

Transcript for The Career Accelerator podcast, Episode #1: A Key Skill That Successful Corporate Managers Have Mastered

Hello. Welcome to Episode #1, where you will learn about the key skill that successful corporate managers have mastered. I'm your host, coach Percy Cannon.

- Are you a corporate manager whose Direct Reports are not capable of achieving their performance goals w/o your frequent involvement?
- Is it hard for you to trust some of the people you interact with at work?
- And, have you been able to enlist your boss to help you achieve your work priorities?

These are just some of the several challenges that, like you, I also faced during my close to three decades as a corporate executive. Unfortunately, during my coaching and consulting engagements in the last decade, I have continued to see corporate managers experience similar challenges. It doesn't have to be this way!

In this and future episodes, I will help you solve these and other challenges faced by corporate managers. I will build on the experience I have gained during the past four decades, from what I did well and the whole lot that I could have done better.

I have been asked before to identify the main skill that can hold back the performance of a corporate manager. Not an easy question to answer... There are many, many skills that are crucial to perform well as a corporate manager. But when pressed to pick one, I would choose not letting go of the mentality and approach of an individual contributor as a key factor that could severely derail the performance and career growth of a corporate manager.

Think about it: At the beginning of our careers, most likely, you (and I) had to rely mainly on ourselves to deliver our goals. But once you let go of this Individual Contributor practice, you can replace it with a mindset of achieving results through others.

How can you do this? My suggestion is to apply the good old Marketing 101 principle of "understanding the other person's needs first."

How often do you run into people whose default approach is to look for What's in it for me? They prioritize their own benefits, their own agenda, and may not care much about others, unless they can, with the minimum possible effort, get something from them.

The common denominator that you will hear from me today, and in future episodes, is to adopt a mindset of service, where you always focus on "What's in it for them", them being the people within your organization with whom you interact the most: Your direct reports, your peers from other departments and even your boss.

This service-oriented mindset will result in pursuing common ground and creating win-win agreements with each audience. This translates into gaining their trust and commitment to goals that are shared between you.

I will illustrate this with a personal example.

Back in my early days as an Individual Contributor in the corporate world, I had a general manager who hardly knew me. I'm going to call him Mark. Mark was my boss' boss' boss. Although Mark had been working several years for the corporation in international, he was new to our organization. Mark quickly developed a reputation for being very demanding and also very impatient. Since Mark didn't know the organization, he was slow to trust the employees. He soon became well known for interrupting meetings, eager to learn more about the local business and, I think, also to confirm that people were, indeed, working.

One day, my manager, who I'm going to call Pete, asked me to brainstorm with him potential solutions to address a key business challenge we were facing. This was his way of engaging and training me in the different strategic and operational aspects of the business. As usual, we were in his office in brainstorming mode: Pete sitting behind his desk, facing the door, me sitting on the other side of his desk, with my back to the door, both of us with our feet on his desk, the glass door behind me closed.

Suddenly, I heard the glass door being opened. As I turned around, I saw Mark bursting into the office. I immediately jumped up to greet him, but before I could get any words out, he asked Pete why we were wasting our time just chatting, without doing anything productive. Remember, Mark was my boss' boss' boss.

I couldn't figure out if he was joking or being serious. All I could think of was that my short career in this company was likely over. To my surprise, Pete kept his feet on the desk and calmly answered Mark: "We're not wasting our time. We're brainstorming." I still remember Pete saying this with a slight smile on his face. I don't think Pete's explanation set too well with Mark. I remember Mark storming out of Pete's office mumbling something along the lines of how he wouldn't be surprised if one day he found us playing cards during office hours.

A few weeks later, Mark burst into Pete's office again and found us... you guessed it ... playing cards! "I knew it!" he shouted at us. "I knew you were wasting your time in here!" This time I was absolutely certain my career was over. But once again, Pete stayed calm. He explained: "Mark, we are planning to sponsor a TV game show which involves cards, and we were fine-tuning the rules and prizes based on the odds of winning." Pete said this with another slight smile on his face.

