



Engineering a Career: The Twelve Commandments of Career Success

An Online Continuing Education Course for Engineers

Course Number: PD-3010

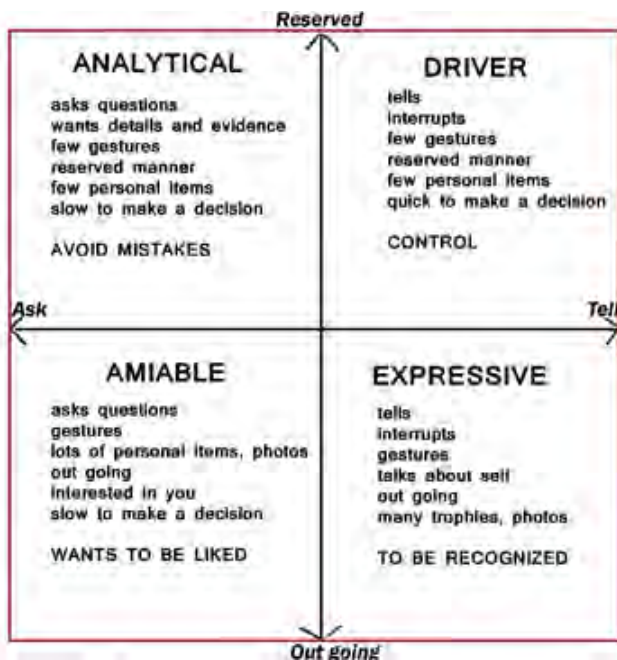
Credit: 3 Hours / 3 PDH / 3 CPD

Engineering a Career: The Twelve Commandments of Career Success

Jeffrey S. Caudill, P.E.

Prologue

Depending on chosen career path, a hub-centric personality type can be one of the best fits for engineering. The Merreil-Reid Personality Model features four potential personality areas that can be classified as dominant traits. Hub-centric personalities are rare and show in less than 10% of engineers. Hub-centric personalities can move or shift comfortably to any one of the four personality types below from their center point of origin, at the hub.



However, the vast majority of engineers fall into Analytical or Driver as their dominant trait. Engineers are often described as introverted or anti-social, which is a reason for their distinction.

Outspoken, extroverted engineers are less common. Expressive personality types tend to be loud and even potentially narcissistic. This trait is the least common in engineers.

Expressive behavior can be confused with bombastic or stern Leadership style, but they are not the same. For example, Donald Trump would most likely fall into a Driver-Expressive personality type. This is as opposed to Barack Obama, who would be an Amiable-Expressive personality type. Knowing how your mind operates

and where you are most comfortable shows you your strengths and reveals your weaknesses.

This course will not test you to determine your personality profile. This is discussed in the beginning so that you can perform this study on your own. Knowing your own skin is important to mapping out a pathway to “Engineer Your Career.” You do not need to know this first to complete this course. However, you will want to complete one of the numerous free personality profiles online. Why?

Engineers are natural problem solvers. Knowing the areas you are weak in can help you learn to mimic some of the other areas when needed, especially that pesky Expressive quadrant. Why is this box so important? Teamwork is a trait that employers, supervisors, and coworkers look for in others. If you don't have it, you can at least learn, up to a point, to demonstrate enough of these skills, so your career is not hindered.

This course will take you through the **Twelve Commandments** of being a successful engineer. With a little note-taking, creativity, and problem-solving, you will be able to map out a successful career for yourself apply these twelve areas to your career.

At the end of this course, you will understand what the CAREER graphic above means. You will have a clear understanding of how to chart-map your career. Lastly, you will have some tough decisions to make. If you are at Step 5 and still are not clear on your path forward or are considering a career change, never mapped out your career, are a meticulous documentarian, or are interested in honing skills used in your daily career, this course will be helpful.



