



# HOW TO BECOME THE CEO OF YOUR CAREER

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**3**

Introduction

**4**

Be likable

**5**

Be principled

**6**

Find your hooks

**7**

Create a personal brand and professional story

**8**

Update your ambition every six months

**9**

Think strategically

**10**

Always be learning

**11**

Leverage your resources

**12**

Be humble and empathetic



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**14**

Fail fast

**15**

Have conviction and confidence

**16**

Be deliberate in communication

**17**

Use every tool in your tool kit

**18**

Coopetition always wins

**19**

Always bring your A game

**20**

Take your craft seriously

**21**

Be the same, on-screen and off

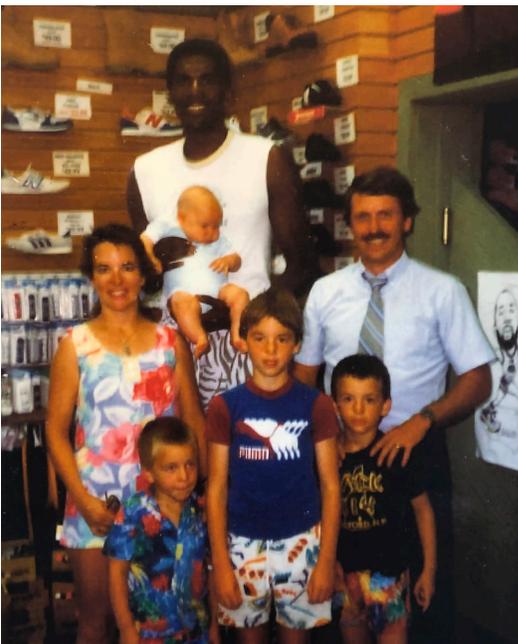
**22**

If you're the CEO, then build a good company



## WHEN I WAS A KID, ONE OF MY FAVORITE THINGS TO DO WAS TO “PLAY WORK.”

I knew early on when I grew up I wanted to be an entrepreneur and run my own companies. I dreamed of the day when I earned my own money, dressed up for work, became independent and charted my own life course. If pro football was out, entrepreneurship would be my next chance to make it big and control my own destiny.



My dad wasn't the stereotypical businessman of the '80s and '90s who wore a suit and tie and headed to the office park. Corporate America was far away from our home on Lake Avenue in Manchester, New Hampshire. He was always going to succeed or fail based on himself. He hit the office early at our family business, Indian Head Athletics, and made it home every single night for dinner together. The man defined hard work, success, integrity and family values to me (still does), and I wanted to be him (still do).

My parents preached — and more importantly, showcased in their daily actions — the importance of an incredible work ethic and commitment to family. Those two integral characteristics fuel my life to this day.

Today, it still feels like I'm playing. I love what I do and wouldn't trade any of the experiences I've had, both good and bad, over my career. My journey from intern to a head of sales to chief revenue officer for a hyperscale startup to an executive at a Fortune 100 company to a CEO and investor has been intense. But I've learned a lot along the way.

One of the reasons I love angel investing is I truly enjoy sharing this knowledge and mentoring entrepreneurs. I've been fortunate to encounter so many wonderful people with bright ideas who simply need someone they can call when faced with a new problem. I always want to be that phone call, because passion and integrity are contagious. And honestly, I learn as much from these entrepreneurs as they learn from me.

One of the key lessons I like to share is to not be passive. Don't sit back and let things happen to you. Take charge and ownership of your career. Think of your career as a company: You, Inc. Be the CEO. Lead your company to success.

Since I can't possibly speak to as many people in person as I would like, I want to share some of my favorite insights and advice in this e-book. I hope it inspires you to become the CEO of your career.



## BE LIKABLE

People want to work with people they like. If you're someone who people like, they will go out of their way to help you.

The best way to be likable is to be authentic and real. Never try to be someone or something you aren't. That phoniness can be smelled a mile away and will turn people off.

Instead, ask questions because you want to learn. Work hard because you want to get better. Exude passion because you're genuinely excited. Along the way, you'll become someone who people want to root for and help out.

