



Differentiating Yourself in the Workplace – What Is Your Differentiator?

Standing out

As unemployment rates jump to 60-year highs, now is the time to differentiate yourself from others in the workplace. Unemployment is at 14.7% and while this is concerning for many, today should be the time you deliver your best. Companies are looking for people to demonstrate leadership and help unite teams during this time of hardship. Stepping up and differentiating yourself will help advance your career and open numerous opportunities. Recognition may not be immediate; however, it will likely be delivered in the future as you become known for making an impact.

How do you shine? What are you known for?



What do you want to be known for?

The first step in differentiating yourself is 1) Pinpoint your strengths and differentiate your performance. 2) Next, determine what you want to be known for. When your name is spoken, what are people likely to associate you with? Are you known for the way you nailed a critical project, solved a systemic business problem, led a start-up operation or a major fix-it project? Identifying your key strengths and what you want to be known for is an essential step you will need to take in building your brand in the workplace.



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Projecting Your Brand

“True success lies in knowing your weaknesses and playing to your strengths.”

- Sophia Amoruso

What are your standout strengths?

Once you have identified your standout strengths, it is incumbent upon you to utilize them to your fullest potential. You can use the range of your abilities to set yourself apart. It is common for leaders to possess several strengths such as organization, empathy, and effective communication. Now that you have identified your top strengths, it is time to demonstrate them. If you find you are in a role that does not give you the opportunity to leverage your strengths, there are definite actions you can take to make this happen. After you have a few of these written down, the next step is finding an opportunity.

1. Proactively ask your manager for a development discussion

It can only help to have your direct-line manager be aware of the strengths you bring to the table so that he/she may consider them as future work is assigned. Simply being aware that you are interested in volunteering for a task force or work on a critical project will increase the likelihood of your manager giving you that great assignment. Be willing to let your interests and your passion be known.

2. Solicit a mentor(s)

Mentors can help more than people realize. Not only will you be able to learn from him/her, but you will build a relationship with someone who will have first-hand knowledge of your strengths, development needs, and major accomplishments. Consider proactively soliciting 1 or 2 mentors in your organization and meet with them on a bi-monthly basis. These mentors can not only shed some light on how to

navigate the organization or build out a skill, but they can be your best advocates in communicating how you stand out.

3. Volunteer for a project/task force

Think about current initiatives that are being launched and volunteer to join the team and offer to take on a major role. Having leadership roles can also be a powerful way to distinguish yourself. It is a double-edge sword as the project must succeed under your leadership or your name will be associated with the wrong thing.

4. Proactively ask for feedback

Most employees will perform a role as part of a project team and move onto the next project upon completion. Take the time to conduct a post-mortem discussion following the dissolution of the task force and completion of the project and ask for personal feedback on what you did well and what you could have improved upon.

Proactively ask both peers, your manager, and your executive sponsor(s) for feedback on what you could have done more of/less of and apply it to your next project. Being self-aware will enable you to further leverage your strength and continuously improve. This ongoing reflection and self-improvement will also ensure you maintain your edge

5. Offer to help others

While setting aside time to improve yourself is essential, it is still very important to help others succeed in the process. Being seen as a team player and one who is willing to help others succeed to achieve team success – not just solo success will set you apart.

What's Your Differentiator?

Why Is Differentiation Important?

Companies depend upon thousands of people coming together around a common purpose and vision. While alignment is critical, success also depends upon associates bringing their best talents to the job. Once you are known for a specific talent, initiative/accomplishment, others want to pull you into their teams, include you in high visibility initiatives, and involve you in solving strategic challenges that require the best and brightest. You can be exceptional at your trade; however, if no one knows you because you have done little to network or self-promote or you are in a remote location – you can easily be lost in the system. It is the reason you do not want to rely exclusively on your manager to be the only one who advocates for you. It is incumbent upon you to tell your story. While you must walk a fine line in communicating your successes – it is essential that others know what you are capable of.

Tell Your Story

Expand Networking

Intentional networking can go a long way in helping you to communicate what you are working on and successes you've had.

Write a White Paper

You may want to consider writing a white paper on a best practice or a significant project you worked on. By documenting you and your team's journey, you are able to help others replicate the successes.

Present to Other Departments

You can use this information to create a PowerPoint deck that can be presented to other internal leaders or teams so that further benchmarking is possible. What key take-aways can they use to improve their own departmental results.

Sharing your story ensures that there is maximum learning across the organization and gives you visibility in new ways. You are actually managing your own brand as you get out in front of various audiences.

No Substitutes for Strong Performance

All these suggestions presume that the projects you are working on reflect your strengths such as commitment to excellence, teamwork, communication, leadership, etc. When you identify your towering strengths, your performance on these various teams must be consistent. Once the spotlight is on you and your talents – it becomes a double-edge sword. The good news is that “the spotlight is on” and the bad news is that “the spotlight is on.” Make the most of these opportunities



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Summary

- Companies are seeking leaders who step up in difficult times. Think about how you can differentiate yourself.
- Use your strengths in a major project or fix a broken business process or lead a startup.
- Continue your networking efforts. Having more advocates can only help you.

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