



## **9 CHARACTERISTICS OF TOP PERFORMERS**

*Find Out What It Takes to Become a "Go-To" Employee*

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### **Is This Scenario Familiar?**

Don stood by, riveted by the wreckage. "It's a burning platform, Jim."

"We've gotta make hay, Don! Why weren't we leveraged for this?"

Grimly, the two office warriors surveyed the damage laid out in grids on a six-page spreadsheet.

"No warning, Jim. Last week we were talking fourth quarter. At this juncture, he's out-of-pocket for the long haul."

Excel-shocked, the two men stared down a bleak future in utter silence, until inspiration struck. "Better bring Diane in for this. She can handle it." Don shrugged, "Sounds like a plan."

**Jim smiled. "Wanna do lunch?"**

### **Becoming the Go-To Guy/Gal**

She may look ordinary, tapping out an email while fielding phone calls and fending off recaps of Ellen's favorite sitcom, but Diane is a magnet for special projects and problem solving. "Check with Diane" and "Maybe Diane will have an idea," are all-too-common phrases heard around the office.

Diane was never a last team pick in gym class and considered far too valuable for bench sitting. Instead, she blazed toward the goal or base -- ready for the quick pass or throw and primed to score for the team. Still in the action, Diane gets the head nod in meetings and the mention in memos, and her stellar traits and skills can be developed by just about anybody.

Interested? Read on to find out how you can become your office's "Diane."

### **9. Decisiveness**

You won't find Diane wavering between the turkey wrap and the cobb salad in the lunchroom, or about whether to cold call a client. She's decisive.



With a tight deadline, weather vane-ing is unproductive. A Go-To gathers necessary facts, tapping into the expertise of others as needed and develops a plan of action. He may appear to have a head start, but that's often just because he knew when to start. His ability to focus forward makes it less likely that an issue will get stuck in review mode, leaving the solution out of sight.

## **8. Flexibility**

Don't confuse being decisive with being stubborn and rigid. You can't be successful if you don't adapt and roll with the punches.

One of Diane's strengths is an ability to bend time (or at least push it around a little). She's mentally flexible and less prone to panic over adjustments to the day's or week's itinerary. While she may be thinking, "There goes spinning class," she can quickly move on to "I'll just run with my dog" or "What a great opportunity" because she sees time as fluid and can readily channel it as needed to meet changing demands.

## **7. Ability to Look at the Big Picture**

There's never a good moment for a popcorn run at an action movie. If the hero-to-be required a lengthy briefing on the impending doom, the concession stand might see a little more action. But somehow, hero man has been gleaning details all along. He's watched evil develop or perhaps absorbed key facts the last time he saved the planet. A finger pointed toward the sky, a quick shrill scream and he's good to go.

Point and scream moments are rare in the office, but like our movie hero, the Go-To is innately aware of what's going on around her. She's the Go-To because her boss knows she'll be quick off the block, and will make decisions that are beneficial in the long-term.

## **6. Be Social**

While an office badge may be required for security purposes, the Go-To is likely a recognizable face in the building. He isn't "that tall guy in marketing." He's "Mike who handled the Walker Project." Because everyone knows Mike.

You're less likely to be top of mind for a problem-solving opportunity if hibernating from 9 to 5 in your cubicle, so make an effort to connect with others on an ongoing basis. Vary your path through the office to maintain more points of contact. Smile, nod, connect. The more people know you and see you as an indispensable part of the company, the better off you are.



## **5. Reliability**

An undependable vehicle is a hard sell on the car lot. "It works most of the time" won't inspire a buyer to even kick a tire. Similarly, office leaders don't like to hand off key assignments to someone who will probably be successful. They want as much of a guarantee as possible and a track record of proven success.

So be careful of what you promise. Give yourself a navigable path. Seek clarity on expectations and be clear about what you are able to do. Then go ahead and deliver consistently.

## **4. Be a Born Networker**

A Go-To doesn't always go solo. Often his success is predicated on his ability to assemble, delegate and consolidate people and processes to a desired end. He knows where to get answers and ideas because he has built relationships with people of varied backgrounds and abilities. And we're not talking about just having 500+ LinkedIn contacts or 1,000 Facebook friends (although that can certainly be a plus). You also need to have contacts at every level within your own organization.

The Go-To might not know the answer, but he knows somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody who does.

## **3. Creativity**

A Go-To is willing to take calculated creative risks to streamline or improve an end result. Rather than putter along in the status quo, she might zip into the passing lane or opt for an alternate route. History is good information, but she also relies on her intuition. The fact that something has worked is no indication that something else might not work better.

A Go-To indulges out-of-the-cubicle idea generation. She may occasionally color outside of the established lines (or simply redraw them).

## **2. Be Self-Assured**

A Go-To would tell you, "Be proud of your strengths." Forget about those pesky deficiencies we all have, and focus on what you do well. Quit worrying that you aren't an eloquent public speaker and acknowledge that you can rock a brainstorming session.

Confidence begets confidence if you can back it up with results. Look for opportunities to use and showcase your unique skills. You may not be tapped for the conference



speech (thank goodness), but you know you can lead an excellent breakout session. A Go-To knows why he or she is a top performer and uses that to his/her advantage.

### **1. Be a Closer**

She may not generate an actual breeze, but a Go-To can amp up the energy in herself and others. Pass her a project, and she's off like a runner with a baton, not stopping until after she's crossed the finish line.

Her stamina to hurdle roadblocks and a reflexive response to directional changes are key reasons she is handed additional responsibilities. She may be highly caffeinated, but more than likely, she has an internal stopwatch and is a fierce competitor. Both individually and as part of a team.

### **Step Up & Be the Hero**

He's the office equivalent of the quick-footed striker on a soccer team, alert for the quick pass and primed for a scoring opportunity. She's the problem solver who sees through an impossible situation to the game saving solution.

When an unexpected crisis or opportunity lobs a project off the standard flowchart, heads turn toward the Go-To Guy/Gal, poised at the edge of a wheeled office chair for another act of office heroism.

While an actual cape would be overkill, the virtual variety that emanates from a department superstar can be quite flattering. And might I add, career boosting.