A long time ago, there was a dynamic young man who interviewed to be part of my sales team. He had conviction, hunger, and was sharp on the market and the tech — all traits I look for in a hire.

I was going to hire him anyway. Then he went above and beyond.

Shortly after leaving the interview, he ordered pizzas for lunch for the entire office, which at that time was around 50 people — no short expense for someone in his position. But the effort paid off. People talked about him. There's no better feeling than hiring someone everyone wants you to hire.

But the story doesn't end there. A few years later, he was crushing it and his trajectory outgrew where we had opportunity. He got another, better offer to run sales at a startup. He didn't hide this opportunity from me or try to steal the rest of my team. He was upfront and honest. Again, he was likable.

Of course, I told him to go pursue that opportunity and that I would help in any way I could. Now fast forward a few years. A startup I advise needed a new head of sales, and as I went through my mental Rolodex, I kept coming back to the same person: the pizza guy. I recommended him and he was hired, and shortly after that he took over as CEO. He now runs a rising startup with strong funding and is on the fast-track to being a multimillionaire. All because he worked hard, was super talented, and yes, he was likable.

Those pizzas were a good investment in his career.

## BE PRINCIPLED

“Be principled” was the mantra in my house growing up. When I lay in bed at night, I can still hear my father saying it. Nothing else matters if you fail this piece of advice. What’s the point of winning the world if you lose yourself in the process?

Take a moment to think about what your guiding principles are or will be. These should be foundational principles you write down and don’t break. If for some reason you do break them, you better have a damn good reason why. And at that point, you may want to think about updating your principles.

**From the beginning of my career, I’ve operated under these two principles:**

### 1) Be loyal

### 2) Play the long game

These are the lenses through which I view everything and the parameters I use to keep myself guided. If I do something that contradicts either of these principles, an internal warning alarm goes off in my gut. If there’s a great outcome but it comes at the expense of my principles, I don’t pursue it. The end doesn’t justify the means.

## FIND YOUR HOOKS

### WHY DO YOU GET OUT OF BED IN THE MORNING?

Obviously, finding your motivation is important. But taking that a step further, you have to find your hooks in everything you do.

What's the difference between motivation and hooks? Motivation is aspirational. Hooks are tangible. A hook is a skill, trait or other element you can sink your teeth into in almost any job, even if you're not crazy about it.

### HERE ARE MY HOOKS:

**Leadership:** motivating a team to rise to new heights unrealized by themselves.

**Corporate disposition and culture:** disrupting the status quo. You can't take the "us" out of "us." (Thanks [@37signals](#))

**Target verticals and customer base:** networking and building relationships with the best internet brands and brains in the world.

**Business model:** SaaS and subscription-based recurring revenue. Outsourcing to consumption-based cloud computing technologies is IT's future.

**Competition and winning:** finding where we're best and focusing on that. It helps when no one likes the industry leader. They're easy to sell against and give us a target to chase down.

**Technology and innovation:** taking seemingly boring markets and industries and making them more relevant and cooler through new technology and solid partnerships.

**Money:** I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to be filthy rich.

### WHAT ARE YOUR HOOKS?

## CREATE A PERSONAL BRAND AND PROFESSIONAL STORY

A lot has been made of the importance of personal brand in today's digital-first business world, but why does it matter? Why should you set aside time, energy, and effort to get it right?

One of the most important things to remember about any brand, but particularly your personal brand, is that it must be authentic. If you try to be something you're not, you'll come off as phony, which will do more harm than good.

Also, building a brand takes time. You'll start and give up if you don't share and talk about topics and issues you're passionate about. That's why it's so critical to find your hooks. If you have your hooks, you know what you're passionate about, and that can then be the foundation of your personal brand.

My personal brand is something I've focused on since high school. For many, it can be an after-thought, you don't share and talk these people often end up realizing it's critical to career success. Don't find yourself playing catch-up when the need for a personal brand inevitably calls.