Mark, who didn't seem to believe Pete, asked me to show him how to play the card game. My shaky voice gave away how nervous I was. Still, I did my very best to explain the game to Mark. Once he understood the rules, he asked me to play a few rounds with him. So, there I was, playing cards with my boss' boss' boss, the guy who had accused us of wasting the company's time!

Mark's attitude changed 180 degrees. He was clearly pleased with our work. He told us: "Put a formal recommendation on my desk to start executing this TV game show ASAP." This time, Mark left Pete's office with a smile on his face. And I had a huge smile on my face, saying to myself: I guess my career is not over after all.

My ex-manager Pete taught me a lesson that I view as valid today as it was four decades ago: as a corporate manager, you can accelerate your career growth by learning how to deliver results through your Direct Reports, your peers and your boss:

- **First, Pete needed a sounding board** to help him address the key business challenge we were facing, and also to develop a recovery plan. That was me, as his Direct Report. He knew I was always willing to learn and go the extra mile. He coached me throughout the several elements of the plan, such as defining the problem, coming up with potential solutions, seeking approval and funding, and, last but not least, executing the plan.
- **Second, Pete needed several of his peers from other areas to partner with him on this program.** He taught me how to look for common ground with them, starting with understanding what they needed from us to make this project a success for their department. In other words, how to realize "what's in it for them" to achieve win-win agreements.
- **Last, but not least, Pete needed funding and authorization from our general manager,** Mark, his boss' boss, to produce the TV game show we had designed. He knew that Mark would be interested to invest in a recovery plan for our product. This would be a win for Mark with his superiors. A key prerequisite was that this recovery plan had to be impactful enough to turnaround the business. Pete's bet was that Mark would like the TV Game show idea.

He was right! Fortunately for Pete, and I, this program, and other proactive activities, resulted in significant improvements in brand awareness, sales, and market share for our product.

I hope you enjoyed today's episode. The common denominator that you heard from me today, and will continue to hear in future episodes, is to let go of the mindset of an individual contributor, where you rely mostly on yourself to deliver your goals. Instead, seek to achieve results through others. Adopt a mindset of service, where you always focus on "What's in it for them", them being the people within your organization with whom you interact the most: Your direct reports, your peers from other departments and your boss.

This focus on WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM is the key skill that I have observed in successful Corporate Managers.

But what happens if this service mindset does not come naturally to you? We will answer this question in our next episode. If you like what you heard today, please rate this podcast and share it with your coworkers and friends. Also, please use any of the links shared in the Episode Notes at the bottom of this podcast to download the transcript of today's episode, to ask questions, to suggest topics of interest, to request a free consultation call with me, or to connect with me on LinkedIn.

This is coach Percy Cannon, working to **help you make the rest of your life...the best of your life®**.

Thank you for listening to THE CAREER ACCELERATOR, the podcast where you will find tips and tools to deliver results through others. Stay tuned for our next episode!

Percy's BIO:

Percy provides corporate managers and leadership teams with customized coaching programs that help them develop the skills and capabilities needed to significantly increase their business results through others and accelerate their career growth.

Percy is an "alumnus" from three multinational corporations, Procter & Gamble, IBM & Microsoft, with whom he spent close to three decades.

Since 2011 he has been helping corporate executives, managers and employees **make the rest of their life...the best of their life®**.

Percy has worked in the United States and across several countries in Latin America as an Executive Coach, Leadership Team Consultant and Keynote Speaker, serving companies such as Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, Citibank, Tiffany & Avianca.

Percy is a Certified Professional Coach from Wainwright Global, Authorized Partner for "The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" and "Everything DiSC" and certified as a "Go-Giver" speaker & coach.

He published his first book in 2012-13 in English (*The Business Apostolate: Insights to Define and Achieve Your Mission in Life*) and in Spanish (*El Negocio Más Grande de su Vida*).

Percy is a Consulting Partner with Grupo Azimuth and the Chapter Director for the COO Forum in Southeast Florida.

He has lived in 9 different cities and 5 countries, and speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese fluently.

Percy is married, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and is a passionate runner & reader.

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