

**Business Career Success: Pick the Right Objectives,
Develop Your Personality and Skills,
Get a Helpful Degree, Work Hard,
and Never Give Up**

Donald W. Mitchell

One of my college roommates had a brother who was a graduate business student and often visited our rooms. Since one of my possible career choices was to work in business, I asked this business student many questions about his studies and career choices. Everything he said expanded my knowledge and made me more interested in a business career.

This information meant a lot to me because I grew up in a small city where there were only two large employers, the Santa Fe Railway and the U.S. Air Force. Neither organization provided opportunities to learn about executive success in a large corporation.

When I began graduate business studies, I was pretty smug, thinking that I knew just what needed to be done: Get a prestigious degree and wait for highly attractive employers to bid for my services.

Talking with the other business students made me realize that I had a lot to learn about career success. I didn't even understand what executives did in different industries.

My complacent eyes were opened wide one day when a management consultant from the famous McKinsey firm made a presentation. At the end of the discussion, I asked one of the other students who got to do what this presenter did for a living. My classmate quickly responded, "Strategy consultants." I asked, "What's a strategy consultant?" He responded that these were people who worked for McKinsey or The Boston Consulting Group. I remembered those answers and later applied to both firms, not quite knowing what to expect.

Even with all of this knowledge, I was totally unclear about how you went from being a management consultant to having a successful business career working for a large corporation. I guessed that someday a client might hire you. And that's what did happen to me after I became a strategy consultant.

The key lesson from my experience is that you can have a wonderful education at a university and still lack important knowledge about the most fundamental elements of developing your business career.

Students typically prefer to get information about potential careers from fellow students and professors, but research shows that students and professors provide incomplete information. It's better to also speak with people who have been developing a career for a decade or so to find out what lessons they learned in the school of hard knocks.

I was recently reminded of this source of information to make more effective business career plans when I corresponded with Dr. Robert Hartinger, a banking executive in Germany who is a Ph.D. graduate of Rushmore University. Dr. Hartinger kindly agreed to share his career experiences and lessons with me so that I could pass them along to you.

Dr. Hartinger started off presuming that the quality of your education was very important to career success. After graduating from his business program at a German university, he soon learned that you have few occasions to apply any of the theoretical knowledge that most schools provide. As a result, new graduates are stuffed full of knowledge and theory that has little relevance to what their employers need.

Instead, degrees qualify people to be considered for certain jobs. Many employers pride themselves on hiring from certain schools and restricting top jobs to those with the most advanced graduate degrees.

Traditional schooling provides few insights into what various industries and types of jobs are like. If students aren't careful, they'll seek a type of work that they won't like. There are two alternatives available:

1. Examine industries and jobs carefully to set the right objectives.
2. Study at a school where you get practical experience in applying theoretical knowledge which gives you a sense of what a career doing that work might be like.

Dr. Hartinger doesn't rule out the first alternative, but he's confident that the second one is essential. If possible do both, but at least do the second. From what you learn, he also recommends that you focus on just a few

opportunities. Otherwise, your attention and energies will be too widely scattered.

A lot of business success depends on your personality. That's something that graduate schools often ignore. Outgoing people with pleasing, helpful personalities will do a lot better than grumpy, self-absorbed geniuses who rarely talk to anyone.

Many studies show that the ability to connect to other people in the organization greatly helps both job effectiveness and advancement. Why? It's simple: You can't know all of the answers, but with help from others you can do a great job.

But it's not enough to simply be a connection point within the organization. You also need to add skills that improve your effectiveness.

Here's where online learning can make a difference. People don't care where you learn a skill; they are just pleased when you add one that's relevant to your situation.

Today, many companies offer financial assistance for those who wish to learn new skills. When that assistance is provided over the Internet, costs are reduced and you can take more courses than those who enroll in classroom-based courses. In addition, learning while you work allows you the chance to apply what you are learning. In that way, you can sift through lots of theoretical knowledge to get just what you need. Dr. Hartinger also notes that if an online school offers flexibility in designing courses, your skill improvement can be even greater.

Copyright 2008 Donald W. Mitchell, All Rights Reserved

Donald W. Mitchell is a professor at Rushmore University, an online school that provides flexible support for people seeking more career success. For more information about ways to engage in fruitful lifelong learning at Rushmore to increase your career options and effectiveness, visit

<http://www.rushmore.edu> .