The key to building and cultivating a successful personal brand is to focus on your business-oriented web presence and social profiles on sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Medium or other blogging platform, AngelList, and Crunchbase. Here are five things to consider on these sites as you build your personal brand:

**Career narrative/story arc:** Can you articulate your resume/CV in a meaningful and connected way? Do the moves you make make sense? Never forget people can relate to a good story.

**Relevance:** Are you current, dynamic, and on point regarding your company, speciality, interests, or industry?

**Networking:** Are you extending your reach and creating opportunities through your contacts? Do they really know you? Do you know them?

**Diversification:** Are you well-rounded in your business pursuits, or are you a one-trick pony?

**Pride:** Do you feel intrinsic passion and happiness in your career? Are you confident enough to share that with the world?

One of my core values is playing the long game. Think of every tweet, blog, or LinkedIn profile update as an investment in your future. The results won't be immediate. You won't have a blue checkmark tomorrow or be making bank as an influencer anytime soon, if ever. But you will project how much you care and the type of person and worker you are. That reputation is priceless, and it transcends whatever current role you're in.

A personal brand travels with you for your whole career, and so do your stops along the way. It's important you weave yourself into your company's pitch and share that with people you come across. Doing so demonstrates the value you add and tells people you are someone to be taken seriously. Also, if you don't think what you do at work has a positive effect on the business, you need to quickly figure out some way to add value.

The ability to articulate how you fit in to your company's story has both short- and long-term benefits. In the short term, it gives your work value and purpose. Over the long term, you'll be in a position to receive credit for your company's success.

## UPDATE YOUR AMBITION EVERY SIX MONTHS

When I started my career, my oldest brother Travis gave me some sound advice: “Make sure to update your resume every six months. You never know when opportunity will present itself, and you need to be ready.”

Like my career, my brother’s advice has evolved with continuous tweaks along the way. Now I say: Update your ambition every six months.

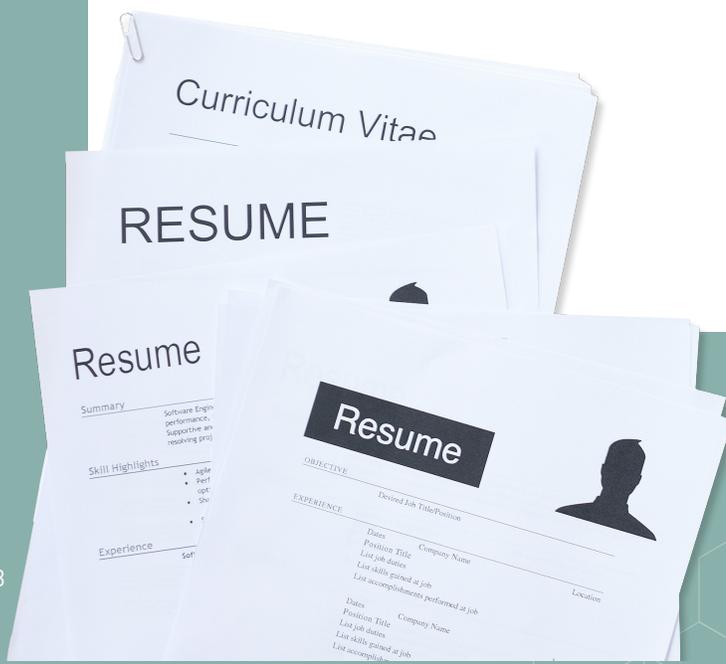
Ambition can be your most powerful tool. It’s important to constantly challenge yourself. From a personal and professional standpoint, where are you today compared to where you were six months ago? Where do you want to be in five years? Are you dreaming big enough?

Have a personal vision of what you want to achieve professionally. You don’t need to share it with anyone, but make sure to keep a personal scorecard and be honest with yourself about your progress.

But realize along the way you’ll change. And as you change, so will what you want out of life. So don’t be afraid to take stock of what you want and update your vision. Doing that will help ensure you’re still playing the long game, which leads me to my next piece of advice.

