

## **10 Ways to Poison Your Career**

By Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor

It takes anywhere from three to 15 months to find the right job -- yet just days or weeks to lose it. Here are 10 traits that are career poison:

### **1. Possessing Poor People Skills**

A little likeability can go a long way. Studies by both the Harvard Business Review and Fast Company magazine show that people consistently and overwhelmingly prefer to work with likeable, less-skilled co-workers than with highly competent jerks. Researchers found that if employees are disliked, it's almost irrelevant whether they're good at what they do, because other workers will avoid them.

### **2. Not Being a Team Player**

No one feels comfortable around a prima donna. And organizations have ways of dealing with employees who subvert the team. Just ask Philadelphia Eagles Wide Receiver Terrell Owens, who was suspended for the 2005 season after repeatedly clashing with and taking public shots at his teammates and management. Show you're a team player by making your boss look like a star and demonstrating that you've got the greater good of the organization at heart.

### **3. Missing Deadlines**

If the deadline is Wednesday, first thing Thursday won't cut it. Organizations need people they can depend on. Missing deadlines is not only unprofessional, it can also play havoc with others' schedules and make your boss look bad. When making commitments, it's best to under-promise and over-deliver. Then, pull an all-nighter if you have to. It's that important.

### **4. Conducting Personal Business on Company Time**

The company e-mail and phone systems are for company business. Keep personal phone calls brief and few -- and never take a call that will require a box of tissues to get through. Also, never type anything in an e-mail that you don't want read by your boss; many systems save deleted messages to a master file. And we can't tell you how many poor souls have gotten fired for hitting the "Reply All" button and disseminating off-color jokes -- or worse yet -- rants about their boss for all to see.

### **5. Isolating Yourself**

Don't isolate yourself. Develop and use relationships with others in your company and profession. Those who network effectively have an inside track on resources and information, and can more quickly cut through organizational politics. Research shows effective networkers tend to serve on more successful teams, get better performance reviews, receive more promotions and be more highly compensated.

### **6. Starting an Office Romance**

Unless you're in separate locations, office romances are a bad idea. If you become involved with your boss, your accomplishments and promotions will be suspect; if you date a subordinate, you leave yourself open to charges of sexual harassment. And if it ends badly, you're at risk of everyone knowing about it and witnessing the unpleasantness.

### **7. Fearing Risk or Failure**

If you don't believe in yourself, no one else will. Have a can-do attitude and take risks. Instead of saying, "I've never done that," say, "I'll learn how." Don't be afraid to fail or make mistakes. If you do mess up, admit it and move on. Above all, find the learning opportunities in every situation. Remember, over time, risk-aversion can be more hazardous to your career than error.

### **8. Having No Goals**

Failure doesn't lie in not reaching your goal, but in not having a goal to reach. Set objectives and plan your daily activities around achieving them. Eighty percent of your effectiveness comes from 20 percent of your activities. Manage your priorities and focus on those tasks that support your goals.

### **9. Neglecting Your Image**

Fair or not, appearance counts. People draw all kinds of conclusions from the way you present yourself. So don't come to work poorly groomed or in inappropriate attire. Be honest, use proper grammar and avoid slang and

expletives. You want to project an image of competence, character and commitment.

#### **10. Being Indiscreet**

Cubicles, hallways, elevators, bathrooms -- even commuter trains -- are not your private domain. Be careful where you hold conversations and what you say to whom. Don't tell off-color jokes, reveal company secrets, gossip about co-workers or espouse your views on race, religion or the boss' personality. Because while there is such a thing as free speech, it's not so free if it costs you your job!

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