I. Basics Any Engineer Can Do

Through education and career choice, engineers should possess the ability to solve problems, be creative, think analytically, and possess strong technical aptitude. This is known in some circles, as depicted in the classic “Dilbert” cartoon, as “the knack.” You would never have had the ability to graduate from an engineering college without having “the knack,” much less become a professionally licensed engineer. Therefore, this course will not cover these elements and assume you already have an aptitude for them. This course focuses on other, softer skills that are more social in their origins.

Why should engineers care about the social aspects of their careers? Ability is one thing, but opportunity is another. You can either create opportunities or wait on opportunities. Your ability as an engineer to be accepted socially is critical in how far your career will go. Today, right now, you need to consider what you want to achieve as an engineer. Do you want to be a leader of people or a technical expert? Very few people can juggle both.

Question: Am I going to pursue a technical career, a leadership career, or both?

We will revisit this question later, but you should be thinking about it as we go. The personality profile mentioned in the prologue should closely match your decision.

There are a few skills that anyone, even engineers, can master. You may have seen these before, but they are:

- Being polite, attitude
- Expressing gratitude
- Showing up on time
- Availability
- Working hard
- Being prepared
- Expressing passion for your work
- Volunteer—being helpful
- Being supportive
- Being organized

These ten skills are the basis for everything you do. Possessing these, along with “the knack” and doing nothing else past this chapter, will lead to a successful career. These foundational traits can be cultivated, even if you do not fully retain them now. Some may argue that these take no talent. This can be debated, but they most certainly take effort.

Attitude

Our attitude reflects how many people view us as a person. It further means a way of thinking or feeling that is reflected in a person's behavior. Notice how attitude quickly translates to behavior. Our behavior is our outward social overcoat. It is the perception others have of us. In short, perception is reality.

Negative attitudes, bored attitudes, condescending attitudes, defiant attitudes, etc., do not serve us well. Positive attitudes that demonstrate our teamwork, support, creativity, listening, compassion, and winning attitude do serve us well.

The implication is not to promote robotic, fake attitudes. It may not take talent to have a positive attitude, but it does take effort. This effort is demonstrated in how engaged in a meeting or discussion with your superiors or your coworkers. You must have the support of both.

For example, at an employer the author worked for, there was a person that was beloved by the managers and supervisors. Her immediate supervisor saw a positive attitude when in her presence. When the supervisor performed a 360-degree review prior to considering her for a leadership position, he was shocked. She treated coworkers and underlings like dirt, never answering their questions or providing them with information or work they need to complete their job, but always making demands from them. Still, the manager went against the team and made her a supervisor.

One of the highest producing and well-respected teams fell apart in months. The team went from being seen as helpful and supportive to mistrusted and despised. Some of the talent left for other departments, some retired, and the ones that could do neither went into self-protection mode. The supervising managers could not believe the poor results.

Feedback was solicited from other department supervisors, and the attitude went with her. Managers above her level thought she was great. Supervisors and coworkers at her level or below her despised and practiced avoidance. After receiving a poor evaluation, most likely, she left the company and went on to another one. Her social media pages show her career progression, but instead of stability, they show a string of 2–3-year stints at multiple companies.

What is the point of this example? This person's attitude was not genuine. She cultivated a toxic work environment within her realm of influence. In a small team setting, the damage was confined, and she could control it. On a larger stage, her negative attitude began to poison other departments and destroy her own. She came across as highly productive and a team player, but in reality, she was a team prey-er. She preyed on the weak or unwitting to selfishly advance her own goals.

If you are genuinely an unhappy person, you will not be able to conceal this. Most people are either in the middle or happy. If you have an attitude that is not midland or better, then consider the technical route. If you have promise and want to put effort into your attitude, then continue reading on.

An unhappy person can still benefit from this training by practicing the skills. Just be careful not to be perceived as fake. This is a much worse label.

Skills to master for a positive attitude are:

- ✓ *Control your language* – Words do matter. The inflection, tone, and word choices you employ make a difference in people’s perception of what you are saying.