**“MAKE SURE TO UPDATE YOUR RESUME EVERY SIX MONTHS. YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN OPPORTUNITY WILL PRESENT ITSELF, AND YOU NEED TO BE READY.”**

**TRAVIS YORK**



## THINK STRATEGICALLY

Many people lose perspective and become disconnected from a grander strategy because they get buried in the weeds. It's amazing how we can settle into the routine of life and end up feeling like we're buried by inertia and no longer in control. Sadly, I've found a lot of folks would rather be unhappy with what they know than risk striking out into the unknown.

**Don't be afraid to be happy.** Happiness is different for everyone, which is why it's so important to take time to reflect. What are you playing for? Money? Legacy? Family? Community? Answer those questions, and then build a strategy around how to attain them. Even if you have a great strategy and execute it perfectly, you'll never be truly happy if it leads you to the wrong outcome.

Achieving happiness often requires risk. But one of the great misconceptions about entrepreneurs is they love to blindly leap off buildings. That's not the case. They do their research, develop a strategy, prepare for the worst, and then they jump.

## WHAT'S YOUR STRATEGY?



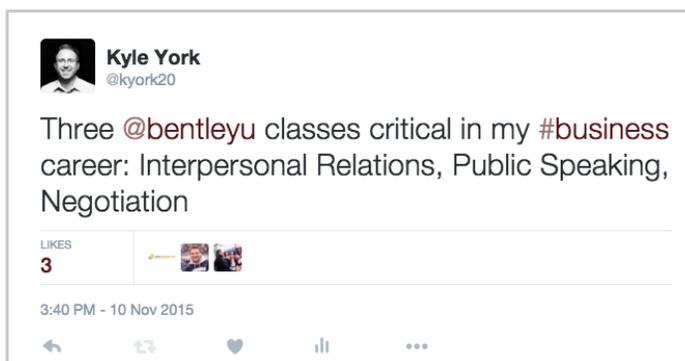
## ALWAYS BE LEARNING

A common question from first-time entrepreneurs is whether or not they need an MBA. There's nothing wrong with getting an MBA. But if you think you need one to be successful in business, you need to change your mindset.

I didn't get an MBA for three major reasons:

- I didn't think it would be valued in the startup world.
- I wanted to make money and start my career.
- Networking happens out in the field, not in the classroom.

However, just because you don't need an MBA doesn't mean you can stop learning. To be successful in business, you need to be a sponge and soak in as much as you can. It's important your ideas are a cross-section of what you learn from others plus your own instincts and experiences.



Regardless of your formal education or career path, there are some foundational skill sets that will prove immensely valuable. Make sure to brush up on:

- **Interpersonal relations:** There's not a more important skill in business than communication. The relationships we build are the one thing that travel with us from job to job across a multi-decade career. Your ability to engage, relate, listen, learn, show empathy, and build trust is paramount.
- **Public speaking:** Throughout your career, you'll undoubtedly be asked to speak in front of an audience. Storytelling, cadence, facial and hand gestures, body language, delivery, and eye contact are all important components of successful public speaking. Presence and dynamism can't be taught, but they can be worked on and honed. Learn how to get out of your comfort zone and embrace your moments on stage.
- **Negotiation:** With a career in strategy, sales, marketing, and development, you may feel like all you do is negotiate deals. There are always at least two parties at the negotiation table, and it's extremely valuable to learn how to read the other party, understand signaling and tells, derive shared value, and drive outcomes.

As you grow in your career, so too will your knowledge base. But just as you're learning, the game is also changing. The most successful people I know constantly seek out others who can help them learn. Remember: Nobody expects you to know everything.

Most people have a hard time clearly drawing the line between what they're supposed to know and what they aren't. Entrepreneurs who think they know everything get themselves in trouble. Knowing what you don't know is critical, and the faster you can figure that out, the better.

## LEVERAGE YOUR RESOURCES

One of the best ways to jump-start your career is to use your network to your advantage. For starters, mentors and mentorship are incredibly valuable. Find someone who's already where you want to go and reach out to them for guidance and advice. But remember, just because someone appears to have what you want doesn't mean they actually do. Never view someone else's highlight reel as if it's a behind-the-scenes documentary.

**ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO JUMP-START YOUR CAREER IS TO USE YOUR NETWORK TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.**

Everyone's busy. Mentoring is an investment in time. We all invest in things we think are valuable. Ensure you're the type of person who a potential mentor would think is valuable. Don't reach out to mentors with no plans or ideas and expect to be led to water. That's a waste of a potential mentor's time and not a help for you. Find the water and then

ask a mentor what the best technique is for drinking. Asking specific questions shows you've done your research, you're putting in the effort, and you might actually be someone the mentor wants to see succeed.

Peer networking can be just as helpful. You have connections to friends who might be equally hungry and ambitious. Seek them out and brainstorm some ideas. If you've already identified your strengths and weaknesses, then you know the types of people who would provide a complementary skill set. Find someone who shares your passion, complements you, and come up with an idea that solves a real business problem, and you can collaborate to accomplish big things.

Remember, investors invest in founding teams as much as they do in ideas.

## BE HUMBLE AND EMPATHETIC

### EXPECTING HELP AND ASKING FOR HELP ARE TWO VERY DIFFERENT THINGS.

While at Dyn In 2010, I went on a solo trip to Twitter's modest headquarters in San Francisco to meet with Jeremy LaTrasse, head of technical operations and employee number five of the social media company. He was our first technical contact and drank from an absolute firehose in scaling the systems behind the site.

The Fail Whale at this point was commonplace and the stuff of fodder across the globe. Can Twitter fix their app? Will they crumble under their own traffic? How will they solve performance issues? Can they handle the scale?

I hit the building lobby with a strut in my step for the big meeting. The elevator opened, and as I looked up, Twitter co-founder and then CEO Evan Williams walked out.

Me: **"Excuse me, Ev, I'm Kyle York from Dyn."**

Ev: **"Hey, how are you? Are you meeting with LaTrasse?"**

Me: **"Yeah, I'm great thanks. We're talking about our advanced traffic management services to help you guys scale. We've been partners since early Odeo and I've wanted to meet you live and thank you for signing on and sticking with us. We won't let you down."**

Ev: **"Please, keep helping us scale. We need your help now more than ever. Have a good meeting with LaTrasse."**

And that was it. It was a fascinating moment that opened my eyes. Ev Williams, a man now worth billions, tried to do his best. Jeremy LaTrasse was too. There was a team of technologists, marketers, and businesspeople who tried to tame a tiger by the tail. And they needed help from any person or service provider who could provide it.

The best entrepreneurs I've ever been around know their strengths, know what they don't know, and always use the resources around them to the fullest.

I took this lesson as a career and life reminder. Stop in the lobby and say hi to a passerby. Be accessible. Have humility, never be afraid to ask for help, treat people well, and always be empathic.

My business mentor, Sir Richard Branson, summarizes empathy like no other. I admire the "put yourself in their shoes" approach, because one day you may no longer be on top, and karma will come for you.

## I KNOW THIS FIRSTHAND.

On October 21, 2016, the company I ran was the victim of one of the largest and most complex cyber attacks in history. Our customers struggled, and people all over the U.S. had difficulty connecting to their favorite websites.

The attack could have been a brand killer. But it wasn't. In fact, we were later lauded in the press for the way we handled the situation.

The trick was, we didn't start handling the situation that morning. We started handling it eight years earlier when we built the kind of company we ran. We respected our customers, our competitors, and our community. And as such, when we were down, they helped pick us back up. They trusted and respected us and knew we'd been good to them over the years, so they were good to us in return.

## FAIL FAST

I've seen a fear of failure in so many bright kids. They work hard their whole lives to be perfect, then when they're faced with real adversity, they crumble. So here's a real life lesson: You're going to fail. And that's OK.

My sports idol, Tom Brady, has lost three Super Bowls. But the lessons he learned in those failures helped drive him to become the greatest football player of all time.

**THERE ARE NO BAD EXPERIENCES; THERE ARE ONLY EXPERIENCES THAT HELP SHAPE YOU INTO THE PERSON YOU CAN BECOME.**

Everything in life, both good and bad, is a learning lesson that can make you better. If you look at it that way, there are no bad experiences; there are only experiences that help shape you into the person you can become.

