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# CAREER-BUILDING EXCLUSIVE

JOBS MAGAZINE

## THE SECRET OF GETTING AHEAD

How To Find Your Company's Edge!

Do you want to be the best at whatever you do? Do you envision promotions taking you up the corporate ladder right to the serious, big-money power jobs? Supervisor-manager-division-head-director-assistant-VP-VP-president?

Whatever field you're in, it's perfectly healthy to envision yourself as top dog one day. The tough part is separating fantasy from reality and making it happen.

So says Mick Quinn, former programmer, project manager and hospital administrator, and founder and president of two successful IT staffing companies. Quinn calls himself a "serial entrepreneur." Anyone can start a bunch of companies, but Quinn has a knack for launching successful ones. When they make a pile of money, he sells them and moves on. When he reached 39, he sold his New York City staffing firms, moved to Europe and started all over again.

Few people can spin on a dime and reinvent themselves. Quinn, however, has elevated it to an art form. Now he lives in Vila Nova Cerveira, a tiny farming village in Portugal, where he's writing a book titled "Power and Grace - An Adventure in Awakened Living," based upon his own experiences and observations. Quinn says the book is about the secrets of personal development, fulfillment and achieving one's potential. After working in many fields, he's discovered that successful people follow a similar path. That journey is the foundation for Quinn's philosophy and strategy for realizing your potential. Here are a few of its essential elements:



• **Find your company's "edge."** The edge (similar to leading edge) is what makes your company's products special and unique. It's the reason customers buy them. Most important, it's the foundation of your company's success. Whether they're multibillion-dollar businesses or tiny startups, all businesses are fundamentally the same, says Quinn. They make a product or sell a service.

• **Identify leaders (power brokers).** These are the innovators behind the company's edge. They created/developed it, promoted it or helped define it. They can be found at every rung of the organizational ladder - from selling floor to executive suite. In small companies they're more visible and easy to spot; in large companies, however, they're harder to identify because they're involved in every department that plays a role in getting products from drawing board to buyers' hands.

Identifying the true leaders, however, might not be easy, cautions Quinn. They don't always have the biggest offices or the fanciest titles. They're often behind the scenes, keeping low profiles. How do you spot them? "They emerge when important decisions have to be made, often in crisis situations," says Quinn. The true litmus test of their leadership abilities is that they never fold under extreme pressure. "They don't think twice about taking risks and assuming full responsibility for their actions," he explains.

Talented project managers often share this rare trait, according to Quinn. PMs summoned in the middle of the night to manage a disaster site caused by a flood, hurricane or fire, for example, have to make tough decisions instantly. No matter how much disaster experience they have, each event presents new obstacles and problems, requiring unique strategies.

\* **Apprentice yourself.** The apprenticeship concept is just as effective today as it was in the 13th century. It's hands-on learning where you get to work for a master craftsman or journeyman. The journeymen in corporate America are the leaders who make, promote and sell their company's products. Once you

identify a leader in your department, ask if you can work with him or her so you can observe, learn and participate. You don't have to use the word "apprenticeship." It's implied by the nature of the relationship. This person, in effect, becomes your mentor. Odds are excellent that whoever you ask will be flattered and agree to mentor you. However long this relationship lasts, it's a wonderful opportunity to learn this person's wisdom.

\* **Become a mentor.** Once you've gained confidence, knowledge and wisdom, the next steps in the learning process is taking on the journeyman's role and mentoring someone whom you deem leadership material. Now the roles are reversed. You may be pleasantly surprised when an inexperienced worker approaches you and asks you to be his or her mentor because he or she has recognized your special leadership qualities.

### Don't put any time limits on the process

It depends upon you, your company and what has to be learned. It could take two or five years - maybe more. However long it takes, the idea is to emerge an innovator, leader and teacher.

There is undeniable logic in Quinn's approach to success. Uppermost, he stresses that there are no shortcuts for preparing for powerful leadership positions. It takes time, hard work and, most of all, a commitment to and belief in the process that gets you there.



Los Angeles Times 100%

Ad Order 26072090 8.00 X 11.52 [col X inches]

Pub Info: Thursday 03/09/06 FULJ

Adv: SECRETS OF GETTING AHEAD Sales Code: 0980

Num Colors: 0 Spot Colors:

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