

The Top 3%

Our research shows that only 3% of professionals have a career of sustained success, what are they doing differently than the rest of us?

In the launch of our book “Make it Work” we offered readers the chance to complete an assessment of their level of career fulfillment, or what we called career wealth. Over the years this assessment has been completed online by thousands of professionals at all levels and across industries.



The Career Wealth Indicator provides each person who completes the survey a score between 0-50. The higher the score, the more fulfilled and successful the person is at that moment. Specifically, people who score over 40 are experiencing a strong career of fulfillment and success. Those scoring between 20-40 are experiencing a mediocre career, and those scoring below 20 are experiencing some significant challenges in their level of career satisfaction and success.

Of the thousands who have completed the Career Wealth indicator, only 9% have assessed above a score of 40. And, of those in that 9% who have completed the survey multiple times, most have not re-assessed above 40 – so their score above 40 was a transitory or temporary state that was not sustained.

Based on our analysis, only 3% of people stay above 40! What are they doing that the rest of us aren't?

Well, there are three things they are clearly and consistently doing . . .

1. Own their career

Every person who has achieved sustained career success has made the critical decision to own their career. Many times, they can identify the time and place they decided to make their own choices and take control of their destiny. One example of this is related by Carly Fiorina.

Carly Fiorina

Now Chairman and CEO of Hewlett-Packard, Corporation, Carly relates the moment she took control of her destiny. After graduating from college, Carly responded to the urgings of her father who was a judge and entered Law School at UCLA. On the surface this would appear to be a great career decision for an ambitious young person. However, she now states that she was “miserable”, and that she was only attending law school to fulfill her father's wishes. Then on a visit home during her first semester Carly states, “I can tell you exactly which shower tile I

*was staring at in my parents' bathroom when it hit me like a bolt of lightning: It's my life. I can do what I want. It was an epiphany for me. . . I got out of the shower. And I walked downstairs and said, 'I quit.'” (Source: “*Backfire*”, Copyright 2003, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. page 38). The rest is history. In the months after taking ownership of her life, Carly found and aligned her passions with her career. Two decades after that defining moment she was heading up a 72-billion-dollar company as the most senior female corporate executive in history.*

People who have achieved sustained career success across every occupation echo Carly’s experience. From the Billionaire entrepreneur and owner of the Dallas Mavericks Mark Cuban, to George Bush Jr. and Bill Clinton, they all point to a time in which they chose to be the primary creator of their lives, and stop living the life someone else, or society, expected.

2. Know themselves and their passion

The story of Carly Fiorina illustrates the second thing that the Top 3% do – they know what they love and need, what they are passionate about, and are unyielding in making it their career. In our soon to be released book, *Don’t Dread Monday!* we outline a concept called “Career Core Needs.” Each of us has a few core needs that need to be met for us to be engaged and at our best. Knowing your self is also knowing your passion. If you want to grow as a person and start living the life you always dreamt of, the first step is always to know who you really are, what makes you tick, and getting it met in your daily work, is core to your success.

3. Focus on the work, not the title

Organizations and the larger world of work are constantly defining success in terms of status, money and levels of prestige. At the core of it is a focus on “title.” We often call this the “title syndrome.” This condition came into focus when having a performance conversation with a program coordinator early in my career. After discussion, it became apparent that her basic belief was that career satisfaction would come almost solely from being promoted. The substance and nature of her work didn’t matter; it was the title and money that would signify to her and others that she had reached career success and was fulfilled. In further conversations with members of my staff, I found that they were in about the same place – wanting and waiting for promotions to achieve career fulfillment. This was the attraction--the promotions they were waiting for--that they were willing to move to new organizations and locations to find.

We have found this is an unfulfilling approach to work where you are left chasing the elusive title, and if/when achieved, we are left wanting something more – it wasn’t what it was cracked up to be.

In most organizations, the formal career planning and compensation systems are based upon the assumption that bigger titles, fatter paychecks, and more strokes from the boss are all that is needed to motivate people. There is nothing innately wrong with titles, money and recognition; however, if that is the only way people are motivated, it underestimates the needs that will unleash the power of people’s spirit and passions.

Those in the top 3% don't chase the title. The title often arrives, but it is a byproduct of doing what they love.

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Adapted from the soon to be released book "Don't Dread Monday!"

CMP is a talent and transition firm in the business of developing people and organizations across the full talent life cycle – from talent acquisition and leadership development, to organization development and career transition support.