Failing means you're trying and stepping outside of your comfort zone. The fun is in overcoming the challenge. But you'll want to fail early by trying different things, then iterate and be better prepared for the next challenge. If you don't, only then do you truly fail.

## HAVE CONVICTION AND CONFIDENCE

In your life and your career, you need to have conviction and confidence. In the beginning, when you're starting out, you won't have a track record of success. So how will people know you're capable? You'll have to convince them. And the only way you can do that is through believing it yourself. There's something special about you — find it, cultivate it, and grow it.

When it's time to make a decision, make it based on all the available information and see it through. That's how leadership is earned and how you gain the respect of your colleagues. Don't waffle. Don't waiver. Don't hope something better is around the corner. Remember, more is lost in indecision than in making the wrong decision.

When I considered signing on to run sales for Dyn, I met with one of the co-founders, who is one of the best engineers I've ever met. This man has one of the brightest minds in tech and a deep understanding of the internet infrastructure layer, because he helped build it.

As we talked, he told me I needed to bone up on technology. He then slid the thickest book I'd ever seen across the table. It was a complete guide to the domain name system (DNS), the product I was going to sell. I slid the book right back to him and said, "With all due respect, you don't want me to read this book. If I do, I'll be bogged down by a ton of technical jargon and I'll sound like just another engineer — and worse, a dumb one. I'm not going to sell DNS. I'm going to sell solutions to our customers' problems, and I'm going to do it in a brand and tone they haven't experienced before."

It was a bold and ballsy move on my part. But he got it. I had conviction and confidence and he knew to get out of the way and let me succeed.

Fortunately, in this case, I did succeed. But if you do make the wrong decision — and you will at some point — admit your mistake, learn from it, move on, and don't repeat it.

## BE DELIBERATE IN COMMUNICATION

**Communication is key to every decision made in a company. It's the most important aspect of a growing company — and remember, your career is a growing company.**

A lot of young people are energetic and ready to charge ahead at 100 miles an hour. I love that drive, but it can be misguided if they haven't communicated with people along the way.

The difference between being a good individual contributor and a great CEO is a great CEO brings people along for the ride. You can only do that by setting a vision for yourself and your company and then explaining it to everyone who's involved. Only when everyone knows the direction you want to go can they start rowing in unison.

Similarly, in your career, you need to communicate where you want to go. If you don't, you can't blame others — your friends and family, your boss, your mentors, your colleagues — for not being supportive or helpful.

Most arguments I've ever had were because of miscommunication. It's easy — especially in our fast-paced, Slack-ified society — to share only half the information and expect people to fill in the blanks. If you take time to communicate and get feedback, you'll be in a better position to succeed.



## USE EVERY TOOL IN YOUR TOOL KIT

One of the great television characters, Ron Swanson, once said, “Literally everything is a weapon, son.” He’s right. In the battle for your career, use everything at your disposal to show who you are and why what you do is unique.

### AN OVERLOOKED EXAMPLE OF THIS IS FASHION.

Seventy percent of a sale is done before someone ever talks to a sales rep. People are constantly researching and evaluating. They’re doing that about you too, long before they’ve ever said hello.

So find clothes that represent you. Just like you need to develop your own voice and principles, you need to define your fashion sense too. Don’t be a poser. Be comfortable in your own skin (I mean clothes) and wear outfits that represent your brand.

### IT DOESN’T TAKE A TIE TO MAKE YOU CREDIBLE.

When I ran Dyn, we were part of an industry dominated by corporate giants. But we realized the companies we wanted to win were startups that were actually much more like us than our corporate competitors.

People buy from people they like and stick with companies they enjoy doing business with. So we rocked jeans and Dyn T-shirts to client meetings, trade shows, and speaking gigs, because that’s who we were. It just so happened to be who our customers were too. We worked with a lot of startups and cutting-edge innovators who looked at neckties as foreign objects. Since we didn’t sell to stiffs in suits and ties, it didn’t make sense for us to dress that way. We expected our employees to be exactly who they were at night and weekends with their family and friends.

