Give Your Career a Boost:

25 Ways to Work Smarter, Get Better, and Be More Confident

By B.J. Schone



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Are you ready for lift-off?

One of my most important beliefs is the idea of "kaizen," the Japanese philosophy that focuses on constant improvement. It's a simple concept: If you continuously improve something, a little bit every day, it can have a great impact over time. If you apply this idea to yourself, improving just a tiny bit each day can ultimately have a great impact on your life and your career. For me, this means sharpening my skills, getting rid of behaviors that hold me back, and improving how I work with others.

In fact, this idea of constant improvement is the main reason I created HelpMeShine: I want people to become smarter, better, and more confident in their life and their career. In a nutshell, HelpMeShine allows you to get constructive feedback from your boss, co-workers, and clients on how you're doing at work. Our patent-pending algorithm looks at the feedback you've received and then suggests training resources, articles, videos, and book recommendations to help you improve. It's a great way to learn about your strengths, work on your weak areas, and gain confidence to help you advance in your career.

This eBook is full of tips and and resources to help you shine, to help you become the best version of you. I hope it gives you the boost you need.

All the best,

B.J. Schone
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San Diego, CA

P.S. - If you have feedback about this eBook (or anything else), please email me or connect with me on LinkedIn. I would love to hear from you!



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1. Get a mentor

You don't have to go it alone. Finding a mentor that can help guide you in your career can be invaluable. Ideally, try to find somebody with several years' more experience - perhaps somebody in a management role, somebody that you respect. One other approach would be to find somebody completely opposite - perhaps somebody younger, in a much different role. Explain that you would appreciate a short amount of their time and that you value their input. Frequently update them on your current position, your interests, and your ideas. Use them as a sounding board to determine if you're headed in the right direction. And don't be afraid to ask questions! Learn as much as you can from their experiences.

Resources:

- How To Find A Mentor
- 13 Tips on Finding a Mentor

> *Learn all you can from the mistakes of others. You won't have time to make them all yourself.*
>
> - Alfred Sheinwold, Writer and champion bridge player



2. Always follow-up

It's easy to make promises, but unfortunately it's also easy to forget about your commitments. Get in the habit of scheduling follow-up meetings or setting calendar reminders with your colleagues whenever you've promised something or whenever they have a deliverable to provide to you. You can create Tasks in Outlook or use a service like FollowUp or RememberTheMilk to help you remember.

Resources:

- Create Tasks in Outlook
- RememberTheMilk- Online to-do list and task management
- FollowUp.cc - Email reminder service

3. Schedule check-in meetings

Scheduling check-in meetings with your boss, your team, or even a subset of co-workers is a great way to stay current with the status of projects, expectations, and timelines. Weekly check-in meetings can generally help prevent surprises and they keep everyone on the same page. Make sure you have a clear, succinct agenda in order to keep these meetings short and productive.

If you have more than 2-3 people in the meeting, go around the table and have each person give a 1-minute update on their projects, any issues they have encountered, and anything they need. No matter how you do it, consider using check-in meetings to stay up to date.



4. Find your optimal work zone

When do you do your best work? How do you "get in the zone" to be productive? Have you ever reached a state of "flow," where you lose yourself in your work, losing all track of time? This is the sweet spot that you should try to find.

Think carefully about these questions over the course of a week:

- Do you find that you complete more tasks early in the morning or later in the day?
- What are the environmental conditions around you? Do you need zen-like peace or do you thrive amidst chaos?
- Do you need caffeine? Music? Light? Darkness?
- Do you work best when completing items on a list? Or do you use your email inbox as your task list? (If so, you might want to check out the "Own your in-box" section…)

Once you have a handle on your optimal productivity conditions, adjust your schedule, conditions, and/or environment as needed to improve your productivity.

Resources:

- 9 Steps to Achieving Flow (and Happiness) in Your Work



5. Never stop learning

Expanding your knowledge beyond your immediate job is a great way to stay sharp and broaden your horizons. Have you ever been interested in history? The arts? Science? There are thousands of free courses available online, just waiting for you. Want to try something more in-person? Go to a local library, attend a community college course, or find a local group to join.

Resources:

- Coursera - Take the World's Best Courses, Online, For Free.
- getAbstract - The world's largest resource of business book summaries
- iTunes U - Learn anything, anywhere, anytime.
- Khan Academy - Learn almost anything for free
- Why Great People Never Stop Learning

> *The more that you read, the more things you will know.*
> *The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.*
>
> - Dr. Seuss, Best-selling children's author



6. Learn to influence others

The ability to influence and persuade others is essential in the business world. There are times where you need to present or "sell" an idea to upper management, convince a team that your approach is the best approach, or make a pitch to an important client. Each of these scenarios requires you to present an idea and influence your audience on what it is the best approach.

