

From Me to You: Things I've Learned as a Professional

Executive Summary. Advice for life in general, and professional life, is often gleaned by the sharing of lessons and anecdotes. Here are some lessons to apply to both home and work.

My resume. I'm 49 years old. I'm not young anymore, but I'm not too old yet either. It could be argued that 49-year olds are in the prime of their lives – of course a 49-year old is telling you this so maybe there's a hint of bias! I've been a lot of there, done a lot of that, and still have all my marbles intact. Here's some things I've learned about people and how to apply those observations to life and, especially, business.

Lower your expectations. I can't tell you who, but someone very close told me about this in the context of marriage. "Scott, first thing to do when you get married is to lower your expectations." The same could be said about your employees or co-workers. I'm not saying lower the bar, but I am saying to expect less and hope for more. This will lower your blood pressure and you'll always know what behavior or end product to receive. I had an employee that I coached about talking less because every single call took 24 minutes. I've got 4 minutes. I finally learned to block out 24 minutes every time he called.

Where there's smoke there's fire. Did you check references on that new employee before you brought him on board? Was the employer short in his answers to your inquiries about the potential employee? We once hired an out-of-work estimator *whose* last place of employ was under a guy I knew very well. When I called for a *reference*, I got the "oh, her, oh ok". That turned out to be a series of no shows at work, alcohol on the breath, going home early, and finally a sexual harassment suit. This anecdote likely fits into more than one of these lessons!

No one does it as good as you. It is true that you should try to surround yourself in business with people smarter than you. And do do that. However, until you get to the point of being able to afford these people, you're having to do it all yourself and with newer and less experienced staff. If you're a business owner or a manager, you're rarely going to get someone who (1) does something as good as you do and to your expectations, and (2) who cares as much as you do. Get over it and manage through it.





Trust your gut. There's probably a statistic out there, but I'd say that 4 times out of 5 when my gut tells me one thing, it's the right call. Almost every time I've gone through with a decision that just didn't seem right, the decision was *wrong*, or I lived with anxiety and trepidation while it played out.

No good deed goes unpunished and don't expect a thank you. You may have helped a co-worker or business

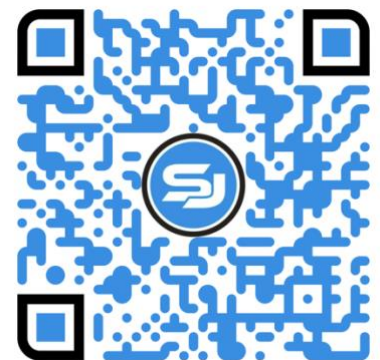
partner by not exposing them in a mistake. Or you may have had a miraculous day in serving your client. Proceed with these "gestures" with no expectations of reciprocal behavior in the first case, or a "thank you" in the second case. Go read the story about the turtle and the scorpion (Google it); you're the turtle here.

Be likeable. I'm having a great career. I was project manager of the supposed largest public wastewater job ever in the state at age 30 and was a Senior Vice President of a multi-billion company at age 34. Why? Well it wasn't because I had a 4.0 GPA and a genius IQ. And I wasn't the owner's son-in-law. I was smart, hard-working, and likeable. Not a pushover, but someone who the owner could rely on to execute work. I was "coachable" and listened. I've been around long enough now to only hire people I like being around. Life's too short for hanging around people you don't enjoy.

Overcommunicate and be clear. Don't feel bad about insulting your client or your co-worker or your staff on being thorough and clear. Limit the use of pronouns – "he" or "she" or "they" could be any one of the parties you've mentioned in the last sixty seconds. Instead of "they are going to deliver concrete to the pour", try "ABC Concrete is going to deliver 3,500 psi concrete to Building 19 generator pads on the east side of the building at noon." I don't care what business you're in, communication comprises ¾ of all of the issues (I made this stat up, but it's a lot!).

Keep it tight. Be succinct. Can you say something in 6 words, rather than four sentences? Be respectful of others' time and keep communication tight. Be David Puddy. Remember him from Seinfeld? Here's your new communication guide [QR]

Proofread. Even the best writers make mistakes, and an unchecked document ends up sending an inaccurate message or just plain 'ol looks bad. If you can have your work product, your emails, or your calculations checked by others, do it. I'm an engineer by *education* but feel as if I spell and write better than 90% of my peers. I'm not blowing smoke up my own you-know-what, but I'm saying there is a lot of bad English and grammar out there.



Listen. Talk when it your turn to talk. Listen the rest of the time. You probably should be listening most of the time, especially when you're meeting with your boss or your client – both of these parties pay you. Don't talk over people, it's rude and it doesn't allow the other party to finish a thought.

Understand your audience. For whom are you performing this service or providing this product? Are you thinking of what other party wants? Most of the memos I write in my service providing starts with an Executive Summary (just like this article). Why do I do this? I do it because I know my audience, they never have any time. And reading a couple sentences on what this article is about allows them to dive deeper if they want to. I do the same thing with technical analysis – we provide a one minute read on a matter, and then the next one to ten pages provides all of the detailed backup and analysis.

My story. This was a list of things that bounced out of my brain in about thirty minutes coupled with some small anecdotes. If only one of them helps you, that's great. If I had one overarching piece of advice it would be to surround yourself with people you like. Perhaps that's a luxury of a 49-year old who owns their own business. But probably not, you can join a group of people similarly minded. Good luck and work safe!

