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Haven't I Heard This Before?

One of the benefits of a long-term career (translation: "I'm getting old!") is that I've had the chance to watch and talk with many folks about the twists and turns in their career paths over the years. There are strategists and explorers. There are "any job will do" folks and "still trying to find myself" folks. It's really interesting to notice, from experience-to-experience, the patterns that begin to emerge in how people approach their careers.

There's another group that I see frequently. It's the group with careers that are off-course and who attribute the derailment to the action of external culprits. And, I buy it...the first time. But, remember, when you follow folks for years, you get to see position-after-position and company-after-company. So, after the third or the fourth...or the eighteenth role, you begin to wonder how many dastardly villains actually are in the person's field!

Naw, after a while, it can't be everyone else...all the time. I've got to ask (and sometimes I even get to vocalize my thinking): "What part are YOU playing?"

That leads me to the topic for the next few editions of **EA Insights**. Let's noodle the issue of self-sabotage. It happens more often than you think. So, why not come to grips with what you're doing that may be holding you back, and why not consider ways to overcome it? Seems like a worthwhile venture to me!

All the best,

June

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Self-Sabotage (Part I)

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The word is "sabotage".

Quotes

"For every failure, there's an alternative course of action. You just have to find it. When you come to a roadblock, take a detour."
~Mary Kay Ash

"Dishonest people conceal their faults from themselves as well as others; honest people know and confess them."
~Christian Bovee

"One of the things people want us to do here is play the blame game[.] We got to solve problems. There will be ample time to figure out what went right and what went wrong."
~George Bush

"Others may make you promises, once again, and then election after election not deliver. We will not do this."
~Mangosuthu Buthelezi

"Sometimes guys ... are resistant to change. They're afraid to stop doing what has made them successful."
~John Curtis

"We're all frustrated because we're losing. It's not a matter of who makes mistakes. It doesn't matter. It's not time to point fingers at anybody. We just want to find a way to start winning."
~Mathieu Garon

What comes to mind? If you're like me, you see the intentional, purposeful, and covert efforts of one person to harm another, right?

But, "sabotage" can take another path. Yes, it still involves disruption or destruction, but it's not always deliberate, and it's not always at the hands of someone on the outside. No, in some instances, to identify the actor all you must do is look in the mirror.

Self-sabotage.

A number of conversations I've had recently have raised the issue of self-sabotage in the workplace. And, they reminded me of a list of misstep behaviors that I saw from Jack Welch a while back. So, over the next few issues, let me add my spin to Welch's list and, together, we'll consider how self-sabotage may limit success.

Behavior #1: Subpar Performance

Have you ever known someone whose credentials looked great on paper but, when the person came aboard, there were all sorts of skill gaps? Have you even known someone who said all of the right things at the interview about work ethic and values, but showed little of what was touted once on the job? Is either of these people...you?

Okay, no one is perfectly equipped to do everything. Okay, the environment you thought you were stepping into may be very different from what truly exists. I get that; but place those situations aside for now. Instead, focus on scenarios where you (or someone you know and see in the mirror daily) consistently and significantly *over* promises and *under* delivers. That is a subpar performance practice that has self-sabotage written all over it.

So, let's make this practical.

How do you avoid it? Avoidance actually is the easier of the two practical application pieces for this behavior. The best way to avoid having your career sidetracked by a pattern of subpar performance is not to put yourself into this situation in the first place. You've got to *promise* what you can deliver, and then you've got to *deliver*.

That requires honesty -- first with yourself and then with others. It means being realistic about your strengths as well as your challenges and choosing roles that will permit you to shine. It means being truthful about your values -- what's important to you and what's not -- and seeking to find a good match for those values in the workplace (at least for the ones that are non-negotiable for you). It also means presenting who you are -- strengths, challenges, values -- in appropriate ways to those seeking to fill roles so that they can make informed decisions on their side, just as you are assessing on yours, about whether the fit is a good one.

Okay, that's how you avoid, but what if you're already in the midst of a situation and you're not cutting the mustard?

How do you fix it? You've got to 'fess up, and that can be hard. Acknowledge where you're performing well and where you're falling short. Ask for input from a respected source, if you're not sure. Then develop a plan for how to address your specific skill or values challenge(s), and work through that plan a step at a time. Know that a "fix" is going to take time and require a change -- a change on how you think and/or perform, a change in the folks around you (which, by the way, you have limited control over), or a change in position because this one may not be the right fit for you at this time.