Robert Cialdini is a leading expert in the field of influence and persuasion. He is known for these Six Principles, which are considered to be the cornerstones of influence:

- **Reciprocity** - People tend to return a favor (e.g., free samples in marketing).
- **Commitment and Consistency** - If people commit to an idea or a goal, verbally or in writing, they are more likely to honor that commitment.
- **Social Proof** - People will do things that they see other people are doing.
- **Authority** - People will tend to obey authority figures (e.g., doctors in TV commercials).
- **Liking** - People are easily persuaded by other people that they like.
- **Scarcity** - Perceived scarcity will generate demand (e.g., "limited time only" offers).

Important note: You should only use these principles for ethical purposes!



6. Learn to influence others (cont'd.)

Resources:

- Cialdini's Six Principles of Influence
- Influence - The Psychology of Persuasion

> *The key to successful leadership is influence, not authority.*
>
> - Ken Blanchard, Business consultant, author, and speaker

7. Learn to say "No"

There are times where you may feel obligated to take on extra work or help colleagues, but it's important to know when to say "No." Being too nice can cause you to always take on more work, which leads to more stress and less time for the things that matter. It's ok to say "no" and you shouldn't feel bad about it. Just make sure to give reasoning and leave the situation on a positive note if possible. Express that you want to help but your current workload won't allow it, or perhaps you are concerned you wouldn't be able to do a good job because of your limited time. It's better to take this approach than to say "Yes" and do a poor job. Be honest, be upfront, and you should be in the clear.

Resources:

- 7 Simple Ways To Say "No"
- Learning To Say No: 6 Simple Tips To Do It



8. Become a great storyteller

The art of storytelling can help you convey almost any message in a much more compassionate, effective way. Anyone can recite a series of facts, but storytelling can create passion, help you lead a team, get people to work together, and much more.

The basics of storytelling are not complicated. In fact, you tell stories every day (most likely) without realizing it. The resources below provide step-by-step directions for crafting your story to effect change. Think of a few key stories to have in your back pocket; they could be about your career, one key moment where you really helped the company, a major lesson you learned, etc. Refine them a bit, and you'll be ready when an opportunity arises.

Resources:

- Business Storytelling - Using Stories to Inspire
- The Essentials of Business Storytelling
- The Leader's Guide to Storytelling
- Storytelling for Business

9. Think about how you think

Stop every once in a while and think about how you think. Do you realize why you make certain decisions or why you behave certain ways? Analyzing your own thought process can be a good exercise to better understand how you operate. Vocalize this with somebody you trust. Explain a scenario or a decision you made and explain your reasoning. What feedback do they give you? Strongly consider their input, and the viewpoints of others, when doing this. Does it affect your thought process?

> *Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason why so few engage in it.*
>
> - Henry Ford, Founder of Ford Motor Company

10. Remember everything

Keeping notes about decisions you've made, projects, accomplishments, clients, or anything else can be a huge help - but it can become a paper nightmare. The last thing you need is a desk covered in Post-It Notes! Several tools exist to help you keep notes in a digital format, along with tagging and full search capabilities. Give one of these a chance and stick with it for a few weeks. Look back and decide if it has helped you remain organized.

Resources:

- Evernote
- Microsoft OneNote



11. Own your inbox

There are differing opinions on how to best wrangle the email inbox. If your current method is working well for you, congratulations! It's not an easy beast to conquer. But if you have trouble keeping up with email or trouble finding old information, listen up - there are a few options to consider:

- Use labels (in Gmail) or categories (in Outlook) to sort emails by project, by client, or by any other topic that makes sense for you. Folders can work well, too, but one advantage of labels / categories is the ability to utilize multiple labels / categories. For example, you can mark an email "Important" and "XYZ client, inc."
- Use the *Inbox Zero* philosophy, which (as you might guess) says that you should always keep an empty inbox. How is this possible? In essence, you create a fast-file method where you either act on an email immediately, file it into an archive (where you can retrieve it later), or you delete it. There's definitely more to the philosophy, so check out the link below to watch a full explanation by Merlin Mann and read some great articles.

Resources:

- Inbox Zero
- Xobni - Track email contacts more effectively



12. Understand your company

Do you know what makes your organization successful? What are the big factors that drive sales and affect customer satisfaction? What issues keep your boss up at night? What about the CEO? Do some research to gain a better understanding of your company, its presence in the market, its competitors, its customers, etc. How does this information affect the decisions you make on a daily basis? You may also want to communicate some of this information to your co-workers and get their insight. You don't need to be a know-it-all, but it's helpful to be very well informed about your organization so you can make optimal decisions.

