

## **10 Ways to Sabotage Your Career**

If you're a "Seinfeld" fan, maybe you recall how Elaine lost all credibility with her staff when they watched her horribly weird dancing at a company function.

Behaving foolishly at a company function is one way to hurt your career. As an employee, you embody the company and its image. If you damage that image, your years of education and hard work can go down the drain, and your career can hit the skids. But there are plenty of other ways you can sabotage your career. Following are just a few:

### **1. Rotten Attitude**

Nobody wants to be around a negative person. If you whine and complain about everything, you'll soon find you're persona non grata around the office. Needless to say, gossiping, back-stabbing and putting down co-workers or your boss are sure ways to alienate everyone around you. And they won't be around you for long!

### **2. Social Isolation**

You may think putting your nose to the grindstone and doing good work is all that's required to ensure your career advancement. Wrong! If you're a no-show at workplace social events, you'll never get to know people who might have helpful contacts. You'll be missing out on the possibility of advancement, or even employment in a different company or field, if that's what you want. Or at the very least, friendships in the department where you work.

### **3. Failing to Deliver**

If you call a pizza parlor that promises delivery within 30 minutes, and the delivery never arrives, how do you feel? Angry, betrayed? Sure. That's how your manager and co-workers feel if you promise to deliver some work by a certain date or time, and you don't deliver it. Project completion depends on everyone on the team delivering what they say they will, on time. Unreliability definitely hurts your chances to advance in your career – or even to keep your job.

### **4. Coming to Work Late**

If you consistently come in to work late, people will notice. Especially people looking to downsize the workforce at your company. When you're habitually late, it gives the impression that your job isn't important to you, that you don't care if you inconvenience others you work with, or that you think the rule about starting time applies to everyone but you, because you're special. All of these impressions will make you unpopular with your peers and your boss.

## **5. Procrastinating**

Do you put off projects 'til the last minute, then end up turning in something late or incomplete? Whether you're disorganized or just plain lazy, the result is the same: you're failing to do a good job. Projects have deadlines, and you have a responsibility to your co-workers and clients to get your part done correctly and on time. Procrastinating is a great way to alienate others and create speed bumps on your career path, if not total blockades.

## **6. Hogging the Spotlight**

It takes teamwork to get most things done. You will be heartily resented if you hog the spotlight by claiming credit for any successes your team creates. And your boss soon will suspect you're a fraud and a phony. Accept the right amount of credit gracefully, and give others their due. Being generous with praise (though not falsely) will get you much farther than being a credit hog.

## **7. Being Dishonest**

Everyone makes mistakes. When you do, the cowardly thing to do is to blame someone else or the position of Jupiter, or deny you made a mistake at all, even when it becomes quite obvious to everyone that you did. Be honest and admit the mistake as soon as you discover it. Being dishonest brands you as untrustworthy, and you can imagine where that gets you – nowhere fast.

## **8. Burning Bridges**

If you're leaving a job with bad feelings, you might be tempted to tell the boss and your co-workers exactly what you think of them. But for your career's sake, don't. You never know who those people know, and who THEY know, who might hurt your chances for future employment or advancement. If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.

## **9. Losing Ground**

These days, technology changes with lightning speed. That changes processes and workflows. If you're not up-to-date on the skills you need to deal with the changes, you're losing ground, career-wise. In the old days, someone could work at the same job for decades with little need to re-train. Not today. Re-education is a career-long activity, if you want to continue your career.

## **10. Dressing All Wrong**

If you work in a “business casual” office, but you wear flip-flops, shorts and tank tops, you’re going to look – and be – a fish out of water. And perhaps soon, a person out of a job. Look around and see what your peers wear to work, and do thou likewise. Unless, that is, you really do want to sabotage your career.

So here are 10 ways you can sabotage your career, if that’s what you want. But if you don’t, keep in mind that you need to be professional, honest, hard-working and socially well-adjusted, as well as properly dressed, to keep from sabotaging your career. Do the right things, and see your career blossom.

## **Do I Really Need to Send a Cover Letter with My Resume?**

The answer is an emphatic “Yes!”

But, you say, “My resume has everything in it employers need to know.” Wrong! It only lists your job titles and employers, your responsibilities, and your accomplishments. But it doesn’t explain how all that qualifies you for this specific position.

