

## Tips for landing the job - and keeping it

### National authors' warnings on toxic mistakes

BY DEVORAH BEN-DAVID  
Special Correspondent

**S**afely navigating one's way through the choppy waters of corporate America is one of a worker's greatest challenges today - especially when trying to hook a new job, or trying to keep the sharks away from your current job.

National author Ruth Haag offers advice through her new four-book series on workplace dynamics. Haag is a management consultant and president of Haag Environmental Company. While her company cleans up hazardous waste, she's busy helping workers avoid making toxic career moves.

"I'm a scientist who started supervising people when I was 23," Haag said. "When things didn't go right for me, I started analyzing all kinds of businesses and how people were relating to each other."

The workforce information she culled through her scientific observations led to workplace theories and directing training seminars. Her management book series includes "Taming Your Inner Supervisor," "Day to Day Supervising," "Hiring and Firing" and "Why Projects Fail."

"The biggest challenges people are facing today is that jobs are changing fast because of advances in technology and because our manufacturing jobs are getting sent overseas," Haag said. "Today's workers almost have to become a 'Jack of all Trades' so they'll be ready to move on should their job get downsized."

Job interviews give candidates the ability to shine in an employer's eyes, but you'll never dazzle potential employers if

you miss subtle cues.

"If you're interviewing for a high-level job and can tell that the lowest person in the organization is interviewing you, you need to politely ask one question," Haag said. "The question is, 'Can you tell me who the job would be reporting to and is it possible for me to meet them?'"

According to Haag, candidates should pay attention when the person conducting the interview is pushing to conclude it too rapidly. That could be a sign that the interview is tanking.

"It could be that the person really didn't like you for some reason," Haag said. "If that happens, I'd recommend saying, 'I'm sorry. I think maybe I said something that upset you. Can I correct it?'"

Arriving late for an interview is one of the top career busters, along with telling off-color jokes, fondling items in the interviewer's office and dressing inappropriately.

"Always dress like you're interviewing for the next job level, so people will envision you as fitting in," Haag said.



**Haag urges those** seeking mobility to make learning new skills an ongoing part of their career advancement strategy.

"If the company says, 'We're getting a new computer,' you should be right there asking to know more about it," she said. "You should never be the person who says, 'No. I really don't want to learn this because I don't feel that I need to learn this.'"

Sometimes workers remark that, typically, friends of the supervisor are first in line for career advancement. In a way, they are right.

"When I ask someone what

they've done so far to get promoted, they usually tell me they've taken a few classes," said Haag, who encourages employees to network while volunteering on projects. "But you

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should also make a point of meeting everyone in the company, including higher-ups."



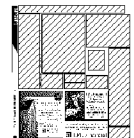
**Once you've landed** a good job, the goal is to keep it in spite of the competition. That's where John M. McKee, founder and president of BusinessSuccessCoach.net can help. He's author of "21 Ways Women in Management Shoot Themselves in the Foot" and "Career Wisdom - 101 Proven Strategies to Ensure Workplace Success."

A 30-year veteran of billion-dollar corporate boardrooms, his coaching objectives include strategies to prevent self-sabotage.

"The single, most important mistake that I see people make, which marks the beginning of career self-sabotage, is that they don't have a plan," McKee said. "It sounds deceptively simple, but you know the old adage, 'Fail to plan. Plan to fail.'"

McKee advocates living a balanced life and taking action by developing a very individualized "personal action plan."

"I always ask my clients, 'What is it that you truly want five years from now?'" McKee said. "Then we go about creat-



ing action steps that will get them there.”

Not keeping your skill sets current is another form of self-sabotage. “A lot of people ride on their past successes, but what got them there is not necessarily what’s going to keep them in the job today,” McKee said. “They need to realize that new people are coming on board all around them and new technologies are evolving. . . .”

Workplace “divas” who view themselves as “irreplaceable” to their employer end up spearing themselves in the virtual foot.

“People, who think they know all the right answers in the workplace end up stagnating their career,” McKee said. “The winners in the world are constantly focused on learning new approaches and discovering new things.”

