

DR. LOIS FRANKEL

Get and keep the job you want.

At Corporate Coaching International we've found that nearly a decade after the introduction of the literature on derailment was introduced it continues to be a major concern of men and women in corporations and nonprofit organizations alike. Although much is written about executive derailment, it regularly occurs at *all* levels when an individual's career stalls, implodes, or explodes and the person finds himself or herself looking for a new position. As with most syndromes, prevention is worth a pound of cure. Below are some tips from CCI team member Dr. Bruce Heller to help you keep your career on track and prevent you from being a casualty of derailment:

1. **Develop your emotional intelligence.** One reason people derail is that their interpersonal skills do not match the needs of the position. As you rise in the organization your technical skills become less important than your social skills. Consciously focus on developing better than average social skills. Read the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie. Keep a journal of your social interactions and fine tune them as needed.
2. **Be aware of being critical.** One of the basics of getting along with others is that people do not like to be criticized. Give feedback only when you get permission to do so. Nothing pushes people away more than receiving unsolicited criticism.
3. **Learn to listen.** Carefully attend to others when they are speaking. Do not interrupt. Ask open-ended questions and look the person in the eye. Taking notes during conversations is one way to demonstrate you're listening.
4. **Balance between dependency and independency.** Whereas some people are overly dependent on others for help with making decisions, others are overly independent. Take stock of how many times you ask for help with decisions from your boss. Also take stock if you are so independent in your decision making that you do not include others. Ask your boss point blank if he or she would like to see you be more independent or collaborative in your decision-making. If you are too dependent, start making more decisions on your own or take a course in decision- making. If you are too independent, schedule time with your boss and others to get their input before deciding. Finding that balance is more art than science.
5. **Make strategic transitions with agility.** Because all organizations are constantly changing, only the agile seem to survive and not derail. One individual kept treating a new boss like an old boss. The result was the new boss asked him to leave. What he really wanted was to get the "good old days" back. With each new boss, brand yourself as a team player. Speak with your new boss about ways you can contribute to accomplishing the emerging strategic goals of the department and organization. Make sure you deliver on your promise. Never bad mouth or say negative things about a new boss or strategy. News travels fast and bad news travels faster.

6. **Become a political animal.** Many derailed executives say that in retrospect they realize they just did not play the political game. Learn to see how things get done in organizations. Read the book, *The Secret Handshake*, by Kathleen Kelley Reardon. The book is helpful in describing political style and evaluating the political landscape of your organization. You can also draw a political “sociogram.” This is a series of boxes and circles that are connected much like an organizational chart, but the guiding questions are: who owns the power, who makes decisions, and what are the different constituent groups. Not only is this exercise fun, but it will also give you a clear idea of how the power dynamics are working within your organization.
7. **Build internal and external network relationships.** One strategy is to list people within your organization that you do not know but need to know. Take them to lunch. Get to know them. Get to know their goals. Find ways of keeping in touch and helping them achieve their goals. Emerson wrote an interesting essay on “the law of compensation:” *the more you do for others, the more comes back to you*. Make sure you find ways to give to others and leverage the reality of the law of compensation.
8. **Brand yourself by design not default.** Everyone in an organization is branded in some way. Try to identify your brand and how people perceive you. Spend time thinking about how you can improve your brand. If you are seen as negative, work on being positive. If you are branded as a rebel, learn the skills of being part of a team. Also, think about your future brand and work on your behaviors, interactions, dress, and even ethics to make sure your brand is well-designed and does not happen by default.

Best regards,

Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D.