13. Stay current with your industry

We are lucky to live in an age where we have an incalculable amount of information at our fingertips. Take some time to brush up on the current events and changes in your industry. What has changed since you originally entered your industry? Why did it change? What are the new trends? Who are the leading experts now? How did they emerge?

Find out if there are local events, conferences, or mixers that you can attend. Catch up with colleagues that you've known in your industry and meet new ones. Read articles, blogs, and white papers. Watch videos and listen to podcasts, too. The information is there - it just takes a little work to find it.

14. Do the most unpleasant task first

There is a famous book, titled "Eat That Frog," which deals with productivity and procrastination. The main idea is to complete the most unpleasant task(s) first in order to get them out of the way. This clears your mind for the rest of the tasks at hand, so you aren't focused on a roadblock in front of you. As gross as it sounds, the best way is to eat the frog - do whatever it takes at the beginning - so you can move forward and get things done. As the book says, "If the first thing you do in the morning is eat a frog, the day can only get better from then on."

Resources:

- Eat That Frog

> *You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.*
>
> - Abraham Lincoln, 16th President of the United States



15. Network, network, network

The old phrase "it's not what you know, it's who you know" still definitely applies in the business world. Why is it important? Networking can help you:

- Maintain relationships with former co-workers and peers
- Meet new people
- Get sales referrals
- Learn about new trends in your industry
- Learn about professional development opportunities
- …and much, much more.

It takes time and effort to build your network. Some ideas to consider: attend local networking events and mixers, join online discussion groups for your industry or subject matter area, ask colleagues for ideas, and read trade journals, blogs, etc.

If you happen to meet important people at a networking event, it is essential to have talking points to keep the conversation going and leave a good impression.

A few thoughts for networking events and mixers:

- Do you know who is hosting the event?
- Who's the president of the organization?
- Where do they work? Where did they go to school?



16. Learn to listen well

It is important to give 100% attention when having a conversation; you don't want to miss out on information, accidentally communicate the wrong message, or make a bad impression.

Many people only listen until they think they know what the person is going to say next. Then they stop listening and start thinking of how they will respond before the person has finished his/her thoughts. This is detrimental to communication. Give the person your undivided attention, confirm your understanding, and then formulate your response.

Here are a few more tips to help you listen well:

- Maintain eye contact
- Don't interrupt
- Confirm your understanding by repeating back what the person said
- Think about your verbal and non-verbal responses alike - body language can speak volumes!

Resources:

Ten Ways to Listen Well as Part of Communicating Effectively



17. Forge your personal brand

Your personal brand is a key part of your reputation; it's a mark of who you are and what you represent. In fact, it's very important because you have directly input on how you are represented. Let's look at a few questions that can help you forge your personal brand:

- What do you stand for? What are your beliefs, and how do they relate to your career?
- What do you do to enforce these beliefs?
- Are you an expert? Do you share your expertise?
- What are your unique abilities?
- What do people see when they search for you online?
- If you were to ask a random person in your industry, would they know your name? If so, how would they know it?
- Are you actively taking steps to promote yourself and your work?

Take these questions to heart and take action where necessary. Consider being more proactive with your personal brand to promote yourself, gain credibility, and pounce when opportunities arise.

Resources:

- 5 Ways to Develop Your Own Brand
- The First Step To Building Your Personal Brand



18. Re-connect with former co-workers

Get in touch with former co-workers to find out how they're doing. Ask about any changes they've made in their role, career, or personal life. You never know - they may have ventured into a new field, become an expert in a different area, or moved to a new company. They are a key part of your network, and it always helps to stay in touch and keep each other up-to-date.

It's easy to re-connect. Reach out to set up a coffee date. Even a simple phone call or email works great. If you see an update from them via social media, or LinkedIn, send them a quick email to say hello - or congratulations if they've made a career change. Don't be shy!

(One important note: Don't wait until you need a favor before you get in touch...)

Resources:

- How to reconnect and not be awkward or creepy
- How to Use the Networking Goldmine of your Former Jobs



19. Learn to negotiate

The art of negotiation is a skill that can help you in nearly every facet of business and life. Negotiations happen every day, whether you realize it or not. Your ability to negotiate helps you solve problems, achieve important goals, and get what you want for yourself (and your career).

Negotiation is a process of give-and-take that takes a great amount of practice. When negotiating, you'll need to remember to consider the needs of all parties, and make sure not to damage relationships during the process.

