



NAC Executive Insights

“Baker’s Dozen”— Keys to Jumpstart Your Career

Key Points

- Never stop learning.
- Relationships are a very important key to success.
- Build your credibility card through proving trustworthiness and dependability.
- Keep your eyes, ears, and heart open. Opportunities are everywhere.

Introduction

Over the many decades of our careers, we have had experiences and learned lessons that have led us to develop a “baker’s dozen” of keys that might help you jumpstart your career. Those 13 keys in our baker’s dozen are:

1. Make sure you are always building your network.
2. Never turn down an assignment.
3. Make sure you have built your credibility card—you must prove trustworthiness and dependability.
4. It is your life. You must take full responsibility for everything that happens at work, at home, and in the communities in which you are involved.
5. Keep your eyes, ears, and heart open for opportunities.
6. Make sure to allocate time to think and not get consumed in life’s busyness.
7. Welcome feedback that you are given, positive and negative.
8. Surround yourself with successful people.
9. Remember, the only constant in life is change. Make sure you embrace it.
10. You must continue to learn.
11. Ensure your character reflects the high standards that you set for yourself.
12. Produce—at work, at home, in the community.
13. Look for mentors to guide your career and be a mentor to others.

Key One—Networking is Mandatory

Business and life are based on relationships. This means that networking is mandatory. Meet all of the people you can in your company and in your industry. You never know when someone you meet at a conference or through one of your activities outside of work may lead to a job prospect or other opportunity. Participate in a golf league or a tennis ladder.

Do not eat lunch alone—make the effort to build relationships with those around you. When you attend a meeting, sit next to someone new to expand your friendship circle rather than sitting with the same people all the time. If someone invites you for drinks after work and you can do it, then go. Make presentations at conferences or serve as a member of a panel discussion. Doing so gives you more visibility than only sitting in the audience, thus you'll meet more people. They will even seek you out. Outside of work, remember your professional organizations. Network through sports, music activities, religious organizations, and your family.

Networking has three components: connect, stay in touch, and give and get. Learn to make small talk. Work on connecting with people. Asking people a question enables them to talk and for you to learn more about them, both which help build a relationship. Stay in touch with the people you meet. Send them articles. Write notes. Send birthday cards. There are many ways to let them know that you are thinking about them. Then give and receive (get). Remember, for someone to give you something, you must be willing to receive it.

Key Two—Never Turn Down an Assignment

Sink your teeth into new assignments. They are how you grow and learn. Ask questions if you don't know how to do something. You might be surprised as to how favorably asking others for help will be perceived.

Key Three—Build Your Credibility Card

You must continuously prove your trustworthiness and dependability—that is how you build your credibility card. Do more than is needed. Go the extra mile. Meet all of your performance objectives. Stand out with your performance. Volunteer for work assignments. Remember that your reputation has taken years to build and can be destroyed in an instant. Ensure that does not happen. Your reputation is your personal brand.

Key Four—You are Responsible for Your Life and Career

Control your own destiny or be assured that someone else will. This means that you must take full responsibility for your life and career. Remember that not making a decision simply means that someone else makes that decision for you. The hardest things to handle in life are success and failure. Learn how to handle both. Choose to view failures as learning opportunities and do not gloat about your successes.

You control future, your destiny. What you think about comes about.

— Mark Victor Hansen

Key Five—Seize Opportunities

Opportunities are all around you, but first you must recognize that there is an opportunity in the wings. Then capitalize on them—or as one of our friends says, “Seize the opportunities.” Doing so, however, usually involves hard work. Remember this quote from Thomas Edison: “Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

See the opportunity in every difficulty, rather than the difficulty in every opportunity. Learn to turn these stumbling blocks into stepping-stones in order to help create your next opportunity.

When one door closes, another door opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the ones which open for us.

— Alexander Graham Bell

Key Six—Set Aside Time to Think

In today’s world, we are so busy doing that we don’t set aside time to think. Setting aside time to think isn’t *wasting* time—it is *using* it wisely. Think about your priorities. Think about your schedule. This might be a good time to think about your personal mission or your purpose in life and work. Spend the best hours of your day thinking about your biggest opportunity, not your biggest problem.

Key Seven—Welcome Feedback

Feedback, both positive and negative, is simply information. Welcome it and use it. Feedback can supply information on lessons learned and how we can improve our performance. It can provide guidance or direction on decisions that we need to make. Listen to people who are sometimes naysayers, you don’t only want to hear from people who always tell you that you are right. Stay curious. As you listen, you will learn.

Key Eight—Surround Yourself with Successful People

Negative people drain your energy and use up your resources. Thus, you need to surround yourself with positive, successful people, those who will support your endeavors and serve as role models for you. They can provide ideas on how you can succeed in your life and your career.

Key Nine—The Only Constant is Change

When you think about change remember this: the sun rises and sets at a different time EVERY DAY. Thus, why would we ever think that conditions in our world and our lives are going to stay the same? They don't. Change is the only constant.

Do not bemoan change. Embrace it. See how adapting to change can benefit you.

Key Ten—Lifelong Learning is Mandatory

You must be a lifelong learner. The pace of change in our technological modern world is so rapid you will otherwise be left behind. Technology has changed so much over the course of our careers. Someday in the not-too-distant future, 2023 technology will look ancient! Your mind is like a parachute: it doesn't work if it isn't open. Be curious. Our economy is driven by knowledge. We must all keep learning.

Key Eleven—Live Up to High Expectations for Yourself

"Character" is how you behave when no one is looking. Actually, you *are* looking. You must live up to the high expectations you've established for yourself. Deliver on your commitments. Keep your promises to yourself and to others. Ability may pave your path for you, but integrity will keep you on the path. Always do the right thing and do it at the right time. Your words are how you see yourself, but your actions are how other people see you.

Character is the sum total of all our everyday choices.

— Margaret Jensen

Key Twelve—You Must Deliver Results

Do your very best. Always. Someone is always watching. And it might be someone who at a later point in your life and your career will turn out to be your advocate or your sponsor if you performed well consistently. You are being paid to perform and perform you must. It is never what you did for someone yesterday. It is always what you will do for them today—and then tomorrow. No trophy is awarded for simply showing up.

Key Thirteen—Find and Be a Mentor

You can't expect to have all the answers at any point in your life. Find others who will mentor you and provide you with guidance. As you progress through your career, make sure you mentor those coming up behind you. It's called "paying it forward." What is the point of all of your hard-earned experience if you don't share it with others?

Summary/Conclusion

Life and our careers provide almost continuous lessons learned. In this Executive Insight, we've provided a "baker's dozen" of keys to jumpstart your career. A very strong career and life can be built through these keys, which include networking is mandatory, you must be a lifelong learner, you need to seize opportunities, and you must always do your very best.

About the Authors

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