Sending a resume to a potential employer without a cover letter is like walking up to a complete stranger on the street and handing them your resume. Without a cover letter, you haven’t said anything to convince the employer to read your resume.

Your cover letter gives the potential employer a taste of your personality and attitude, spells out specifically how your skills and experience are relevant to the position, and shows you’re not only familiar with the company’s mission, but can help them fulfill it.

A cover letter is the first step toward getting that interview you’re requesting. So put your best foot forward with a great letter!

### **Write a Great Cover Letter. But First...**

#### **Step One: Check Your Resume**

Make sure your resume is current. Does it include every position you’ve held in the last 10 years (if you’ve been working that long), the responsibilities you had, and the achievements that would interest an employer in your field?

Your generic resume won’t be the one you send to every employer. You will want to tweak your basic resume to position yourself most effectively for specific employers. The following targeting tips for your cover letter will help you customize your resume, too.

#### **Step Two: Research Your Target Company**

In archery, you aim for the bull’s-eye. It’s the same in your job search. To target your message effectively, you need to find out what the company is all about. The company’s website will help you learn about its mission, organizational structure, values and culture, and its clients or customers.

Try to find the name of the manager of the department you hope to join, or the name of the Human Resources person. It’s much more effective to address your cover letter to a specific person than “To Whom It May Concern” or “Dear sir or madame.”

### Step Three: Connect the Dots

Think about how your skills and experience connect to specific experiences, attributes or abilities the employer is asking for in the ad or job post. When you connect the dots, you create a picture of you as a valuable asset to the department or company.

### **Writing the Letter**

Your cover letter will consist of one page filled with three or four carefully crafted, interesting paragraphs, in the following order:

#### Paragraph One:

Open with “Dear Mr./Ms. So-And-So.” Then, in two or three sentences, introduce yourself, tell them what position you’re applying for and why you’re contacting them (Don’t bother with how you learned about the opening, as in, “I’m writing in response to your CareerBuilder ad on January 10.”). Explain why you’re interested in working for this particular company.

#### Paragraph Two:

The purpose of your letter is to sell this employer on the idea of asking you in for an interview. So in the second paragraph, state your relevant experience and show how well it fits the employer’s requirements. Offer your two or three strong selling points and examples. Show enthusiasm, but without going overboard.

#### Paragraph Three:

In a few sentences, point the employer to your resume, indicate your availability for an interview, and provide your contact information (phone, e-mail). End with a positive statement about your desire to discuss the opportunity further, at a time that’s convenient for them, and thank them for their consideration.

#### Conclusion:

You can close with “Sincerely,” “Yours truly,” or “Regards.” If your letter is on paper, leave four blank lines and sign your name. Some people think it’s better to sign in blue ink, so it doesn’t look like a copy. If you’re sending an e-mail, leave a couple of blank lines, then type your name.

## **After Writing the Letter**

### How's Your Spelling?

Be sure to proofread your letter before sending it. SpellCheck helps, but it's not foolproof. It ignores correctly spelled words, even if they're not the correct words to use in a particular context. For example, if you wrote "lion's liar" instead of "lion's lair," SpellCheck wouldn't notice the mistake.

### Check Sentence Construction

Have you used active voice throughout, or did you slip into passive voice? Active voice is, "In this job, I created a system for..." and passive voice would be, "A system was created that..." You want to be the actor, not a passive observer. So use active voice.

### Strike the Right Tone

You should sound objective and professional, but not stuffy. Friendly and upbeat, but not casual. Words like "heretofore" will make you sound too professorial. "My BFF" or other slang expressions will make you sound immature and flippant. Stick with simple, clear, non-colloquial terminology.

### How's Punctuation?

If you're unsure about the difference between "their" and "they're," or "its" and "it's," check a punctuation guide online or at the library. Be sure you know where and how to use commas and dashes, too.

### Use the Correct Format

Whether you're sending a letter on paper or attaching a Word file to an e-mail, you will need to use a standard business letter format. You can find examples of block style, modified block style, and others online.

## **Following Up**

How long should you wait after sending your cover letter and resume before following up with the employer? That's hard to say.

