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The IdeaBridge White Paper Series:
The Methods of Business Champions



THE METHODS OF BUSINESS CHAMPIONS

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Summary

Only about 10 to 15 percent of all people will outperform their peers by a wide enough margin to rise to the “Champion” status. Subtle, day-to-day behaviors of these Champions make astounding differences in their production and work-effectiveness. But getting superior performance out of all your employees, instead of relying on just one or two, is the best method for lasting profits. Boosting the productivity of your entire team, not just depending on one or two Champions to carry the team, is the key to consistent success. (Excerpts from “How to be a Star at Work” by Robert E. Kelly, Random House)

You can raise the collective productivity of your team by teaching these proven productivity-enhancement secrets of the Champion performers. Champions share these productivity-enhancing strategies:

- Initiative
- Networking
- Credibility
- Followership
- Teamwork
- Organizational Savvy
- Show-and-Tell
- The Critical Path
- Leadership
- Productivity

“Initiative” Means

Champions proactively look for and seize opportunities to go the extra mile for the good of the department or Company. It is one of the important habits one must look for in new hires. When looking for Champions, narrow your list to those individuals you would turn to if you had to staff an important new project, if you had a crisis that needed a special project team, or if you had to delegate a critical task that had “career-implications” if not completed perfectly.

Taking immediate, decisive action is the acid test of initiative.

True initiative, as practiced by a Champion, always ends up benefiting someone else – a group of coworkers, the department, or the entire Company. It’s true that Champions often end up benefiting themselves in the process, but their primary emphasis tends to be on someone other than themselves.



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Champions Have The Initiative To:

- Seek out responsibility above and beyond the expected job description.
- Undertake extra efforts for the benefit of coworkers or the larger team.
- Stick tenaciously to an idea or project and follow it through to successful implementation.
- Willingly assume some personal risk in taking-on new responsibilities.
- Work late nights, early mornings, even weekends if it's necessary to get the project done on time.

“Networking” Means

Proactively developing relationships and regular dialogue with knowledge experts around the Company who can help you complete critical-path tasks. Champions readily share their knowledge with those who need it. The networking goal is to develop relationships before one needs to call upon them for help.

Champion networking requires learning how to build, maintain and operate within a group of experts who share knowledge for mutual benefit.

“Credibility” Means

Credibility Champions also follow the initiative process by working to develop a reputation for doing work that adds value to the Company. They develop a track record for keeping an open mind on aspects of their work and seeking the opinions of others. The credibility Champions are those whom managers can consistently count on to deliver work of superior quality in a timely fashion. Because Champions have worked hard at building their credibility, they are called-upon more often when the boss has a critical task or project.

Followership

As a Champion follower, one is perfectly comfortable to work cooperatively with a leader to accomplish the Company's goals, despite personality, style or workplace differences. Champion followers are actively engaged in helping the Company succeed while exercising independent, critical judgment of goals, tasks, and methods.

Teamwork Means

A Champion's goals are to contribute to, rather than compete with, their colleagues, to earn their trust and respect through selfless assistance and teamwork. Champions check their egos at the door.

Being a positive contributor to the group's dynamics: helping everyone feel part of the team, dealing with conflict, and readily assisting others in solving their problems...that's teamwork.



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Organizational Savvy

Some people are passed-over because they lack an essential ability to maneuver effectively in a workplace fraught with competing interests, established policies and procedures, demanding customers and other sensitive issues. Organizational savvy becomes its own distinct skill – the ability to manage competing workplace interests to promote an idea, resolve conflicts, and most important, to achieve our goals.

Champions quickly master the etiquette of their department and the Company. They navigate the competing interests in an organization, to promote cooperation, address conflicts, and get things done. Champions learn when to avoid conflicts and when to meet them head-on; knowing how to make allies out of potential roadblocks or nay Sayers.

Show-and-Tell

Champions master the ability to deliver a message to a targeted audience, to persuade listeners to accept the message, and to be proactive in deflecting criticism, some call this “show-and-tell.”

Champions often start out their bigger, higher-level initiatives in smaller, more private settings. They want to nurture the idea before it hits the harsh public spotlight. If it turns out to be a clunker, they can abort quickly.

Once they do go public with an initiative, Champions seek support from others. This commitment often means the difference between success and failure.

The Critical Path

Champions learn to evaluate tasks or an initiative by how well it improves the “critical path” – the line that moves all the efforts of employees and managers toward a delighted customer, where, in turn, profitability and increased shareholder value are sent back down the path. For example, sales and manufacturing are closer to the critical path than the company’s cafeteria. Initiatives that are closer to the critical path are generally better linked to increased profits.

Champions find out what the critical path is for the Company or their department and get on it by learning how to add value.

The first step to Champion-quality self-management is learning to work primarily on those activities directly tied to the critical path of the Company. Your success in doing this depends on a deep understanding of what our critical path is and where you should be positioned on it to contribute in the most productive way to your department and the Company.

The critical path is the most direct, essential, value-added route that can be plotted from the employee, to the delighted customer. Critical path work ensures the Company’s profitability and sustained success in the marketplace.

Profitability, in its most fundamental sense, results from efforts either to reduce costs or to increase revenues. No matter which department you are in, these are good places to enter the critical path. Determine how your efforts can affect costs, revenues, or overall profitability, and try to stay on that path.



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Leadership

Peers will go along only if they believe a member of the group who wants to lead is acting in their interest as much as his or her own. Accomplishing this requires the kind of time-consuming interaction that many people believe is a waste of precious leadership time. The leader who bonds with coworker followers by slogging through the daily project-grind and sharing late-night pizzas while meeting deadlines earns more loyalty and credibility than even the most charismatic boss.

Productivity

Average performers often get confused between effort and results. They will say that they are working just as hard as the Champions, but they miss the point.

Champions gauge whether they are being productive by asking the following:

- Do I add value to my colleagues, the critical path that leads to the organization's goals, and the Company's bottom line?
- Do I consistently spot issues before they become problems and make sure that something gets done about them?
- Do I always get work done on time and with high quality?
- Do I consistently delight both my external and internal customers?
- Do I succeed at working across organizational boundaries and building bridges so that all the Company's resources can be applied to customers or problems effectively?
- Do I keep my manager informed about work progress and how it will impact other people/projects?