Resources:

- How to Negotiate Effectively
- Negotiation skills videos on YouTube

> *The most difficult thing in any negotiation, almost, is making sure that you strip it of the emotion and deal with the facts.*
>
> - Howard Baker, United States Senator

20. Minimize distractions

When you need to concentrate on a project or task, don't hesitate to take steps to protect your time and focus. Some distractions are our own doing, while others are from our co-workers. Here are a few tips for minimizing distractions at work:

- Tell your co-workers when you need time to focus.
- Close your office door or put a "Do not disturb" sign on your cubicle.
- Block off time on your calendar and devote it to project work, eliminating the possibility of meeting requests for that time period.
- Turn off email alerts.
- Mute your phone.
- Minimize web surfing.

It's not difficult to minimize distractions - but it is sometime difficult to realize when you are being distracted. Keep aware of your productivity and follow these tips when needed.

Resources:

Minimizing Distractions - Managing Your Work Environment



21. Hone your presentation skills

The ability to effectively present an idea to an audience, large or small, is absolutely critical in today's business environment. Whether you're presenting quarterly results to upper management or pitching a product for a new client, you need to be able to communicate your ideas clearly, effectively, and convincingly. One of the tricky parts about improving your presentation skills is that you must practice, practice, practice. It isn't always comfortable, but it's a necessity. Thankfully, many people say that it gets easier with practice.

Consider the links below to brush up on your presentation skills.

Resources:

- The Exceptional Presenter
- Impromptu Guru - 60-second Guru Videos
- Toastmasters



22. Learn how to conduct a post-mortem meeting

A post-mortem meeting is a gathering of employees who worked on a particular project in order to reflect on how everything went. Post-mortems are a great way to discuss lessons learned in a safe environment. (Important note: the purpose of the meeting is to learn and improve for next time, not to place blame.)

Here are some questions to ask:

- What went right?
- What went wrong?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What did you learn from the project?
- Are there any remaining issues or things that need to be "cleaned up" now that the project is over?

Hold these meetings within one week after wrapping up the project. Be sure to get everyone's input and send out a summary of the meeting once it is over. Keep this information somewhere safe and review it at the start of your team's next project.

Resources:

- How to hold a postmortem meeting
- The Postmortem: What It Is, & How to Survive One



23. Remember everyone

With zillions of applications and options for managing contacts, it's important to figure out the option that works best for you. One important feature is the ability to access your contacts across any device. For example, being able to look somebody up on your mobile phone, computer, tablet, or any other device is very convenient. Consider portability as well: What if you want to take all of your contact data and move it to another service? Make sure you have this as an option, so you aren't permanently locked in to one service forever. Try some of the options below to get started.

Resources:

- Evernote Hello
- LinkedIn
- Outlook
- Plaxo
- Rapportive

24. Get organized

How cluttered is your desk? How about the desktop on your computer? One simple way to be more efficient is to always have your notes, files, contacts, and all other information organized well. Whether you keep your files in a filing cabinet or documents in your laptop, it's critical to have a "system" for keeping things organized. There is no perfect way to stay organized; you need to find something that works well for you - and something that is sustainable over time.

You may find that taking 1 hour to stop and analyze your system can ultimately have a much greater impact, saving you time in the long run. If you're not sure where to start, ask co-workers how they keep their documents, files, etc., organized. You might learn a few new tricks.

Resources:

- 10 Tips to Get Your Office Organized
- 10 Quick Tips for Getting Organized

> *Organization isn't about perfection; it's about efficiency, reducing stress and clutter, saving time and money and improving your overall quality of life.*
>
> - Christina Scalise, Designer



25. Ask for feedback

What are your strengths and weaknesses? How do you know? Nobody knows you better than your boss, co-workers, clients, and partners. One of the best ways to get feedback about how you work with others is by simply asking. If you aren't comfortable asking for direct feedback, or you think others may be hesitant to give you honest answers, consider using a feedback service like HelpMeShine.

By asking for feedback on a regular basis you are showing three things:

1. You care about your performance,
2. You value the opinions of others, and
3. You're willing to improve any areas where you may be lacking.

Don't wait until your annual performance review at work to find out how you're doing. Constant feedback is the best way to understand and improve your performance, and this can have a major impact on your career.

Resources:

- HelpMeShine - Get constant feedback about your performance



About HelpMeShine

HelpMeShine is a performance feedback tool that will help you grow and improve your career, simply by asking your peers to anonymously tell you how you're doing. We'll provide you with short, simple surveys that you can send out to your peers, who will then give you constructive feedback in real time. Our patent-pending algorithm will then automatically give you access to training materials, articles, videos, and book recommendations to help you get caught-up in the areas where you maybe lacking. Sign up today to give your career a boost!





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