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Building your construction business

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BECOME YOUR OWN BOSS...WITHOUT QUITTING (930 words)

Be your own boss without quitting your day job. Does this sound good to you?

Many of us feel unappreciated at work, and that we're not getting the recognition and remuneration we deserve. We rely on our bosses to tell us how wonderful we are (which they usually don't) and what a wonderful job we are doing (which they usually don't).

This is understandable, because most bosses are ordinary people with little training in management or human relations. They're just not good at that kind of stuff. They spend their days and nights just trying to stay on top of things, so the majority will never find the time to work on being good bosses.

This is why you have to take a leadership role. Don't turn your back on your boss for his shortcomings, but rather help him overcome them. Help him understand the value you bring to the company. Make it easy for him to evaluate what a great employee you are. When you follow the approach below, you won't need a boss to tell you how well you're performing: you'll already know.

Becoming your own boss

I lecture a degree program in Construction Technology at the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT). I ask my students to do this exercise: There is a job opening for a project manager. It's a great job and pays very well. Now, list 10 reasons why you should be hired.

My students—each one thinking he/she is more special than the next—invariably give me different versions of the same answer. They tell me they are reliable and knowledgeable, have great people skills, strive for success, etc. After discussing these answers with the class, the students soon realize that what they thought set them apart from everyone else was, in fact, showing prospective employers just how much *they were like everyone else*.

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We should instead look at this situation from the employer's perspective. **What matters to him? He wants you to tell him things like:**

- You have a history of bringing jobs in under budget. This means he will make money.
- You finish jobs on time. This means he will have a happy customer and can move on to another job.
- You work to specified quality levels. This means no complaints or callbacks, and no excess quality causing overruns.
- You maintain good customer relations. This reduces the likelihood of disputes and helps ensure the same customer will want to work with you again.

These kinds of statements show an employer *just how much you're not like everyone else.*

Now, you're probably saying to yourself, "That's fine if I'm looking for another job, but it doesn't help me at all with my current employer."

And yet it does. Basically, you have to figure out your job description for your current job and identify measurable outcomes. Discuss it with your boss: let him/her know these are the key performance indicators you're going to be working on and ensure they match up with whatever he has in mind for you. Anything that comes your way that doesn't impact these criteria should be delegated as fast as possible.

Then, on a regular basis and with the facts on your side, you can show your boss you are meeting and beating the set targets. You can qualify the great job you are doing. This puts you in control: if your boss still doesn't appear to appreciate you, then you can bet other employers will.

Let's get back to the project manager example: **What are the critical success factors for a project manager?**

- Finish under budget.
- Finish on time.
- Work to the specified quality.
- Retain the client's good will.

Now, let's explore the key performance indicators for each point.

Finish under budget

Monitor each line item and do comparisons of budget to actual as often as possible. Manage the variances quickly and efficiently and you'll prove what a great job you are doing.

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Finish on time

Keep a proper job schedule using software like MS Project. This way, you'll quickly know when a job has gone off track and be able to take corrective action to put it back on track.

Work to the specified quality

Know the standards and pass the inspections, and don't work beyond the standards you are being paid for.

Retain the client's good will

Keep the lines of communications open so that the client is happy. Make sure you provide a good audit trail for everything, especially claims for extras; you will only get paid for what you have documented.

Take responsibility for your job

The biggest waste of time for most of us involves doing things that are not our responsibility and focusing too much on trivial matters. The beauty of key performance indicators—against which you are being measured—is they liberate you from the mundane and force you to focus on the important elements of your work. Your productivity will improve. The time you spend on pre-planning will increase. Trivia will be delegated to juniors.

This is not just for the self-employed: everyone should keep on top of key performance indicators and take responsibility for them. Don't let an employer or anyone else be your guardian. Take control and be your own boss!

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