

**HIGH ACHIEVERS TELL ALL...**

**HOW TO GET TO  
THE TOP IN YOUR CAREER**

**TECHNICAL  
FOCUS**

In March 2004, Technical Focus conducted a survey of 25 General Managers and Directors operating in the manufacturing and supply chain based businesses from \$50M to \$2.7B.

All 25 managers have carved out successful careers in their chosen field and enjoy their work. We asked them to share their tips on how talented “up & comers” could get the most out of their career.

Some of their advice may not surprise you.  
Some might challenge you.

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## MANAGING YOUR APPROACH

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### Don't make money your focus early in your career

#### Common suggestions:

- Don't be afraid of taking risks and take them early on
- Vary your career, be flexible about career path
- Don't stay with one employer too long
- Take a drop in salary to get new experience

#### Other hints on your approach:

- Don't be an incrementalist
- Break out of your specialist technical area - don't stick to your original skill set, push yourself to develop into other areas
- Operations and supply chain isn't industry specific so try and get cross-industry experience
- There are ways that you can still innovate in highly regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals
- Maintain work life balance where possible, however, one year of effort and imbalance can get you ahead every now and again

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## ATTITUDE AND PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

### Develop an ambitious edge and balance it with loyalty

#### Common suggestions:

- Belief in self
- Perseverance, success doesn't come easily
- Need professional courage - take ownership/ responsibility for your success
- Make success absolute in own backyard (your area of responsibility)
- Don't make yourself beholden to anyone - you need to be loyal to your company, management & staff, but remember that every business is always up for sale and you could be made redundant tomorrow - you need to be aware of the best step for you.

#### Other hints on your approach:

- Honesty - work with integrity
- Achievement driven
- Energy and enthusiasm
- There are no bad decisions just set backs and learnings
- Be pro-active and prepare well for interviews
- Do homework and go for it
- Don't worry too much about timing
- Focus on being successful
- Try to be independently successful
- It's not always about being nice...results count
- Show your work ethic
- Take ownership of your future as no-one else will
- It's not what happens to you when you fail it's what you do afterwards that counts
- Don't be afraid to have a go at a role that scares you
- Challenge everything
- Focus on results and avoid political networking in early career
- Embrace high levels of change
- Be a little selfish about your career sometimes

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## SUCCEED WITH THE SUPPORT OF OTHERS

### Developing people skills is critical

#### Common suggestions:

- Work with other people - don't try to side-step someone who is a potential obstacle
- Build good relationships with your peers and managers even throughout adversity

#### Other hints:

- Network at conferences (if you make one new contact or learn one new thing it's worth a few hours of your time)
- Get a mentor out of your area

## SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

### Don't just react, make decisions based on a long-term career strategy

#### Common suggestions:

- Results count more than most things so keep your eye on the ball
- Educate yourself, take responsibility for learning and developing
- Learn to think strategically early in your career whether it be about opportunities, obstacles, politics
- Understand sales and the sales process of your industry
- Develop your ability to sell yourself

#### Other hints on skills:

- Don't get involved in politics too early in your career
- If there's any restructuring try and get involved
- Be pro-active and prepare well for interviews
- Invest in yourself and do as much study as possible early in your career
- Take-on and request public speaking requests
- Practice continuous improvement

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## SOME LIMITING BELIEFS AND BARRIERS

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### Life balance

There is no doubt that life balance is important, but what this actually means for each of us can be as individual as we are. If you enjoy what you do and get tremendous satisfaction out of what you do, what is wrong with being devoted to your work? The work/"my time" or work/family balance can also go through phases - when you are beginning a new position that is challenging, it makes sense that you will be investing more of your time in your work. The key to life balance is to ensure a "balance over your life (time)".

### Reduced availability/ productivity of staff as they demand life balance

As a manager this is a critical issue to manage. Reduced availability doesn't directly mean reduced productivity. A contented staff member that feels their manager has empathy, will usually be more productive working less hours than being "forced" to work long or inflexible hours. The long-term benefits of loyalty and reduced staff turnover can often out-way the perceived negatives.

### No MBA/no sales experience

Many careers still progress without either of these so don't get too hung up on this. However, if you are aiming high in an industry where your peers have an MBA and/or sales experience, or if having an MBA will give you an edge... you have to pay the price. You can never lose when investing in you.

### Introduction of new technology

It has to be accepted as fact that technology will change dramatically in every industry over the course of your career. It's up to you to stay abreast of technology swings and to ensure your skill-set is not dependent on one technology.

### Perception of the ongoing business cost-price squeeze

Get over it. It's a basic element of a free economy. That's why we have to continually learn to be smarter, more productive, more effective. If it were easy they'd hire a bunch of teenagers to run operations while we're on the golf course or beach!