

## Grab All The Responsibilities You Can Handle

*by Ramon Greenwood*

Each of us has three options for handling responsibilities. The choice we make is one of the most powerful determinants of the degree of career success we experience.

One option is to avoid responsibility whenever possible. That is the G. I. Joe response. Recruits learn early that unless they want to make a career of the military, "don't volunteer."

A second option is to accept responsibility when it is thrust upon us. The commonly accepted wisdom is that this is the road to success.

But wise careerists understand that merely accepting responsibility is not enough. The real key to getting ahead of the competition in the world of organizations is to aggressively seek responsibilities.

Each of these options produces its own predictable results.

To just avoid responsibility means at best to stay in place and in time to drift downward into the routine of bureaucracy.

To accept responsibility is to advance in lock steps with a lot of other people in the pack who believe that is enough to satisfy their ambitions.

To seek responsibility is the way to move ahead of one's peers.

The upwardly mobile person, however, also knows that the reach for responsibility must never exceed the grasp - the ability to handle it.

### **Be Sure You Can Deliver**

Promise only what you can deliver and deliver what you promise is wise career advice.

The irresistible urge to seek out and take on more and more assignments is a sure sign of career health, if it is controlled. But taking on additional assignments until there is an impossible overload is a sure road to big headaches, if not worse.

If your supervisor has seen you as a reliable, ambitious producer, he will be only too glad to let you take on more and more. However, he may not recall all that you already have on your plate.

He gives you another responsibility and he expects you to do your usual good job on time. But if the assignment is not completed as promised, he forgets "what you've done for him lately." His chagrin and disappointment will not be lessened by the excuse, "I have had much to do. I have been here every night until ten or eleven o'clock."

Lou Gerstner, the recently retired CEO at IBM, says the ambitious person needs to learn early on that it is perfectly acceptable to decline an assignment. That is, he says, if you are already overloaded and know that you cannot deliver on an additional project.

Far better, declares Gerstner, to say up front: "Sorry, although I would like to do that job for you, I am so overloaded right now that I simply can't deliver the kind of quality you and I both want on the schedule you need. Can you give me a little more time or can we delay delivery of another one of my assignments?"

The message is clear. Reach out and grasp all of the responsibility you can handle. But once an assignment is taken there is absolutely no viable excuse for not completing it as promised.

Ask yourself two questions:

- **When I have finished an assignment, do I wait for my leader to give me another one or do I go looking for the next task to do?**
- **Am I looking ahead to the challenge of increasingly difficult responsibilities?**

The answers to these questions are a sure indicator of the direction and pace of your career.