Ah, *change*... That brings me to the next point.

Behavior #2: Stuck in Your Ways

Into this category, I place change *resistant* behavior. Clearly, everyone won't be tickled pink when it comes to change; to be professionally successful, you don't have to subscribe to the "adventure a day keeps the boredom away" mantra.

However, you also don't want to be a person who is so entrenched in the way things always have been

"The people who resist change will be confronted by the growing number of people who see that better ways...are available[.]"
~Bill Gates

"Where is the man who has the strength to be true, and to show himself as he is?"
~Wolfgang Goethe

"If you make ... a promise..., make sure you deliver it."
~Merv Griffin

"The high road is always respected. Honesty and integrity are always rewarded."
~Scott Hamilton

"The point is to solve problems, not point fingers."
~Jane Harman

"You don't point fingers; you look at yourself. You work from the inside out and just try and build on the simple things."
~Jeff Jillson

"I just think that this is a key time, not to point fingers or to be critical, it's just showing a trend and now there's an opportunity..., which is a positive thing."
~Tim Jones

"People often resist change for reasons that make good sense to them, even if those reasons don't correspond to organizational goals."
~Rosabeth Kanter

"Once I decide to do something, I can't have people telling me I can't. If there's a roadblock, you jump over it, walk around it, crawl under it."
~Kitty Kelley

*"We're not helping ourselves. *** That's just poor performance. We've got to ... make something happen[.]"*
~Dan McCarney

"When things aren't going well

done or one who's so change-averse that you become known as the "hard sell" for any new idea. There's a difference between showing proper caution to ensure good decision-making and being the resident roadblock to innovation and improvement. Close-mindedness is a one-way ticket to self-sabotage.

What can you do if this is you? Again, we're talking about situations that go beyond a healthy dose of caution and that rise to the level of demonstrating a pattern of obstructionist behavior around change. So, when you see that you're headed for the deep end, an important place to start is by identifying *why* change is so unsettling for you. There often are one or more deep-seated contributors that you'll find lurking in the background and that must be identified and dealt with. Until you do, it will be difficult to consider change from a more balanced perspective or to navigate through change situations more effectively going forward.

Behavior #3: Problem Identifier vs. Problem Solver

We actually tackled these two behaviors back in [April 2013](#), but let's highlight them again here.

When you become known largely as a "problem identifier", it's akin to being seen as a person who just *picks*. You know what I mean. Nothing is ever right; nothing is ever good enough; there's always a monkey wrench to be thrown in; there's always a reason why it won't work. (Even as I sit and write this, I feel my face tightening and my head shaking. And, that's *not* how you want folks to respond when they think of you.)

Now, don't get me wrong. It's essential to engage in critical thinking so that matters can be addressed with the best possible information. And, that's often what problem identifiers *think* they're doing but, unfortunately, that mischaracterization is what results in self-sabotage.

How can you turn this behavior around? Well, what often is missing in behavior that's focused exclusively on problem-*finding* is the "*So then what?*" part of the equation. When you stop at problem identification, all you're doing is picking out the wrong. However, when you can catch problems, and also take part in thinking creatively about *solutions* to them, then you move from just *picking* to *playing*. And, *playing* -- being a problem *solver* -- boosts your stock significantly. People begin to recognize you as a valuable asset because your goal is not just to poke holes...but to help fill those holes and build.

So, those are the first three limiting behaviors. Join us next month as we cover four self-sabotage areas related to professional image.

In the meantime, though, did you see yourself in any of the mini-profiles covered here? 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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for us, we don't hang our heads, we don't point fingers. We just try to come together..., dig down and make adjustments."
~Wes Miller

"For me personally,... I get an awful amount of success and I don't think I deserve it and then I want to sabotage it."
~Michael Parkinson

*"People who fail to achieve their goals usually get stopped by frustration. They allow frustration to keep them from taking the necessary actions that would support them in achieving their desire. You get through this roadblock by plowing through frustration, taking each setback as feedback you can learn from, and pushing ahead. *** All successful people learn that success is buried on the other side of frustration."*
~Tony Robbins

"Only the extremely ignorant or the extremely intelligent can resist change."
~Socrates

"People who feel they do not deserve success will ALWAYS, ALWAYS find a way to sabotage themselves."
~Roberto Torres

"It was a poor performance and we have to lift ourselves for the next one."
~Michael Vaughan

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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