Our primary goal was to develop long-lasting and genuine relationships with the best web companies in the world. You’re friends with people who are real. We were real.

I’m not saying to burn all of your ties. If you’re a suit person, rock the hell out of it. But if you’re a jeans and T-shirt person, be proud of that too. Don’t change who you are to fit into a mold.

## COOPETITION ALWAYS WINS

Respect is a two-way street, and there should always be respect within a market.

Don't get me wrong, I'm as competitive as anyone when it comes to earning a new customer's business. But it's OK to not win them all. For a good space to exist, it takes competition, choice, leaders, and followers — and many successful, growing, and thriving companies.

Markets aren't won, they're led. To stay in the lead is the moving target with no finish line in sight.

Would Nike be as successful as it is without adidas, Reebok, Puma, and YORK Athletics (I had to throw that in there!)?

Would McDonald's be as big if not for Burger King and Wendy's?

The correlations go on and on.

**ALWAYS BE HUMAN, HONEST, REAL,  
SUPPORTIVE, AND TRANSPARENT. IN THE  
LONG RUN, YOUR COMPANY AND THE  
MARKET YOU'RE IN WILL BE BETTER FOR IT.**

## HOW DO YOU VIEW COMPETITORS?

Always be human, honest, real, supportive, and transparent. In the long run, your company and the market you're in will be better for it.

## ALWAYS BRING YOUR A GAME

Throughout your career, life is going to happen. You're going to catch a cold. You're going to meet someone special. You're going to buy a house. Family members will be born. Family members will die. These events can understandably affect your performance at work. But when it's time to bring your A game, you need to be ready no matter what.

Professional athletes face this reality constantly. We never think of them as normal human beings with other stressors and obligations in life. We just know the task they need to execute, and we expect them to do it. That's easier said than done, and I give them a world of credit for being able to perform under the brightest of lights.

For us non-athletes, we only get a few moments in our careers when the lights shine on us and we need to perform. In these moments, you must put everything else aside and step up. At first, those high stakes can be petrifying, but as you deliver again and again, you'll find it addictive.

**Here's an example:** I used to host a party at SXSW. The parties became a can't-miss VIP experience for customers, partners, employees, investors, and friends. One major highlight was my "meeting" with Werner Vogels — CTO, visionary, and evangelist behind Amazon and Amazon Web Services (AWS).

On the night of this "meeting," the party started at 7 p.m. and we had six hours of live music, drinks, partner shout-outs and non-stop networking. As the show wrapped up and we took pictures with the bands and recapped the night, I got a tap on my shoulder from one of my colleagues.

"York! Werner Vogels is here, and he says he's here for his meeting with you."

I had invited Werner to the event. But he was invited VIP to every event, by every company. He was as VIP as it got. We had never met, and my invite was cold. I never expected him to show. The fact he arrived, called it a "meeting," and asked for me by name at 2 a.m. was and remains a highlight of my career.

The end of the party marked the end of months of planning, four days of the festival, dozens of parties, hours of setting up that day, intense networking, and steady drinking. I was exhausted. But it was time to bring my A game.

Werner and I proceeded to share company histories, discuss collaboration opportunities, talk scaling, learn more about our visions, and generally have a great time chatting. AWS became one of our most strategic partnerships that helped skyrocket our company growth.

## TAKE YOUR CRAFT SERIOUSLY

When I was just 7 years old, at the height of the Boston Celtics' 1980s run, their star center Robert Parish came to my parents' house for dinner with his friend, Clifford Ray.

My mom made a ridiculous spread of food with tons of meat. It turned out, Parish was a vegetarian. He talked about needing to stay as fit as possible in the later years of his career. Eating well was how he could prolong and maximize his remaining playing days and create a balance for later in life, because many athletes gain weight after they retire.

Elite athletes hone their skills, focus on their strengths, and maximize their best assets. We need to do that in our own careers. This mindset requires committed vision, obsessive focus, self-reflection, maturation, crazy dedication, and passion. We all have strengths. We all have core assets that separate us from our peers. Pinpoint those intangibles that make you great, narrow in, and crush it.



