

Impact Players

Tags: [#high-potential](#) [#career](#) [#executive-presence](#)

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Dialogue

Story of a year in at Oracle -- and your department got disbanded after a year. You knew what you wanted to do -- you talked with one of the VPs.

When we polled managers about what reduces employees' credibility in their eyes, two of their top responses were "When they just do their job without considering the bigger picture" and "When they wait for the boss to tell them what to do."

Contributors vs. Impact Players

They don't see problems as distractions from their job; rather, they are the job—not just their job, but everyone's job.

Habit 1: Learn the game

What is upward empathy?

[liz-wiseman-upward-awareness.png](#)

Habit 2: Play where they are needed

Contributors are like the plastic soccer players on a foosball table—well spaced but locked into position along the rod. They can spin but easily miss the action. In sharp contrast, Impact Players operate more like the best live-action midfielders, who watch for developing action and then shift up- or downfield to play where they are most needed. They don't leave their post; they play their position but expand their range.

Habit 3: Play with passion

Story about Qualtrics and Utah Jazz

Concern

What's in it for me?

Decoys and distractions

Call to duty (following a syllabus)

Pursue of passion (Fill the seats or get fired example).

What have you changed your mind on?

Reserve

Connection to episode with Sandie on partnerships and not reinventing the wheel?

Quotes

Highlight [5]: In the research, my team and I studied these three different categories of contributors: High-impact contributors. Those who are doing work of exceptional value and impact Typical contributors. The vast majority of people, who are doing solid (if not great) work Under-contributors. Smart, talented people who are playing below their capability level This book will focus primarily on the distinction between the top two categories in order to explore the subtle, often counterintuitive differences in mindset that become big differentiators in impact.

Highlight [8]: The Impact Players in our study see everyday challenges as opportunities. To Impact Players, unclear direction and changing priorities are chances to add value. They are energized by the messy problems that would enervate or foil others. Lack of clarity doesn't paralyze them; Impact Players tend to see opportunity where others see threat it provokes them. Invitations to make changes are intriguing, not intimidating. Perhaps most fundamentally, they don't see problems as distractions from their job; rather, they are the job—not just their job, but everyone's job.

Highlight [11]: Do the Job that's Needed. When dealing with messy problems, Impact Players address the needs of the organization; they venture beyond their assigned job to tackle the real job that needs to be done.

Highlight [11]: Step Up, Step Back. When it's clear that something needs to be done but it's unclear who's in charge, Impact Players step up and lead. They don't wait to be asked; they get things started and involve others, even when they're not officially in charge.

Highlight [11]: Finish Strong. Impact Players tend to be completion freaks; they stick with things and get the entire job done, even when the job becomes hard and plagued with unforeseen obstacles.

Highlight [12]: Ask and Adjust. Impact Players tend to adapt to changing conditions faster than their peers because they interpret new rules and new targets as opportunities for learning and growth. They certainly appreciate affirmation and positive feedback; yet, they actively seek corrective feedback and contrary views and use this information to recalibrate and refocus their efforts.

Highlight [21]: Impact Players tend to be self-managing and offer their managers the assurance and peace of mind that they will complete the job, in full, without being told

or reminded. They not only get the job done, they also do it the right way; they steer clear of politics and create a positive team environment. Leaders appreciate this compelling value proposition: the job is done well, and the experience is positive for the team and efficient for the team leader.

Highlight [22]: Through our interviews, it became apparent that Impact Players were consistently progressing faster than their peers; they were being promoted more often and given more impactful opportunities. However, they weren't merely climbing a career ladder. Rather, they were increasing their currency in the organization and using it in novel ways. Some were ambitious and used their increased influence to move quickly up the organization chart. Others were content in their roles and used their political currency to pick their projects, direct their work schedule, or simply continue to work in a job they truly enjoyed.

Highlight [32]: I interviewed with the department manager and then her boss, Bob Shaver, the VP of administration. After answering his questions, I raised an issue. I'd seen young professionals thrown into management with little training, and I'd witnessed them wreak havoc on their teams. I confidently told him that Oracle needed a management boot camp, and that I'd love to help build it. I will never forget Bob's reaction. He began, "Liz, this is compelling, but your boss has a different problem. She needs to get two thousand new hires up to speed on Oracle technology this year." His explanation was another indicator that at that point, technical skills were more important than management skills. He continued, "It would be great if you could help her figure out how to do this." His gentle guidance carried a loud message. What I heard was "Liz, make yourself useful." I was disappointed. I knew the company needed people to teach programming, and I did want to teach, but I lacked passion for the nuances of correlated subqueries and the virtues of database-indexing techniques. To make matters worse, I was woefully underqualified, and the techies with their advanced degrees from MIT and Caltech would surely notice. I wanted to develop leaders, but now Bob wanted me to teach programming to a bunch of nerds. It was not the job I wanted to do, but it was the job that needed to be done.

