

# Winning Attitudes for Career Success

By Matthew Williams

It probably comes with the territory. But in capacity with Canada's leading IT Recruitment firm, CNC Global, I often get asked the question: "What makes the perfect IT job candidate?" Whether you are looking for a new role, trying to scale the heights in your current organization, or you are a manager seeking to select candidates to build your team, it is a question that will occur to most of us sooner or later.

The career development plans of most IT Professionals usually involves an endless and ongoing upgrade in technical knowledge and ability. This in itself is not a bad thing of course, and much needed if one is to "keep up". However, perhaps there is another area of personal development that receives less focus than it should, and without which you will only get so far. Allow me to explain.

At CNC Global we interview hundreds of IT job seekers every month, and talk to IT Managers about what they are looking for in new hires. We also perform reference checks on all skill levels in a variety of roles from executives to hands-on developers. Interestingly, of the criteria listed for the ideal or successful employee, technical skills are not the dominant feature of the conversation. Absolutely they are a key factor, but they are not the difference between mediocre and a star. Think about it, how many people do you know who have great technical skills or knowledge but never seem to get the success that you would think those attributes deserve? Conversely, how many people

do you know with average technical skills, but with that little extra something called a "great attitude", achieve great things?

Now a great attitude to work is something we all know we need to have - no big news there. But what specifically are the attitudes required in order to be the "star" employee, or collectively to be a star team. Curiously, many sought after IT Professionals; the current leaders, rising

stars, movers and shakers, mentors and innovators, aren't always able to articulate what it is they are doing differently. Perhaps it comes naturally to some people. But anyone can learn to use the key attitudes necessary for career success. Infact they are obvious, we all know them and given the chance to brainstorm with a couple of friends could come up with them all in only a few minutes. →



The advertisement features a dark blue background with a glowing yellow circular graphic at the bottom. In the center, five black Ultrium tape cartridges are displayed, some standing upright and others lying flat. The EMTEC logo, consisting of two red concentric circles, is positioned to the left of the text "EMTEC BASF". Below this, the text "New From EMTEC Ultrium Tape for LTO" is written in a large, white, serif font. At the top right, there is a small graphic of a red and white target with the text "The Power of Experience" written in a cursive font above it. At the bottom right, the EMTEC logo is repeated in white.

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Allow me to share with you the criteria that I know all my experienced recruiters look for in interviews and reference checks in order to spot a star. Working hard to absorb each and every one of these qualities into your own personal value proposition will further help you be the best you can be, in whatever part of the IT career field you choose to specialize in.

In no particular order, here they are:

**1. Be a quick change artist:** In today's economy you have to go with the flow. That means rapid recovery and instant realignment with goals and objectives. Don't be the person who sits around for six months battling against the inevitable. Be the person who rallies to the cause and helps drive toward the new direction.

**2. Be engaged in your job:** Know the difference between showing up versus contributing. As one manager said when asked, "How many people work here", "Oh", he replied, "about 50% of them". Career success in any role belongs to the committed. Invest passionately in what you do and success will come a lot easier. If you can't invest passionately, or discover a passion for your chosen profession then maybe you are in the wrong job and are destined therefore to be mediocre.

**3. Achieve Maximum Velocity:** In today's economy organizations that fail to move quickly, will die. But organizations can't go fast if their employees go slowly. Develop a strong sense of urgency. Fail fast, fix it, and move on.

**4. Learn to live with uncertainty and ambiguity:** The times they are a'changing and they are often changing weekly. Expect shifting priorities. Develop an ability to improvise and achieve "Role Clarity" for yourself. In other words, keep an eye on the big picture, but if it seems clouded from where you sit make sure you know what is expected of you and seek to contribute.

**5. Be in business for yourself:** The biggest mistake you can make is to

believe that you work for someone else. Take ownership, consider how to personally; cut costs, innovate and be your own service centre.

**6. Commit to Lifelong Learning:** something most technical people are extremely good at. But don't rely on your employer. Invest your own money and time in improving yourself as a "product".

**7. Add Value:** if you want a long and successful career concentrate on making contributions and making a difference. Effort, long hours and putting in your time, are not enough anymore. Above average employee's focus on outcomes, not process - they can demonstrate results.

**8. Manage your own morale:** Put someone else in charge of your own morale and you disempower yourself. Knowledge and expertise are greatly diminished without energy and a positive attitude. Showing up for work motivated is part of your obligation to the company.

**9. Be a Fixer, not a finger pointer:** Organizations need people who can fix problems. Be the solution provider, the person who brings their team to a solution.

**10. Be prepared to fail:** Recognize that failure is a necessary pre-cursor to success. As one famous businessman observed; in order to achieve success more rapidly, first double your failure rate.

**11. Be a great listener:** Is listening an attitude or a skill? One could argue it is both. But I believe it starts with the attitude that you want to be a great listener. The fact is people gravitate to great listeners. People who listen well make consistently better decisions, follow instructions more closely and understand what questions to ask to truly understand the subject in which they are engaged. As a result their job performance is superior.

None of the above should come as a great surprise to any of us. In fact the phrase "flash of the blindingly obvious" springs to mind. However, most of us would have to admit that we don't demonstrate all of the above qualities on a consistent basis.

Career success means different things to different people. Not everyone wants to be the next Bill Gates or CIO of a major Fortune 500 company. Maybe we want to be recognized as the best Java Developer or Unix Systems Administrator. No matter, the qualities necessary for success remain the same.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that our only currency on the job market is the references we bring with us from previous positions, and the accomplishments we can point to along the way. I always enjoy interviewing a candidate and then doing a series of thorough reference checks with managers, peers and clients. What I am always reminded of on these occasions is that our perception of ourselves is not nearly as important as that which others hold of us. The true test is what people say of us when we have moved on. It is this reputation which builds a career.

So good luck out there, we are in a very different job market from the one most of us first entered into or expected even 5 years ago. Opportunities for success are extensive, but they will not be handed to any of us on a plate. The basic tools we need to be a top performer are clear and available to all of us, but aren't necessarily taught in College or University, they are learned through experience and through observing the star performers amongst us.

Just remember there are three types of people: people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who wonder what happened. Which one will you choose to be today?

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