## BE THE SAME, ON-SCREEN AND OFF

One of the best things you can do for your career is to authentically network. I don't just mean going to networking events where you wear a nametag and talk with people who you think can help you. I mean network with everyone, because you never know what's going to happen.

And you better be the same person regardless of who you talked to. You build a reputation through consistency.

Back in my early years out of college, my friend Tim and I attended the Harvard versus Yale football game in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After tailgating in the parking lot through the first quarter, we decided it was time to enter the game. But there was a catch: We didn't have tickets.

Tim walked ahead of me, leaned against the rod iron fence, and asked someone inside the stadium what the score was and if we could snag their ticket stubs. As I caught up to Tim and the passerby who was on the other side of the fence, I rubbed my eyes. I thought he looked familiar, but he was hard to place with his baseball cap and hooded sweatshirt on. Then it dawned on me.

Me: **"Tim, I think you're talking to John Malkovich."**

Tim: **"Huh? That's not John Malkovich. I'd know, I've been talking to him for a minute."**

Me: **"Sorry, but are you John Malkovich? And what are you doing here?"**

John Malkovich (chuckling): **"Yes, guys, I am, and I live in Cambridge. I love coming to Harvard games. I've been coming for years."**

Sports columnist Bill Simmons' advice for meeting actors is to tell them you loved them in the most obscure movie you can think of. So I made a go at it.

Me: **"I loved you in 'In the Line of Fire.' It's on TNT nightly. Classic flick."**

Malkovich: **"Gee, thanks. That means a lot to me. Everyone always says 'Being John Malkovich' and that's just too easy."**

We talked a little bit more about "In the Line of Fire," in which Malkovich portrays a sociopath assassin. That led him to deadpan, "Glad you like it. You know, that was an easy role to play because I'm a lot like that guy in that movie."

We kept talking for a few more minutes and ran into him again the bathroom in the fourth quarter, where we talked football for a few minutes. A random guy in the bathroom even commented on the fact we talked like old pals.

This may seem like a chance encounter. And, yes, there's always an element of chance. But you can increase your chances by putting yourself out there. Network with everyone. And when you do, be yourself. John Malkovich talked to us like he was one of us, comfortable in his own skin.

Be the same person at home that you are at work. Be the same person with friends and family that you are with colleagues. Be the same person when the lights are the brightest that you are when no one's watching.

## IF YOU'RE THE CEO, THEN BUILD A GOOD COMPANY

Hopefully by this point you're starting to think of your career as a company. So you might as well make it a damn good company.

If you put your customers first, an engaged community and enviable culture will keep pace. Your company will become a place your competition will mimic, where talented people want to work, and prospective customers flock to.

### HERE ARE THREE KEYS TO BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS OF AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY, AN ENVIABLE CULTURE, AND LOYAL CUSTOMERS:

Let it happen naturally and organically. It takes time. Be patient.

If you engage them first and continuously, users will be responsive and reach out to others on your behalf. They'll do much of your job for you.

Don't rely on one channel. Give users and clients several arenas to engage and spread the gospel.

### HERE ARE THREE KEYS TO AN ENVIABLE CULTURE:

- Culture needs to be built and evolve from the bottom up. It needs to be enabled and supported from the top. Be entirely transparent.
- Incentives can motivate and empower employees. Autonomy is king.
- Don't ever say no to an employee with an idea. There's good in every idea. It might just need some help.

### AND HERE ARE THREE KEYS TO CREATING LOYAL CUSTOMERS:

- Always be on-call and willing to do whatever it takes for your clients. It's all about access and putting the customer first.
- Be honest, passionate, and persistent. Build real relationships.
- Ask for support and advocacy. Ensure clients know how important they and their referrals are to you.

I've been fortunate enough to see this approach work for several companies I've been involved with — and in my own career. It's happened because we care and work damn hard to deliver on every promise we make.

**IF YOU'D LIKE TO HEAR MORE OF MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND THOSE OF OTHER ENTREPRENEURS, PLEASE FOLLOW US ON TWITTER: @YORKGROWTH**