

## **Performance Excellence**

Performance Excellence: It's not rocket science. I was all set to open this article with a definition, but the words 'over egging' and 'pudding' swiftly came to mind! And anyway it's been described countless times by many a mortal, loftier than I.

In words of John W Gardner, politician, writer and leadership expert:

*"Excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well"*

This echoed Booker T Washington, half a century earlier:

*"Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way".*

And the opportunity is never far away, here's John W. Gardner again:

*"Whoever I am, or whatever I am doing, some kind of excellence is within my reach."*

### **'Excellence always sells', Earl Nightingale**

A far more pertinent question to ask is what Performance Excellence actually means to you? What's the point? It's all about the why behind your own search for Performance Excellence.

And it matters. Turbulent, tough and taut, yes these are trying times, but even in calmer, balmier waters, Performance Excellence is important. Why? It offers you choice; the more choice the better. Choice means being in control of your job, your career, your life. Personal Excellence means you call the tune, design your own destiny and it provides the currency for getting you to where you want to be.

### **'Begin with the End in Mind', Stephen Covey**

Yes folks, you've heard that one before, it's visioning time: Hopes, aspirations, ambitions. And please dream big. You need a mighty strong why to keep driving your Performance Excellence.

Tools I use with my clients include, the eulogy or epitaph approach: what do you want to be remembered for, how will your life be summed up at your funeral? Too depressing? Oft preferred by auditors and accountants, the backwards CV. Quite simply this is your lifetime CV, describing your successes and achievements over your full career, right up to your retirement (when? – you choose!). Your 'Proudest moments' provide the starting point and then you can put flesh on the bones, identifying the roles and opportunities you'll need to experience to fulfil this vision.

This is a very inspiring, life-affirming exercise, providing a blueprint for your future career path. Need some help? Readers of [CareersInAudit.com](http://CareersInAudit.com) can book an exclusive session with me, 'The fully-comp CV' at a very special price. Just email me at [info@theaccountantscoach.com](mailto:info@theaccountantscoach.com).

### **'Too perfect by half'**

If pinning down your life vision provides the motivation and creates the momentum for Performance Excellence then the next step is to don the habit. Excellence is attitude. Or more precisely, in the prose of Colin Powell *"Excellence is not an exception, it is a prevailing attitude"*. In other words, it permeates everything we do.

However, heed this health warning: Performance Excellence is not the same as perfection. Excellence is striving to be better, to be the very best **you** can be. Perfection is an elusive standard that you'll never achieve.

Perfection isn't within our grasp – excellence is. Come on auditors, think **materiality** here. There's no such thing as the perfect audit, but by using materiality and applying your professional judgement you can sure achieve an excellent one.

But that's not to deny:

## The Devil's in the detail

Again, think audit. Details matter. Details are crucial. This is where the over-riding, permeating excellence attitude comes to the fore. Colin Powell again: 'If you are going to achieve excellence in big things, you develop the habit in little matters'.

### Performance Excellence: I'm ready. Now take me there

Follow my quick tips to take you to infinity and beyond!

- Performance Excellence is all about you. Stop blaming externals –other people, systems or circumstances. Concentrate on what is within your control. Take personal responsibility. Take ownership.
- Work **on** your job, not just **in** the job. Look for the 'difference that makes the difference'. Look for leverage: invest in your strengths, minimise your weakness.
- Speaking of which, it's time to take stock. Draw up your personal SWOT. Your very own matrix of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Think much broader than technical prowess. Use the **transferable skills checklist** to dig deep and excavate the layers of skill that you can fully exploit to truly create excellence
- Think of yourself as a company, me plc. Then go understand your market. What are your critical success factors to your employer? Yes, that's critical. Cover these bases before you spread investment in professional or personal development any further afield.
- And then, establish your personal X-factor. Also known as your personal USP (Unique Selling Point) this is what makes you special, what stands out in a crowd, what people will remember. Hint: we all have one! It could be your ace presentation skills, your easy rapport, excel magnificence, or your supreme efficiency prowess. I promise, you've got one. See me if in doubt! Discovery complete, then get leveraging your X-factor.
- Once you've set your vision, goals and objectives, you need measures and milestones. Also known as 'de-chunking' this turns the **why** into **how** and creates the do-able baby steps that take you to where you want to go.
- Resource-wise, try modelling. Look around you to see who demonstrates what, in the Performance Excellence stakes. What can you learn? What behaviours, attitudes, and mind-sets can you beg, steal or borrow?

### What are you waiting for?

*"There are no speed limits on the road to excellence", Anon*

Stop thinking, start acting. Carpe Diem and get cracking on this one right away!

Written by Carol McLachlan for CareersinAudit.com, July 2009