Highlight [33]: Like many shortsighted professionals, I began my career seeking work that held interest for me. But when we look beyond our ideal job and do the job that needs to be done, we make ourselves useful— and much more valuable— and increase our influence. Are you bending your work to fit your personal interests, or are you flexing yourself to serve where you can be most useful?

Highlight [33]: You will learn why job descriptions are irrelevant, why bosses hate being bossy, and how the simple act of fixing a broken copier can put you onto a path to leadership. At the most fundamental level, this chapter is about how to make yourself useful—how to understand what is important and then do the things that are important in a way that is extremely beneficial to your career. But before we begin, a warning: be prepared to leave behind the comfort of a neatly defined job and work where things get messy.

Highlight [38]: When we polled managers about what reduces employees' credibility in their eyes, two of their top responses were "When they just do their job without considering the bigger picture" (the fourth-highest-ranked frustration) and "When they wait for the boss to tell them what to do" (the second-highest-ranked frustration). Though we often think of bosses as power-hungry dictators, the truth is that most managers dislike having to tell people what to do. We asked the same group of managers what employee behaviors they most appreciate. Their number one response? "When people do things without being asked." The most effective professionals look above their role and go beyond their job to get the real job done. In this section, we will explore how Impact Players do just that.

Highlight [40]: Habit 1: Learn the Game To be of maximum value inside an organization—to be of service—we first need to know what is valued. How clearly do you understand the skills and capabilities that are most prized in your organization? What are the top priorities? What warrants attention and care? What's valued by your leaders, customers, and partners?

Highlight [41]: Know the Rules Every organization has a distinct culture, a set of values and norms that govern daily behavior and decision making. But as any careful observer of organizations also realizes, the stated culture is rarely the actual culture. Several studies had pointed out the incongruence between what companies state as the organization values and what employees perceive as the real values. ⁴This incongruence suggests that employees need to decipher the real culture to be successful. Impact Players are active decoders of the culture; they read the posters on the wall and observe the behavior in the hall. They pay less attention to what people say and more attention to what people actually do—like the snickering at the term "fuzzy" I recall from my first day at Oracle. They are observing and asking questions: What types of accomplishments are celebrated? What groups have the most power and why? What's a fast way to get fired? By paying attention to what is valued, they learn how to add value. By adding value, they increase their impact.

Highlight [43]: Impact Players learn what their leaders need and are great practitioners of what I call upward empathy—the tendency to look up at managers and see not only a demanding boss but that boss's challenges, constraints, and best intentions. Upward empathy is looking beyond what frustrates you about your boss to appreciate what frustrates your boss, especially if the frustration is you. Upward empathy can be enhanced through perspective taking—the ability to take someone else's viewpoint into account.⁶

Highlight [48]: When a pressing problem gets complicated, do you play your position, assuming that someone else will handle it? Or do you chase the problem down? Your impact increases as you shift your orientation from position holder to problem solver. In the world of work, Contributors are like the plastic soccer players on a foosball table—well spaced but locked into position along the rod. They can spin but easily miss the action. In sharp contrast, Impact Players operate more like the best live-action

midfielders, who watch for developing action and then shift up- or downfield to play where they are most needed. They don't leave their post; they play their position but expand their range.

Highlight [49]: Impact Player Pro Tip As a general rule, if you aren't working on your boss's top three priorities, you are not working on the agenda.

Highlight [56]: This pursuit of one's personal interests can actually come at a real cost to the contributor. Consider Andrew, who graduated from a top university and took his first job at a leadership development company to pursue his passion for leadership and learning. A philosophy major, he was a deep thinker and voraciously read everything he could about the company's programs. He could talk intelligently about the learning outcomes and design of each program, but when it came to making sales calls, well, that just wasn't his thing. His manager sat him down, reexplained his job responsibilities, and issued a warning: fill the seats or get fired. Though learning was his passion, he needed to become passionate about selling, or at least enthusiastic enough to keep his job. He wanted to get his career off to a good start, so he took out a stack of sticky notes, wrote "D.G.F." on a dozen of them, and then posted them throughout his cubicle. He didn't tell any of his colleagues what it meant, but Andrew knew that "D.G.F." stood for "Don't Get Fired"!

References