Remember that managers and HR people get buried in applications, and it takes time to sort them into "go" and "no" piles. Then it takes more time for someone to call and schedule interviews. You want to show you're interested, but you don't want to annoy the employer or HR person. A couple of weeks should be enough time to wait before calling. Use your own judgment as to when or if you should call again.

With an up-to-date, targeted resume and a well-written, compelling cover letter, you will improve your chance of getting an interview for that job you really want.  
Good luck!

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## **Get in gear and take control of your career!**

You have checklists for grocery items, errands, and even car maintenance. But what about a checklist for career maintenance? If the last time you had a career checklist was in college, it's time to make a new one. In fact, you should review and revise your goals and action steps at least once a year.

To be prepared for job changes, responsibility changes, and real-life changes, here are four to-dos that **MUST** be on your annual checklist.

### **1. (First Gear) Revise Your Resume**

You may feel secure in your job, but the situation could change in a flash. There might be a general layoff. You may get a new boss whose personality clashes with yours. Or your company may suddenly file for Chapter 11 and cut your position.

Whatever should happen, you need to think of your resume as an ongoing project. Reviewing your resume once a year, or more frequently, will keep it fresh, because you can add new job titles and notable achievements as they happen. With a current resume in hand, you'll be prepared to get a running start on a job search.

### **2. (Second Gear) Evaluate Your Current Position**

In an ideal world, you would gain experience, and your career would automatically move in the right direction. But it usually doesn't happen that way. You might find you don't like the job or field you're in as much as you used to. Maybe you become dissatisfied because you're not advancing in your company as quickly as you would like. From time to time, you need to stop and think seriously about your career. Not just about what you're doing now, but what you want to be doing one or two jobs from now.

Here are some of the questions you might ask yourself:

- Am I still learning and growing professionally?
- What longer-term threats and opportunities could affect my industry, my company, and me?
- Can I see myself working for this company in a few years? If so, in what capacity? If not, why not? And what alternatives can I imagine?

### **3. (Third Gear) Develop a Career Plan**

You can't control everything that might affect your career, but you can decide where you'd like to go in the future. And if you can do that, you can create an action plan for getting there.

"Having a career plan doesn't mean it will all happen immediately," says Laura Hill, founder of Careers in Motion, a Manhattan-based career coaching firm. "But it's good over time, since it allows you to direct your career."

- A workable career plan begins with an honest, in-depth self-assessment. What are your strengths and weaknesses in your current job? What qualities and skills do you have that would be attractive to a company in your field? What measurable achievements can you talk about? What abilities or interests of yours could be assets in the career you'd like to move into? While doing a thorough self-assessment, you may identify interesting career options you'd never thought of before.

- Once you've done your self-assessment, you're ready to create a career plan. It should start with your main goal, to be achieved in the next one, three or five years (You decide the time frame.). Then, you need to identify stepping stones along the way; a target date for reaching each one, and specific actions you're going to take to do it.

Don't make your actions vague and open-ended, like "Read classified ads online every day." Make them specific and goal-oriented: "This week, I'll use LinkedIn to research three companies where I might want to work, talk with people in their \_\_\_\_\_ departments, and set informational interviews by \_\_\_\_\_(date)."

- Check off each stepping stone as you go, and remain open to new self-assessment information to see whether your main goal is still valid. Adjusting your plan as needed to reflect your current thinking is not only okay – it's absolutely necessary if you're are to remain committed to following it.

### **4. (Fourth Gear) Learn a New Skill**

Industries and technologies change fast these days. Are your skills appropriate for your current job, or the one you want in the future? If you want to remain marketable and competitive, you'll probably need to learn new ones.

If you're not sure what new skills you need to learn, ask others in your job field. Then take the initiative to teach yourself by attending in-house training seminars, Webinars, and outside classes.

To summarize:

- Do your annual resume review so you won't have to spend time revising it extensively if you need to jump into a job search quickly.
- Do a thorough, honest self-assessment to help you identify skills and abilities that will be assets in your future career. While doing it, you may even change your ideas about the career you desire.
- Create a career plan to serve as a road map to your career goal.
- Keep your skills up-to-date to have the best chance to be interviewed and hired for the position you want.

It makes sense to plan your future, rather than gamble that fate will bring you what you want in life. Doing the things on your annual career checklist will help you plan your career, translate your plan into action steps, and move you toward the career you truly desire.