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Career Killers, Career Builders

The Book Every Millennial Needs to Read

John M Crossman • Union Square © 2017 • 150 pages

Society / Millennials

Take-Aways

- Your career should make you feel great, match your strengths and enable you to get ahead.
- For career success, you need to be self-controlled, responsible and capable of making wise decisions.
- The five “career killers” are substance abuse, sex, avarice, bad temper and egotism.
- Seek five “career builders” that can help you reach your goals: mentors, relationships, professional counseling, coaching and connections.
- Establish balance and unity in your life three ways.
 1. Become passionate about your work.
 2. Create a robust personal and professional brand.
 3. Select the right home base.
- If your work and your life aren’t going well, consider what you can change.

Recommendation

John M. Crossman discusses five “career killers” that can immediately torpedo you at work and five “career builders” that can help you succeed. He lists and describes acts of self-indulgence that no career can survive and offers the caveat that even one mistake can ruin you. In this career-planning guide for millennials, college grads and new employees, he tells readers what steps to take and what disasters to avoid when building a successful career and an enjoyable, satisfying life. His brief but comprehensive primer lends a hand to young people trying to create a context for success.

Summary

Your career should make you feel great, match your strengths and enable you to get ahead.

A great career should boost the way you feel, correspond with your personal and professional abilities, and help you reach your goals. In kindergarten, teachers tell kids they can become anything they want: astronauts, big-league ballplayers, movie stars, even president of the United States. Things change when those kids turn into adults.

“There’s a time and a place for everything, and it’s called college.” (“South Park”)

Grownups have to leave dreamland and face reality. Facing reality means planning, preparing for, securing, and enjoying a meaningful and satisfying career. No matter what your career turns out to be, making it satisfying and successful requires hard work, dedication and discipline.

For career success, you need to be self-controlled, responsible and capable of making wise decisions.

You must make the right choices, do the correct things and avoiding the deadly mistakes that can kill any career. A successful career depends on three elements:

1. **Knowledge** – You will develop specialized information in the course of your work, beginning with your college studies and continuing as you gain real-world experience.
2. **Passion** – When you do work that you really care about, you’ll be more engaged and joyful.
3. **Maturity** – The more responsibility you have, the more maturity you’ll need. The more maturity you have, the better your decisions will be.

“There is no passion to be found playing small – in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living.” (Nelson Mandela)

In planning your career, consider several crucial questions: What are your special talents? What areas of your life do you most want to improve? What professional activities bring you the most enjoyment? What nonprofessional activities do you most enjoy? How would you define success in both areas of your life?

The five “career killers” are substance abuse, sex, avarice, bad temper and egotism.

Preparation is crucial in every aspect of life. You must speak and act carefully. If you say or do the wrong thing at work, in some cases even just once, you can blow up your career, not only at your current firm but with potential employers in your industry.

“Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.” (Will Rogers)

Career-killing mistakes fall into five broad areas:

1. **“Drugs and alcohol”** – When it comes to destroying careers and too often actually destroying people along with their careers, no problem area is more malevolent than substance abuse. According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, drug abuse costs US employers \$81 billion each year. The media regularly report on how people ruin their careers and lives with drugs and alcohol. Even famous celebrities and important leaders ruin their lives with drugs and drinking. If you have a problem with drugs – whether prescribed or illicit – or alcohol, get support to address your addiction before it is too late. Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous can help.
2. **“Sex”** – The workplace is a great environment to develop new friends and acquaintances. But never look for love where you work. You ask for big trouble when you try to turn the workplace into your private love nest. This is especially true if you become involved with a married colleague. The office is a place for work, not romance. Many companies enforce rules saying that colleagues should never date. Employees who break this rule can lose their jobs.
3. **“Greed”** – Money is essential. You can’t do much without it, but always focusing on money is a mistake. The extra money you will earn when money is your only goal will never make up for all that your avarice will cost you. Greedy people don’t engender trust. If you are greedy, people suspect that you might cheat and steal for money. Greed will harm you in the long run.
4. **“Temperament”** – “The best fighter is never angry.” These words remain as true now as when ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu first uttered them. When people become angry, they often lose control. As a result, they may end up saying or doing just about anything, including resorting to physical violence against others. You’ll never get ahead at work as a hothead. Indeed, quite the opposite is true: One outburst, and you may lose your job.
5. **“Pride”** – Everyone needs confidence and self-esteem. You should take pride in yourself and the work you do. However, too much arrogance can be hugely unattractive. Egotistic people, who already think they are perfect, don’t think they need to adapt to life’s changing circumstances. They seldom admit their mistakes. But no one – neither bosses nor employees – wants to associate with a know-it-all. And if nobody wants to work with you, where will you work?

Seek five “career builders” that can help you reach your goals: mentors, relationships, professional counseling, coaching and connections.

Any of the career killers can demolish your career. Fortunately, most people don't let alcohol, drugs, sex, greed or ego ruin their lives or their professions. Most people don't make stupid personal mistakes that turn their colleagues and bosses against them.

“Opportunities always come dressed in challenges and hard work. Make the most of them.”

