Get Your Work Noticed

It’s all too easy for your work to get overlooked in the busy hurly-burly of office life. You’re slaving away and it can be hard to remember that you need to put in some effort to boost your individual status and personal kudos for your work. But it’s important. You have to make your mark so you stand out and your promotional potential will be realized.

The best way to do this is to step outside the normal working routine. If you have to process so many widgets each day—and so does everyone else—then processing more won’t do you that much good. But if you subject a report to your boss of how everyone could process more widgets then you’ll get noticed. The unsolicited report is a brilliant way to stand out from the crowd. It shows you’re thinking on your feet and using your initiative. But it mustn’t be used too often. If you submit your boss to a barrage of unsolicited reports you’ll get noticed but in completely the wrong way. You have to stick to certain rules:

- Only submit a report occasionally.
- Make really sure that your report will actually work—that it will do good or provide benefits.
- Make sure your name is prominently displayed.
• Make sure the report will be seen not only by your boss, but by their boss as well.

• It doesn’t have to be a report—it can be an article in the company newsletter.

Of course, the very best way to get your work noticed is to be very, very good at your job. And the best way to be good at your job is to be totally dedicated to doing the job and ignoring all the rest. There is a vast amount of politics, gossip, gamesmanship, time wasting, and socializing that goes on in the name of work. It isn’t work. Keep your eye on the ball and you’ll be already playing with a vast advantage over your colleagues. The Rules Player stays focused. Keep your mind on the task at hand—being very good at your job—and don’t get distracted.

“THE UNSOLICITED REPORT IS A BRILLIANT WAY TO STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD.”
Never Stand Still

Most people go into work each day with only one thought—getting through to going home time. During their day they will do whatever they have to, to arrive at that magic time. You won’t. You won’t stand still. Having got the job it seems enough for most people that they will just do it and thus remain static. But doing the job isn’t the end game for you—it is merely a means to the end. And the end for you is promotion, more money, success, moving onward and upward, amassing the contacts and experience to set out on your own, whatever it is that is on your wish list—see Part 3. The job, in a way, is an irrelevance.

Yes, you have to do the work. And yes, you have to do it supremely well. But your eye should already be on the next step and every activity you indulge in at work should be merely a cog in your plan to move up.

While others are thinking of their next coffee break or how to get through the afternoon without actually having to do any work, you will be busy planning and executing your next maneuver. In an ideal world the Rules Player will have got their work done by lunchtime, so that they have the afternoon free; to study for the next promotion, to assess the competition among close colleagues, to write the unsolicited reports to get their work noticed, to research ways to improve the work process for everyone, to further their knowledge of company procedures and history.
If you can’t get your work done by lunchtime then you will have to fit all these things into and around the work. What the competition will be doing is not doing them. But you don’t stand still. Never accept that doing the job is enough. That’s for the others. You will be moving right along preparing, studying, analyzing, and learning.

We talked earlier about the manager’s walk; well, that’s what you’ll be doing, practicing the manager’s walk—or whoever’s walk it is you need to master. You have to see promotion—or whatever else it is you want—as a movement. You keep moving or you grow moss. You have to have movement or you grow stagnant. You have to like movement or you grow roots.

Movement requires of you that you don’t sit on your backside and do nothing—don’t stand still.
Volunteer Carefully

A lot of people think that if they say “yes” to everything they will get noticed, get praised and get promoted. Not true. The clever manager above them will use this “I’ll do it” mentality and you will end up overworked, undervalued and abused. Before you put your hand up to volunteer for anything, think very carefully. You have to ask yourself various questions:

- Why is this person asking for volunteers?
- How will this further my plan?
- How will I look to senior management if I volunteer?
- How will I look if I don’t volunteer?
- Is this a dirty job that no one else wants?
- Or is this person genuinely, desperately overburdened and really in need of my help?

It might well be a dirty job that no one else wants and by volunteering you might look very good in the eyes of senior management—they think you capable of rising to a challenge, being useful and being prepared to get your sleeves rolled up and stuck in. On the other hand they might think you’re a sucker. Or if you volunteer to do the filing they’ll see you as a mere filing clerk. Or you might generate a load of goodwill for helping out someone in real need of support. Be careful and
choose your moments. There's no point sticking your hand up if it means you're going to be seen as a monkey. Only step that one step forward when you are confident you will look good, gain benefit, or make a difference to someone who needs help.

