



# Staying relevant and advancing your career

I coach current and up-and-coming leaders from all levels within an organization to help them be more effective in their roles. Recently, I received an email from a safety professional early in his career and from a country that doesn't have the same degree of support for workplace safety, or oppor-

tunities to professionally develop oneself or many career opportunities in general. Competition for employment is fierce. He asked, "Please, what can I do to stay relevant in the midst of this situation, and how can I advance myself career-wise?"

With this single important question, I

could tell he was on the right track toward success, as he already understood the two most important things to a successful career: relevancy and personal, continuous investment in advancing yourself. Moreover, this question hit close to home. When I turned 16, my father told me something I've never forgotten and which has become my work ethic. He said, "Shawn, no one will ever owe you a job. You have to show and demonstrate new value every day." As a business owner and consultant hired to coach and advise all levels of leaders, I have yet to find anything that contradicts my father's advice.

Most companies today no longer have well laid out career path progression plans or steps for individuals within to see how they can advance their careers, and few take on the responsibility to professionally develop employees. It is up to each individual to stay relevant and be perceived as value-adding. If you don't continuously improve, others will, and you will no longer be perceived as relevant.

Relevancy, applicability, connection and pertinence: How well are you creating the perception of these with the people you are trying to serve and who employ you? To be relevant, you need to know your audience, what they need and want, what they are interested in and thus how to add value to them. To personally and professionally advance yourself, you have to know where you are going and what success would look like for you in your career. Otherwise, what do you focus on in order to advance yourself, the perception others have of you and your value?

We teach that the perception of safety professionals within an organization should advance from grunt (performing the tasks for others such as paperwork, sometimes perceived as "busy-work") to guardian (overseeing grunts and working to help operational leaders own safety improvement efforts and overall strategy) to guru (offering counsel to shape business

and individual decisions that drive performance and culture within organizations).

As I coached this individual, the following are some of the initial questions I shared to help: What type of safety professional do you want to be? What aspect of safety do you want to focus on? What industry do you want to work in and add value to? What books are you reading relevant to safety, but also relevant to the interests of the businesspeople who will employ you? Do you understand the business you are serving, and can you speak the business language? How are you networking and building relationships with people both inside and outside your area, city and country? How are you offering value to others so they see you have value to provide?

**To personally and professionally advance yourself, you have to know where you are going and what success would look like.**

You need to manage how you are perceived, as this will either be a catalyst or a constraint. If you want to be perceived as an expert offering extreme value to those employing you, year after year, what are you doing to create and continuously improve that perception?

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