listen.

Annoying, maybe, but does this really rise to the level of self-sabotage? It absolutely can. You see, when *you're* the one tooting your horn, one of two things happens. First, others stop listening; so the good stuff you're tooting isn't being heard any more (and that doesn't get you anywhere). Second, if *you're* more than willing to pump you up, then others don't have to, and that often means they stop looking for your good or they discount any good they do hear. Why? Because...well, it's *you!* In either instance, your constant attempts to boost *you* actually may end up damaging you in the eyes of others. (Did you follow that?)

**How do you avoid it?** Understand *why* you have the need to be your biggest cheerleader. Yes, we know that you are kind, special, and important, but come to grips with why you feel that *you* must be the one to proclaim this to all who will listen (and even to some who would rather not).

Now, this doesn't mean that you're doomed to become a shrinking violet who never shares victories aloud. It does mean that balance is required. There certainly are times when it's appropriate to share what you did (within reason, of course). Other times, the opportunity may arise to outline the fine work of a team on which you are privileged to participate. And, sometimes, you just need to hush...and let your good work speak for itself or let others step up and pass along *unsolicited* recognition.

#### **Behavior #6: Eying the Future at the Expense of the Present**

You hear this in pre-game interviews all the time. "So, coach, by winning today's game, you'll face the X squad. Will you be ready for them?" And, invariably, what's the coach's response? "We have to focus on one game at a time." Why's this the first phrase taught in Coaching School? It's because the act of underestimating today has self-sabotage written all over it.

Hear me well: Developing a long-range plan is critical. It's essential to have some sense of what you see in your future.

Many of us undercut ourselves, though, by disregarding the important skills, lessons, experiences, and contacts that are available to us today and also by failing to discover how each of

"Americans have a penchant for the future and tend to disregard the past."  
~Alan Dundes

"Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better. What if they are a little course and you may get your coat soiled or torn? What if you do fail, and get fairly rolled in the dirt once or twice? Up again, you shall never be so afraid of a tumble."  
~Ralph Waldo Emerson

"My path has not been determined. I shall have more experiences and pass many more milestones."  
~Agnetha Faltskog

"This is the celebration of a few brave and courageous souls, men and women, whose personal sacrifice and commitment to justice was free of malice, greed and self-promotion."  
~Shirley Franklin

"It's refreshing to watch it. He has this persona that he wants to maintain[;] he isn't someone who wants to put himself before the team."  
~Tom Glavine

"There's often a gross disconnect between the public persona that people present and what their values actually are."  
~Ross Goldstein

"Success makes men rigid and they tend to exalt stability over all the other virtues[.]"  
~Walter Lippmann

"I can't stand [people] who laugh at everything I say like I'm the funniest guy in the world. I like [people] who tell it like it is, no kissing up to me because I'm on TV."  
~Jeremy London

"I don't need to brown-nose or kiss [up]. I didn't get here by being a yes man."

these positions us for our desired future. As a result, we see the current job or assignment as inconsequential, beneath us, a throw away, and we fail to realize that faithfulness with *today's* responsibilities prepares us for what's to come tomorrow.

**What do you do about it?** My practical application is to go and watch "The Karate Kid". (Choose the Ralph Macchio version or the Jaden Smith version; it doesn't matter.) The key point is that, yes, you want to win the tournament (or whatever your personal target is); however, it's a *journey* to get there. And, on that journey, there will be many cars to be waxed, fences to be painted, stumps to be hopped on, and people to be met at each of stop along the way. Each of them is a critical milestone to the future. To short-change any one of them impacts both how far you go and how you experience the trip.

### **Behavior #7: All Focus, No Fun**

Since we've been talking sports, can I get an "S"? Can I get a "T"? Can I get an "O"? Can I get a "D"? Can I get a "G"? Can I get a "Y"? What does that spell? If it spells "you", you're in trouble.

As we saw with Behavior #1, the *lack* of focus can result in subpar performance, and that can have an adverse effect on your career. But, the opposite also is a potential challenge. When you are so focused that you're rigid, or aloof, or hard to engage, that too impedes progress. People want to work with professionals, but it *is* possible to take "professional" too far. When your image is best described as "cardboard" or "machine-like", you've actually moved into the self-sabotage arena.

Think about it. You put on that professional persona because you want to function effectively in the environment, be well-respected, and reach certain goals, right? But each of those things just listed cannot happen without the active involvement of others. So, if people in your workplace can't get past that outer layer, it will be hard for them to feel some level of comfort with you. That disconnect calls into question your ability to function effectively because "functioning", in most jobs, requires interaction. It impacts the respect you can engender because people may not see enough of *you* to decide whether or not they can respect you. And, that jeopardizes your level of achievement.

**How do you turn it around?** Commit to being a *person...who is professional*. Clearly, professionalism is a necessary part of the equation. Just as necessary, though, is some level of transparency. Be willing to share the best parts of you with colleagues (and be willing to do the hard work on other parts so they, too, can be sharable). You'll find that a correlation exists in professional demeanor, solid performance, and comfort. When you combine the three well, they result in a more natural set of growth opportunities than tends to be present when decision makers and colleagues alike are unsure of the identity of the *person* behind the mask.

So, that's the second installment of limiting conduct. Join us next month as we close out the self-sabotage topic with three final behaviors.

In the meantime, though, have you seen yourself in any of the mini-profiles we've covered so far? Or, is your career not progressing as you'd hoped, but you're not sure why it's stalled? Why don't you let **Executive Advantage** help you get on (or back on) track? Contact us today to explore how we can partner with you. We're here to help you build your thriving [career](#) or [business](#).

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~Charlie Manuel

*"Unfortunately, a lot of coaches have grasped the concept of self-promotion and [he] never cared about self-promotion. It is a mystery with [him]. But the guy has never played politics[.]"*

~Chris Mortensen

*"It's do or die now, so we can't afford to look ahead."*

~Chris Moser

*"To get anywhere in this...business, you either have to a) Work hard, and get your hands dirty, or b) Brown-nose and get your face stink."*

~Dedrick Pitter

*"It's important to recognize milestones along the way."*

~Palma Posillico

*"We must never throw away a bushel of truth because it happens to contain a few grains of chaff."*

~Dean Stanley

*"When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."*

~Corrie ten Boom

*"You celebrate as you go; then look ahead."*

~Deke Thompson

*"Do the one thing you think you cannot do. Fail at it. Try again. Do better the second time. The only people who never tumble are those who never mount the high wire. This is your moment. Own it."*

~Oprah Winfrey

## About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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