Also be aware that sometimes you seem to have volunteered without putting your hand up or stepping forward. It just happens that sometimes all your colleagues take a collective step backward leaving you there out in the open seemingly volunteering when you really had no intention of doing so. The first time this happens you will have to ride with it and do the job—but make sure it doesn’t happen again, not to a Rules Player, not twice. Keep your ear better attuned next time and feel out the collective approach and make sure you’re stepping backward with the rest of them.

“BEFORE YOU PUT YOUR HAND UP TO VOLUNTEER FOR ANYTHING, THINK VERY CAREFULLY.”
Carve Out a Niche For Yourself

I once worked with a colleague who made it a great personal skill to find out stuff about customers that we couldn’t. It seemed he always knew the names of their children, where they went on vacation, their birthdays—and their spouses—their favorite music and restaurants, and consequently if you had to deal with a particular customer you went to Mike and asked, politely and humbly, if he could give you some little titbit that would get you well in with the customer. Mike had carved out a niche for himself. No one asked him to become a walking encyclopedia of customer likes and dislikes. It wasn’t part of his job description. It took a lot of work and unseen effort. And it was a very valuable asset. It didn’t take long for the Regional Director to hear of this extra effort Mike had put in and his rise up the corporate ladder was swift, meteoric, unprecedented. That’s all it took. I say “all,” it was in fact a lot of work and immensely clever.

Carving out a niche means spotting a useful area that no one else has spotted. It might be as simple as being great at spreadsheets or report writing. It might be, like Mike, knowing something no one else does. It might be being brilliant with
scheduling or budgets or understanding the system. Make sure you don’t make yourself indispensable or this rule backfires.

Carving out a niche for yourself often takes you out of the normal range of office activities. You get to move around more, be out of the office more often without having to explain to anyone where you are or what you are doing. This makes you stand out from the herd, gives you independence and a superior quality. I once volunteered to edit the company newsletter—bearing in mind the previous rule—and could wander about between our seven branches at will. Obviously, I always made sure my work was done on time and supremely well.

Carving out a niche for yourself frequently means you get noticed by people other than your boss—other people’s bosses. These bosses get together and they talk. If they bring your name up it will be in a good way—“I see Rich has been busy doing some really original market analysis.” This makes it difficult for your boss not to promote you if they want to win their peer group approval. If the other bosses think you are a good idea then your boss really has to go along with it.

“If the other bosses think you are a good idea then your boss really has to go along with it.”
Underpromise and Overdeliver

If you know you can do it by Wednesday always say Friday. If you know it will take your department a week, say two. If you know it will cost an extra two people to get the new machine installed and up and running, then say three.

This isn’t dishonest, merely prudent. If it gets spotted that this is what you do, then openly and honestly admit it and say you always build in a contingency percentage into your calculations. They can’t kill you for that.

That’s the first part. Underpromise. And just because you have said Friday or two weeks or whatever doesn’t mean you can coast and use up that allowance. Oh, no. What you have to do is make sure you deliver early, on budget, and better than promised. And that’s the second part. Overdeliver. This means if you promised to have the report finished by Monday, first thing, it is finished but not only is it a report but it also contains the full implementation plans for the new premises. Or if you said you’d have the exhibition stand up and running by Sunday night with only two extra members of staff you have—and you’ve managed to get your major competitor to pull out of the show. Or if you said you’d have a rough proposal written for the new company brochure by the next meeting you not only have this but also a full color mock-up, the complete text written and
proofread, all the photos taken and full printing costs and quotes for distribution. Obviously you’ve got to be careful that you don’t overstep the mark and assume responsibilities you haven’t been given, but I’m sure you get the idea.

Again it might be stating the obvious but don’t be too blatant when you do this or your boss will get to expect it—it should be a pleasant surprise not a frequently used tactic.

It also helps sometimes to act dumb. You can pretend you don’t really understand some new technique or software when in reality you know it back to front. Then when you suddenly do all the budgets on the spreadsheets that no one else could, you look good. If, in advance, you had said “Oh, yes, I know that, I worked with these spreadsheets at my last place,” there is no surprise and you’ve given the game away—and your advantage.

When you underpromise and overdeliver you have to have a bottom line—in your case, as a Rules Player, it is simply that you will never deliver late or deliver short. That’s it. If you have to sweat blood and work all night then so be it. You will deliver when you said you would—or earlier if you can—without exception. It is better to negotiate a longer delivery time in the first place than to have to let someone down. A lot of people are so keen to be liked, or approved of, or praised that they will agree to the first delivery time offered to them—“Oh yes, I can do that,” and then they fail. They look like pushovers in the first place and incompetent in the end.