# **10 Career-killers To Avoid**

#### **Workers can unintentionally sabotage their careers**

To help IT professionals become more aware of potential career blunders, Computerworld spoke with John M. McKee, president of BusinessSuccessCoach.net, a Thousand Oaks, Calif.-based career coaching and consulting firm. McKee is the author of author of *Career Wisdom: 101 Proven Strategies to Ensure Workplace Success*. Here are 10 career-killers, with McKee's advice about how to recognize and avoid them.

**1. Failing to have a life plan.** "This is the No. 1 biggest mistake that I run into with my clients. I work with a number of clients in IT, many of whom are in C-level roles. A life plan is a business plan, in the same way that a company leader creates an annual business plan for what the future is going to bring from a corporate perspective. Three life aspects to focus on include one's career, personal and family, and financial goals. If someone has a good title and a satisfactory personal and family life but they're struggling to make monthly payments, then they're not going to be satisfied. They should look at those aspects for themselves. They should look at the competitive environment, the job marketplace and whether their skill set is current. If someone can replace them because they're cheaper, faster or better, it's no different than looking at your IT requirements. Most importantly, this plan should be written down. Only 14% of people do that. 86% are putting their futures in the hands of others. It's not a good place to be in."

**2. Not keeping your skills current.** "The business landscape is ever-changing and there is more demand for jobs than supply. Not staying on par with colleagues and those vying for your job will be a death knell. With individuals able to do the same work that someone is doing anywhere in the world today and the prospect that organizations will chase skill sets around the world, if you're not up to date with your skill sets in IT, you're significantly at risk of being replaced. This includes the need to stay up to date in technical skills, business skills and soft skills."

**3. Failing to deliver results.** "Winners in business know that it's all about accountability. Those who harbor a sense of entitlement for simply having put forth effort, irrespective of the results of those efforts, are guaranteed to fall by the wayside. It's very easy in a corporation to believe that becoming more efficient will translate into becoming more effective. So becoming preoccupied with creating greater efficiency may be a short-term solution to helping the bottom line, but it doesn't help the organization to grow. I rarely see people get the big bonuses in the organization simply because they understand the policies and procedures of the company. It has to do with delivering the goods. You have to know your customers, know what your marketplace wants. Great leadership is all about asking questions."

**4. Confusing efficiency with effectiveness.** "Those who think that communicating via e-mail replaces the need to actually talk with people around them fail to recognize the importance of personally connecting with others in today's highly automated and technological environment. Communicating in person whenever possible is imperative for success-seekers."

**5. Believing that you are irreplaceable.** "There is no room for divas in the workplace. As soon as you convince yourself that you and only you can do the job 'right,' your star will surely start to fall. In any organization, any person can have a good couple of ideas, a good couple of years and a few successes under their belts and they start to think that the company can't do without them. They start to sit on their laurels and find themselves in greater jeopardy of losing their jobs. Comparing notes with others in the organization helps keep people grounded. It helps anyone in the organization to have different trusted advisers' perspective on what's going on and how their performance is being viewed."

**6. Knowing all the answers.** "This old adage remains true: Knowledge is power. Professing to know it all can readily stagnate a career. Winners remain unceasingly interested in learning new ideas and approaches. Asking a lot of questions is a hallmark of great leaders and great managers. When one stops asking questions and starts believing they've seen it all, they are devaluing the amount of change going on in the world today."

**7. Surrounding yourself with "brown-nosers."** "Losers like having people tell them how smart they are, whether or not it's true, while successful managers and other professionals accept and encourage intelligence and creativity in others. If you're constantly being told by your peers that everything you're doing is wonderful, you need a better group of advisers. If your supervisor believes that you're doing a great job, that's terrific -- it's probably reflecting well on him or her."

**8. Forgetting to give credit to others.** "Losers inappropriately take full credit for positive events despite the help or input received by others, while winners give credit where credit is due. Losers inevitably reap what they sow. If your boss is a real pumpkinhead, you can probably get away with this a few times. But if you keep doing this, chances are your boss is going to catch on that you're a glory hog."

**9. Failing to self-promote.** "Bragging is one thing, but letting colleagues throughout your industry know of your success through case studies, promotion bulletins, or other such tools is quite another. Losers often fail to recognize the importance of letting others know about their successes, or go about it in entirely the wrong way. In today's disconnected business world, where many people work at a distance from their supervisors, it's important to let your boss and leadership know your contributions and that you are a valuable asset. This could be as simple as providing your supervisor with an e-mail once a week to inform him about what you're working on and your progress. By doing that, when decisions are made for promotions or job transfers, you're more likely to get what's due to you."

**10. Losing perspective.** "Intuitive businesspeople recognize that, despite their best attempts to do everything right, sometimes they approach roadblocks and seek the advice and perspective of a respected friend, colleague or even a business coach. Those who fail to recognize their shortcomings are destined for the unemployment line. It has everything to do with forgetting the reasons why their business exists, why they're in this business, and what it is they intended to accomplish when they entered this industry. You need to be excited about what it is you're doing, and you need to put more enthusiasm into what it is you're doing. If you're not looking forward to getting out of bed in the morning, you're working on a downward trend -- you just don't know it yet."

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