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The Top 10 Keys to My Professional Success and Enjoyment

Preface: I developed this list in the course of mentoring many university interns and other promising young people at the start of their career. At this end of the year time of reflection I thought I'd share them more widely here. Some may resonate for you. You may believe the exact opposite of others. Some may not fit with your own path. But here there such as that are.

Over the past four decades I've worked in a wide range of roles in both manufacturing companies and consulting firms. I've had many successes and my share of wrong turns, dead ends, and failures. This list is a distillation down to the 10 elements that upon reflection I believe in 20:20 hindsight have contributed the most to my success. And more importantly, to my professional happiness, satisfaction, and comfort within my own 'professional skin'.

1. **'Success is journey, not a destination'**¹ so enjoy and relish the journey
2. **Be yourself you can't be anybody else**². Figure out how to leverage who you are because trying to climb by acting as someone else is a house of cards that will ultimately implode.
3. **Find out what you are truly passionate about doing and do that.** You will be far more successful building upon your strengths³ than wasting time trying to prop up your weaknesses. And you will get far more intrinsic rewards and enjoyment from playing to your strengths
4. **Before you captain a ship you have to row a lot of very small boats**⁴ - High intelligence and college degrees from top universities are merely table stakes – the price to enter the game – to get hired. Once you're in, your success is dependent upon how much you accomplish that benefits your employer, whatever that may be, not how smart you are.
5. **Read the right publications** for your target area voraciously
6. **Learn the lessons of History** lest you be condemned to repeat them⁵.
7. **Include Psychology in your studies**, particularly Organization Behavior/Organizational Change and the group dynamics
8. **Treat everyone as you'd like to be treated yourself.**

¹ Ben Sweetland

² Manhattan Transfer

³ Take the "Strengths Finder Test" – "Now Discover Your Strengths" by Marcus Buckingham & Donald O. Clifton Ph.D

⁴ Inspired by: Succeeding in Challenging and Complex Company Environments: "*Power and Influence*", John P. Kotter and The critical importance of practicing the fundamentals first: "*First You Have to Row a Little Boat*", Richard Bode

⁵ Paraphrasing Sir Winston Churchill: "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

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9. **Talk in depth to anyone from any background anywhere** that you can strike up a conversation. You will be amazed at what you will learn that seems so irrelevant at the time but becomes very valuable to know later. And it certainly makes otherwise dead time waiting in airports and other such circumstances pass so much more pleasantly when one is engaged in conversation.

 10. No matter how bad any situation you are in looks at the time always remember and never forget that **IT WILL ALL WORK OUT!** – It always does.

You will know that you are nearing the objective of your journey when you can be completely honest to yourself and others when you say, as I can now [in my 50s] that:

“I do not want what I do not have.”⁶

Having all that one wants sounds very altruistic, until one realizes that one doesn't want to give up any of what one has risen to either. And therein like the challenge of figuring out how to hold on to all one has.

What is on the top of your own list? Which of these do you agree with and disagree with?

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⁶ Sinead O'Connor