According to McKee, losers also share another common characteristic: they take full credit for positive events and downplay the valuable contributions of others.

“These workers feel that, by telling everyone that they’ve done it all, people will give them more credit and promotions,” McKee said. “But what you find is people coalescing around that person to make sure he’ll step on the banana peel lying in the middle of the walkway.”

For similarly misguided individuals, a “nasty” rather than “nice” management style serves to alienate people.

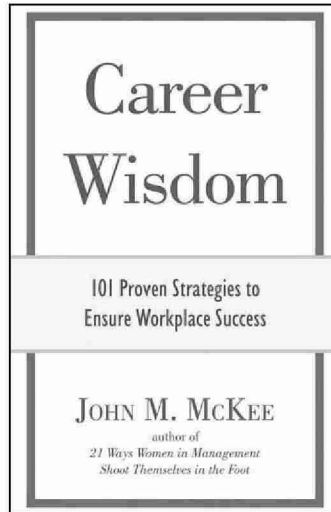
“The characteristic of a really great leader is that they know how to be nice at the same time they’re getting the job done,” said McKee.

Conversely, a real caution light flashes when a person is hesitant to self-promote. This pesky deficit proves particularly

troublesome because many workers don’t regularly interface with their bosses.

“In a highly competitive environment, particularly if you’re in an organization under siege or an industry that’s growing very quickly, it’s very important that you figure out how to communicate with your manager,” McKee said. “When raises and promotions are given out, we find women are more frequently inclined to say ‘thank you’ and men more inclined to push for a better deal.”

McKee’s company encour-



ages all people, whether looking for a job or looking to keep a job, to take a realistic look at the person they really are in terms of personality, preferences, strengths and weaknesses.

“We call it a ‘SWOT’ analysis,” said McKee. “SWOT stands for strength, weakness, opportunity and threats, so it helps people understand their marketability and viability.”

## Equity Concepts

Equity Concepts LLC  
(www.equity-concepts.com),

a Richmond business that encourages clients to invest in their career potential, offers these tips:

**Work with a mentor:** Choose a mentor who exemplifies the type of employee you want to be. This can teach you how to mentor others.

**Take the initiative:** If there are new projects, ask to join the team. Take the opportunity to both share with co-workers and learn from them.

**Dress for success:** Put your best foot forward in dress and appearance. You will feel better about yourself and people will take notice of you.

**Build positive relationships:** Remember you brought valuable knowledge from your past jobs into your new job.

**Maintain your integrity:** Always be honest and forthright. Always do what you say you are going to do. Stand by your principles and be respectful to the opinions and values of others.

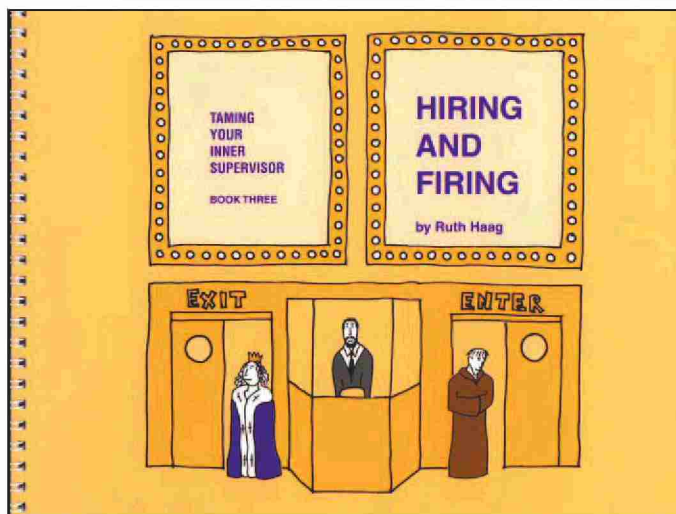
**Be a team player:** Always be a team player. Employers value the power of a unified team.

**Enjoy your job and have fun:** As an employee you will always do a better job if you truly enjoy your job. As the saying goes, “Attitude is catching.”

## Ruth Haag

Management consultant, author, and president of Haag Environmental Co. Books include:

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