

## Overcoming Career Myopia - Affliction of Overachievers

Career myopia refers to the blinders we wear at work in order to stay focused on achieving our goals. It is a particular affliction of overachievers because success requires single-mindedness. Who hasn't grappled with an unreasonable boss, a toxic colleague or two, demanding clients, difficult vendors, demanding board members, challenging deadlines and confusing priorities? It takes a great deal of attentiveness to stay on task.

A myopic view may help us navigate our road, but it can undermine us when that road changes or shifts. Blinders remove the distractions in our peripheral vision, but also prevent us from seeing alternative routes. We speed past detours, only to reach the end of our road, look up and wonder what on earth we are to do next. We feel cut off when the time comes to consider growth options both in and outside of our current organizations.

This disconnect is the single most consistent regret I hear from my clients: They have remained so focused on their own universe of work that they are unaware of what's happening in other departments or divisions of their own companies. So when change inevitably comes, they can only react to it. They feel behind the eight ball, scrambling to reconnect with old acquaintances and urgently looking for solid ground.

Horses wear blinders to minimize distractions and go where they are told.

They don't vote on their direction. But you do!  
Career Management means taking off the blinders to see change coming and create options before you need them.

Career management is about expanding your vision so that you can create options *before* you need them. It is about seeing changes coming and responding to them proactively, without sacrificing your current performance. And that means you need additional eyes and ears: You need to be connected to others that can see and hear for you. While networking is about using names to get other names, connectivity is about developing respectful, reciprocal relationships over the long term.

### Here are ten rules to get you started.

**1. Connect to Learn.** Expand your knowledge base by learning about your industry: the trends and areas of growth and decline; the companies, people and associations that serve it; and how technology is affecting it. You may not see connections at first, but as you increase your awareness you will discover problems in new arenas—problems that you will be able to help solve. One CFO established monthly informational meetings with other CFO's in the six local divisions of her company. When she was offered a promotion that required an undesired move overseas, she was able to negotiate an alternative, local promotion to a position that she learned of through those monthly meetings.

**2. Connect for the Long Term.** Don't expect to gather all of this information in one meeting. Find people that you have something in common with and stay in touch with them. You may kiss a lot of frogs along the way, but you will find people with whom you connect. You will establish reciprocal friendships that can last a lifetime.

**3. Connect with Sincerity.** Ask people about their background, how they feel about what they do and how they got into it. Be sincerely interested, instead of worrying about being interesting. You will be amazed at the circuitous route everyone's career takes, and you will see opportunities for yourself you may have never considered.

**4. Connect with Preparation.** Try to know something about people before you interact with them. Do a little online research about their company, industry and background so that you can have an intelligent dialogue and really *be* interested.

**5. Connect...and Stay Connected.** Don't follow up in a way that makes you seem like a stalker. Try to determine what the other person is interested in and then share information they might care about. Ask if you can follow up—get permission.

**6. Connect Deep, Not Broad.** You don't need to have 'relationships' with everyone you meet. It's far better to have a few people with whom you share a depth of knowledge instead of collecting hundreds of business cards from people you know nothing about.

**7. Connect with Interest.** People often tell me they have no time to build and nurture relationships. But it doesn't seem like an effort if you are doing something you like to do at the same time. One of my clients worked as a headhunter for technology companies but had a passion for art. She created time to take an art class and connect with people that shared her interest. Two years later, she is a retained search professional for museums and art galleries—a move she made in a Saturday morning painting class.

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that came about through the connections

**8. Connect Outside Your Comfort Zone.** Don't forget to connect with people in industries related to yours. If you work for a financial services firm, attend programs with the companies that service your firm. This is how a corporate development professional in investment banking made the move to sales director for an international marketing and PR firm.

**9. Connect with Reciprocity.** If someone shares information with you or helps you in any way, be sure to let them know. And keep an eye out for a way to reciprocate. If you can't figure out any thing at all, ask!

**10. Connect with Self-Awareness.** You can gather all the information in the world, but if you don't know your own skills or the kinds of problems you like to solve, you will get lost in a morass of data. You need self-awareness to interpret the road signs your connections reveal.

In conclusion...DO NOT WAIT TO GET CONNECTED! Change is inevitable—for industries (think dot-bomb), companies (think consolidations and rightsizings), and people (when the thrill is gone, move on). You may as well be the one to chart your own course. Remove the blinders you may be wearing, say farewell to career myopia and go create the professional destiny you want!

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