



10 Ways You're Sabotaging Your Career

YOU MAY THINK SOME OF THESE HABITS
MAKE YOU STAND OUT, BUT THEY COULD
BE UNDERMINING YOUR SUCCESS

BY GINA ROBERTS-GREY

MONEY &
POWER

Certainly behaviors such as chronic tardiness can be detrimental to your reputation and paycheck. But what are some of the less obvious ways you could be stunting your career growth or earning potential? Avoid these ten bad habits to keep your job secure and stay on the right path.

1. YOU DON'T TOOT YOUR OWN HORN

It's okay to talk about your accomplishments—just as long as you have the right intention. Before speaking up, ask yourself if you want to make people aware of what you're doing or elicit jealousy, suggests Annette Y. Harris, a personal brand and executive presence coach and certified image consultant at ShowUp! in the Washington, D.C., area.

"It's good to know your value and be willing to articulate that," says Harris. "If you don't publicly acknowledge your results and impact on the organization, you risk being overlooked, because supervisors and decision makers won't know what you've accomplished."

Furthermore, refrain from downplaying praise or congratulatory sentiments. "Don't say, 'It's no big deal,' when given a compliment," urges Harris. "Offer a confident and collected thank-you or risk changing the perception that you're self-assured."

2. YOU HAVE MOOD SWINGS

Employers pick up on your energy and any changes to it. "If you're typically the team cheerleader rallying everyone to meet deadlines, organizing the Friday lunch run or projecting positivity, your boss will likely pick up on any changes to that baseline persona," says Jane Scudder, a certified coach and owner-founder of Never Settle Coaching in



Venting about the job is okay—outside your work circle.

Chicago. Your boss might jump to the conclusion that you're unhappy and looking for a new job.

That doesn't mean you have to fake enthusiasm or liveliness. But Scudder suggests tuning in to the energy you project and owning it. "If you're in a bad mood or going through a slump, it's totally okay to pull back a bit," she says. "Just acknowledge the change to keep it from taking over and creating problems." Do that by casually mentioning, "I usually spearhead this stuff, but I'm just drained right now, so I have to pass." Your boss and colleagues will appreciate the honesty, and you won't tarnish the brand you've built for yourself, says Scudder.

3. YOU FAIL TO CHOOSE YOUR WORDS WISELY

Nothing turns people off like a sense of entitlement. And stating you "deserve" a raise or another week of vacation can have your employer tuning out of negotiations before you can even present a case for earning more moolah. Instead say, "I'd like to have a conversation with you about my performance with the company," suggests Cheryl E. Palmer, a certified career coach and owner of Call to Career in Fayetteville, Georgia. "Explain that it's been X time since your compensation was reviewed, and since then you've worked on A,

B and C projects, added X value to the organization and so on."


Same goes for trying to justify a bump in pay based on personal needs. While your child's college tuition is pressing into your already pinched pennies, it doesn't factor into your boss's budgetary decisions. "Remind the company why it needs you by listing three or four ways you've improved or contributed to the organization since your last salary and benefit review," adds Scudder.

4. YOU BAD-MOUTH THE BOSS

It may seem harmless to chime in on complaints about your manager, especially when that's the buzzing topic in the break room. However, Palmer stresses that one negative word about the supervisor uttered to someone with loose lips can be the highest form of career self-sabotage: "Even if you speak negatively about the boss to someone you trust, there is always the possibility that someone else might overhear your conversation and repeat it to further [a personal] agenda." When you need to blow off some steam, stick to doing so outside your work circle. "Vent about your boss to a trusted friend or family member," says Palmer.

5. YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA PROFILES DON'T SPARKLE

Even if you adjust your social media account settings to the highest privacy level, your employer might



Show you're a team player and attend the office party.

still stumble upon inappropriate pictures or posts online. At worst, that could result in your termination. But Palmer says it could also leave you passed over for promotions or key projects because your personal life doesn't complement the corporation's image. "The best advice is, 'Don't post anything you'd be embarrassed to show your family over a holiday dinner,'" says Palmer. However, if your social media accounts are already a little iffy, she suggests cleaning them up by deleting photos and posts that show you partying hard, are laced with obscenities or could be considered improper in another way.

Palmer advises drowning digital indiscretions: "If you have digital dirt that you don't want everyone to know about, add positive information to the Internet via blog posts, comments on articles or social media sites and so on, so those positive results come up first in a search."

6. YOU SKIP THE OFFICE PARTIES

Skills and qualifications play a major role in determining who receives promotions or is assigned key projects—but so does being a team player. In some organizations, supervisors and peers take it personally when you are a no-show to after-work parties and company events. "You could be viewed as not being a team player or not as committed to the team," says Devay Campbell, a career coach and certified human resources professional in Pfafftown, North Carolina. "You are

sabotaging yourself if you are an 'eat at your desk' employee who skips after-hour office events where colleagues and supervisors can get to know you in a less formal environment."

7. YOUR WORK SPACE IS A MESS

Even if you're able to function amid cubicle chaos, an unkempt area can spell disaster for your reputation, says Marjorie Brody, a workplace-career executive coach in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania: "If your desk or floor is piled high with stacks of papers, folders and other clutter, this creates the perception that you're messy or unable to pay attention to detail." So your boss might not have confidence in your abilities or trust you to deliver when it's crunch time. Tidy things up to avoid giving the impression you don't care about, or focus on, details, suggests Brody.

8. YOU'RE AFRAID TO SAY NO

Overcommitting can lead to underdelivering. Harris cautions against agreeing to take on every task that crosses your path—it can be overwhelming and set you up for failure. "You risk not being able to competently and completely accomplish the goal to your boss's expectations. You could also sign up for the projects that don't showcase your talents," says Harris. Instead of diving into a task merely

because you're uncertain about saying no, offer to help find the best resource while stating your desire to tackle something else that's more suited to your skill set and career aspirations. A raise won't be the result of always saying yes. "Respect will come from saying no because your plate is too full or you don't have the right skills to deliver the desired result," says Harris.

9. YOU ATTACH READ RECEIPTS

We get it. You're sending that one e-mail you want—*absolutely need*—to make sure your boss or team reads. But attaching a read receipt to the message can go from communicating its importance to sending your boss a missive that you don't trust him or her. Regardless of the sender's intended tone, read receipts can be taken as intrusive, says Ellen Jovin, a principal and cofounder of Syntaxis, Inc., a New York City communication skills consultancy. "Instead of conveying a message was read, they only tell a sender that the recipient clicked on the e-mail," she says. "It is not your business to micromanage someone else's e-mail management, and trying to do so says, 'I don't trust you.'" Replace read receipts with a follow-up. "Put a note on your calendar X hours or days out to remind yourself to check with the e-mail recipient if you don't receive a response," says Jovin.

10. YOU'RE ALWAYS THE LAST ONE TO LEAVE

Burning the midnight oil now and then may be necessary to complete a special project. But being the last lit cubicle every night in the hopes of demonstrating your professional dedication can backfire. "Chronically staying late can be perceived as though you're disorganized and not getting work done," says Brody. And it's never good for the boss—or coworkers—to think you're a suck-up. "Staying late doesn't win you a badge when it's habitual," says Brody.

Gina Roberts-Grey is a frequent ESSENCE contributor.