

THE FUTURE OF WORK

Three simple strategies for keeping your edge at work

LEAH EICHLER

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With unemployment hovering around 7 per cent these days, the rise of the robot apocalypse threatening jobs and the move toward a contingent work force, long-term job security feels more like a relic every year, something akin to dial-up modems or flash mobs.

So how do hard-working employees maintain their edge? Three experts weigh in on the habits you need to embrace to stay competitive and even get ahead at work.

1. Stretch yourself

While research out of Oxford University suggests that [nearly half of all jobs are at risk of being replaced by technology](#)

[http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/downloads/academic/The_Future_of_Employment.pdf], employees need to do more than bone up on their high-tech skills to stay ahead, explained Barbara Mistick, co-author of *Stretch: How to Future-Proof Yourself for Tomorrow's Workplace*, which will be published in January.

“In many workplaces, there is pressure to do more with less. Changes in business models and the pressure to develop new skills have made us all feel like we have a looming sell-by date,” she said in an interview.

In order to manage these expectations, Ms. Mistick encourages employees to “always be stretching,” which includes learning new things, being open to new opportunities and having options in hand when the unexpected occurs. To do so, Ms. Mistick, who is also president of Wilson College, a private liberal arts school in Pennsylvania, advises employees to start “being greedy” about gaining new experiences. Since experiences enhance the way we obtain knowledge, workers do themselves a disservice by waiting for opportunities to land in their laps.

“Employees who ask for these experiences are able to keep their skills more up-to-date and stay more engaged in their roles at work. One of the best tips to get more experiences is to put your hand up often and volunteer for new assignments,” she suggested.

But stretching extends past opportunities at work. It also includes opening up your mind to opportunities outside your industry, especially if you work in one that is encountering a period of

turmoil.

“You don’t want to be an ostrich about economic realities; instead consider stretching to new opportunities,” Ms. Mistick said.

2. Tell great stories

Selling really is everything. Whether you are selling a product or an idea, to stay ahead at work you need to be convincing. Telling a good story – one that moves hearts and minds – is the key to winning people over, explained Carmine Gallo, author of *The Storyteller’s Secret: From TED Speakers to Business Legends, Why Some Ideas Catch on and Others Don’t*, to be published in February.

Drawing from interviews with top business leaders, including Virgin Group founder Richard Branson and Starbucks chief executive officer Howard Schultz, Mr. Gallo found that storytelling played a strong part in their success.

The human brain, he argued, citing research from Dan McAdams, a professor of human development at Northwestern University in Illinois, is hard-wired to process information in the form of a narrative.

Storytelling, Mr. Gallo said, applies to everything from job interviews to sending e-mails, and it need not be complicated.

So how do you tell a story? Mr. Gallo suggested that good stories have a “villain” and a “hero,” but in the business world, the villain is the problem and the hero is your solution. Don’t forget to include a personal story to add a human element to any data and stick to “the rule of three.” Simply put, people can’t store more than three messages in their short-term memory, so don’t inundate them with too much information.

“There’s a reason why Goldilocks saw three bears and why there were three musketeers or three ghosts who appeared to Mr. Scrooge. Three is most important number in narrative,” he said.

3. Be happy

“People generally have the misconception that, in order to be successful, they have to postpone their happiness,” said Emma Seppala, author of *The Happiness Track*, coming out in January.

That includes working so hard that they stop doing the things they love and burn themselves out. However, her research suggests that happiness itself is the fast track to success.

For those hard-working A-types who see happiness at work as a foreign concept, Ms. Seppala suggested lengthening your exhales during moments of stress.

She also advises people to be less critical of themselves. While many of us believe that being hard on ourselves will make us work harder, her research showed that that isn't the case. "Treat yourself as you would treat a friend. Remind yourself that everyone makes mistakes and it's no big deal if you screwed up. Give yourself a break," she encouraged.

Finally, Ms. Seppala suggested practising gratitude.

"Research shows that more things go right in our day than wrong, but we tend to focus on the negative. By recalling and noticing all the things that are going right, you will feel happier and more energized," she said.

Leah Eichler is founder and CEO of r/ally, a machine-learning, human capital search engine for enterprises. Twitter: [@LeahEichler](https://twitter.com/leaheichler) [https://twitter.com/leaheichler]

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