

Expressing Body English on a Surfboard Leads to an Impressive Business Career Communicating in English

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Observe carefully and important lessons about career choices can be observed all around us. Career planning will be more effective when it is based on our experiences and those of others. From unexpected nuances about different careers, great insights and results can follow.

To gain the most from those career lessons, draw on these important principles:

1. Consider what you want to gain from a career and set tentative goals.
2. Check those tentative career goals for consistency with your personal values and make any necessary adjustments.
3. Choose a career that fits your value-tested goals.
4. Examine your beliefs about that career and yourself to see if the beliefs are true.
5. Whenever a belief is shown to be false, consider your alternatives for accomplishing your career goals to verify the reality behind the seemingly attractive choices.
6. Act on the best, verified alternative for gaining your goals.

To make it easier to understand these steps, let's consider the experiences of Mr. Nobuo Shiraiwa, a successful Japanese businessman. Mr. Shiraiwa's career was launched in a quite unexpected way while he was a college student.

1. Consider What You Want to Gain from a Career and Set Appropriate Goals

Believing (as many students do) that college should be fun because work wouldn't be, Mr. Shiraiwa focused more on surfing than on his studies. Like many young people, he didn't see the point of sitting at a desk with a book.

Taking a break from college to go surfing on Bali in Indonesia, Mr. Shiraiwa was chagrined to find that Australians he met there had trouble understanding his English, despite this being one of his favorite subjects. This experience helped him realize that he wanted to be able to communicate with more people through speaking English and to have a career working in an international company where English was the everyday language.

2. Check Those Career Goals for Consistency with Your Personal Values and Make Any Necessary Adjustments

Mr. Shiraiwa decided to test out those beliefs by taking a temporary leave from his university studies to live in Australia. He chose that country because he could easily obtain a visa to work while visiting there.

For the first three months, all he did was study English . . . but he began to run out of money and needed to earn some more. Trying every restaurant and coffee shop he could, no one would hire him.

Remembering that he had worked in a hotel in Japan, he decided to try hotels and got a job working in the restaurant where he could practice his English while earning some money. Rapid language progress followed.

3. Choose a Career That Fits Your Value-Tested Goals

Returning to Japan for his last year of college, Mr. Shiraiwa needed to find a permanent job. He applied to over 50 companies. From these contacts, he learned that he liked small companies better than larger ones and he was happy to accept a position at a small, Zurich-based multinational trading firm that two Swiss businessmen had expanded into Japan.

4. Examine Your Beliefs about That Career and Yourself to See if the Beliefs Are True

For the first three months, all he did was learn about business terms and distribution channels for confectionary supplies. His next assignment was to try to collect over 1,000 business cards from potential customers as he learned about them. Each week, he returned to the office to explain to his boss why he had not made sales.

Six months later, he made a breakthrough by providing a technical solution that led to receiving a big order from one of the largest family restaurant chains. Mr. Shiraiwa felt encouraged by this accomplishment.

5. Whenever a Belief Is Shown to Be False, Consider Your Alternatives to Accomplish Your Career Goals

Mr. Shiraiwa was once asked to take the wife of a visiting Spanish executive, whose German company supplied his firm, on a shopping trip. That night, Mr. Shiraiwa had dinner with the couple and his boss. A year later, he was surprised to learn that the executive now wanted Mr. Shiraiwa to move to Germany to work for them, but he accepted. On arrival, he found that speaking English wasn't the key to success: Learning about the European confectionary markets and adding German language skills were much more important.

After gaining that knowledge and new language skills, Mr. Shiraiwa returned to Japan to head up Asian sales operations for the German supplier. While he had been in Germany, his old company had opened a confectionary development center to provide technical expertise for its customers. Building on his expertise, he was able to help both companies successfully enter the airline catering market.

His responsibilities grew, and Mr. Shiraiwa was soon looking after global customers, an area where his English skills definitely helped, even though he was working in Japan. Faster career progress required, however, a different set of skills for being a global executive.

6. Act on the Best, Verified Choice for Gaining Your Goals

Not having the option to take a break from his demanding work in mid-career, Mr. Shiraiwa found a helpful compromise: online MBA courses at Rushmore University. From his work with the professors who tutored him individually, Mr. Shiraiwa was able to learn a lot about leadership and management of a global enterprise, apply what he learned to his day-to-day work, and further improve his facility in reading and writing English.

Mr. Shiraiwa described one of the most important lessons he learned from his MBA studies in the final paper he wrote before graduating in 2007:

“Experience has taught me that even if I set my goal, if something in line with the strategy we agreed on to meet the goal isn’t working, we need to acknowledge that and fine-tune the strategy, even if we are facing big opponents. Leadership is not a one-time announcement, but it is adjusting the organization to daily changes in the environment.”

In drawing that important lesson, it’s clear that Mr. Shiraiwa was drawing from his successful career development experience.

What can you accomplish by taking his approach with your career?

What are you waiting for?

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