Still, in today's intensely competitive market, people who want to rise to the top in their fields can't simply keep their heads down, work hard, and avoid making personal blunders or gaffes. Being average at work won't increase your standing. You must take active steps to differentiate yourself from everyone else at work. Look for five career builders that can help fulfill your ambitions:

1. **“Mentors”** – Throughout history, mentors have helped people grow professionally. Star athletes, CEOs and leaders of all stripes have mentors. Often leaders who receive mentoring earlier in their careers become mentors who then teach others. Mentors show their protégées how to overcome career obstacles, introduce them to other leaders and help them grow professionally. If you have a mentor, say often that you're grateful.
2. **“Relationships”** – No one can navigate life alone. Your family, friends and acquaintances help keep you on track to succeed in life and in your career. They are major influences, whether you want them to be or not. Ideally, establish trusting, open relationships with those who are close to you so you can express yourself freely without worrying about repercussions.
3. **“Professional counseling”** – Sometimes you need more than mentors, family and friends. At such times, professional counselors can be of immense help. Executive coaches and other advisers can offer objective views on what you could do to improve your life and move ahead in your career. Some people automatically reject the idea of professional counseling, taking the attitude that they don't need help and want to go it alone. That kind of thinking can severely limit what you can accomplish personally and professionally.
4. **“Becoming coachable”** – Employers want to hire people who will listen carefully, learn to meet the company's requirements and do things its way. They prefer to employ coachable people they can develop professionally. People who aren't coachable tend to be immature, to have a know-it-all attitude, and to be prideful and even lazy. Show that you can learn by embracing professional growth.
5. **“Connections”** – Most people today don't find new jobs through classified ads, social media, the internet or headhunters. Instead, the clearest path to finding a great position is to work with your network of connections. How many job applications you fill out doesn't matter; it's how many people you know who can help you. Many companies and professional firms also rely on personal connections to generate new clients and customers.

Establish balance and unity in your life three ways.

Avoiding career killers and leveraging career builders is just part of what you should do to establish a career and a life that work for you. Try to tie your personal life and your professional life together so that they complement one another. The mix is essential to achieving lasting happiness. Consider three goals:

1. Become passionate about your work.

The profession you pursue should make you excited to wake up every morning and begin your day. Everyone deserves that level of engagement, and it's an important step toward the goal of achieving personal satisfaction. Be aware, however, that not everyone can initially discover happiness in their work. You can always act to change your profession, though that may require courage. Julia Child, the great French cuisine chef, worked in advertising until age 50. That's when she wrote her first cookbook and discovered her true calling.

"Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you." (Oprah Winfrey)

Determine if you're content with how your job is structured, whether you're making progress at a suitable pace and if your work is making you happy. If any of your answers are negative, take steps to make changes. As poet Maya Angelou wrote, "My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive – and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style."

2. Create a robust personal and professional brand.

Don't see your career as merely a career. See it as a brand. Think of your career as a branded business start-up, and see yourself as the entrepreneur who works hard every day to expand your venture. Utilize social media – Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and Pinterest – to brand yourself and your career.

3. Select the right home base.

Where you decide to live and work has a lot to do with the success you'll achieve in your career. Many young people choose to live in cities because of the opportunities to socialize, the vibrant nightlife or the professional sports teams.

"A key component of knowledge is choosing companions and activities that foster enjoyment of your life's journey and a steadfast pursuit of goals."

Some recent college grads go to work without putting any serious thought into where they're living. Fun bars and sports activities aren't necessarily the criteria you should use to determine where to live and work. Instead, choosing where to live and work is a consequential decision. Think about where your career can flourish and consider these factors about each city:

- **“Connection”** – Just like deciding whether to go out again with someone you met on a first date, the city you choose must be a good fit for you, and you must be a good fit for it.
- **“Opportunity”** – Aspiring actors move to Hollywood, California, not to Hollywood, Florida, because Hollywood, California is where they will find opportunities to work in their profession. Young people who seek certain types of jobs need to locate in cities that are centers for their industry.
- **“Relationships”** – Choose a city where you already have a robust community: friends and family who can help open the necessary doors for you to begin your career.

If your work and your life aren’t going well, consider what you can change.

In your career, you might do everything right, avoid stupid mistakes and still come up short. If this happens, make significant changes. For example, you could take these steps: Try a different job, speak with people you trust about what change or changes you need to make, work to undergo an attitude shift, make sure your personal life makes sense, take some time off from work, seek the help of a therapist or life coach, and turn to books or the internet for sound advice on what to do.

“At the end of the day, you write the final chapter of your life with the choices you make, the people you spend time with, and your attitude as you approach and enjoy your life.”

After trying these measures, your rock-bottom choice is whether to make the best of what you’re doing or to take a break and try something new. Think carefully about which choice is right for your life and your long-term career goals.

About the Author

John M. Crossman is president of Crossman & Company – a regional commercial real estate company based in Orlando, Florida. He has funded or helped fund scholarships at more than 30 universities. He based this book on his most requested speech, *The Top Five Ways to Get Fired* and *The Top Five Ways to Keep From Being Fired*. For more information, see his website at <https://crossmancb.com/>.



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