The language you use every day, both in thought and spoken word, has a cumulative effect on how you think about yourself, your work, and those around you.

This may seem like a simplistic point, but it demonstrates the difference between seeing your day as filled with tasks or filled with opportunities. The former is tiring and arduous, making you feel trapped in a daily grind. The latter is exciting and filled with potential.

Self-awareness of your reactions to others and the words you use to respond reflect either positively or negatively on you. Using terms like “never,” “always,” “we always did it that way,” “that will never work,” “that idea is terrible,” “this is a stupid idea,” and so on plants seeds of discontentment in others.

- ✓ *Be nice to others* – This doesn’t mean you should be a doormat. There are polite ways to excuse yourself. Listening always promotes caring. Smile. Offer support.

If you make being nice to other people a habit, it becomes a cycle of generosity and happiness that makes you feel good and causes those around you to feel happy as well.

Think of the worst negative work environment possible. Negativity feeds on more negativity until it seems overwhelming. Be nice to other people and watch them pay it forward.

- ✓ *Enjoy the high points of your day* – If you don’t have many, create them. You can create small “high points” in each day to help you get through projects or days that might otherwise seem mind-numbing. Taking breaks is important, but they need to have value.

Some suggestions are:

- Take breaks away from work if possible. A close friend and I used to get lunch and drive to the bay and eat once a month. This was very reinvigorating.
- Consider walking, solitude, silence, or whatever sounds good and is doable where you work.
- Find a place at work to read up on your hobbies.

Daily high points should be small and simple. They should not require a lot of money or create a habit that could have negative effects on your health, budget, or work. Weekly or monthly high points can be a bit bigger. Maybe every Thursday, you eat lunch at a restaurant nearby instead of bringing in your own lunch. Whatever it is, create something to look forward to.

- ✓ *Take responsibility* – Choose your reaction in all situations. Refusing to take responsibility for your actions and your situation, or not taking control of how you respond, kills a positive attitude immediately.

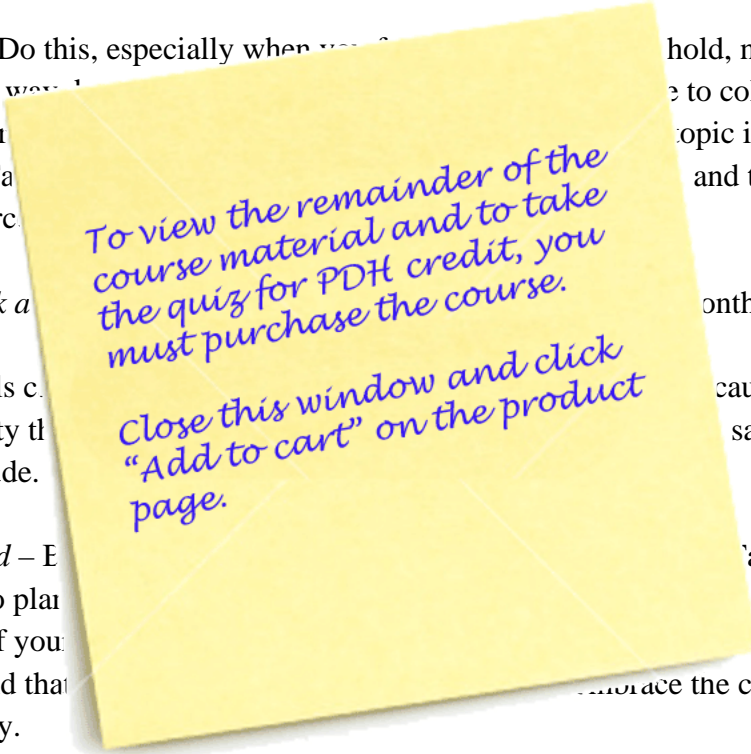
After all, if something happens and you're at fault or in some way responsible, refusing to acknowledge it means you can't correct the behavior and it will happen again, and you also set yourself up for a victimhood mindset in which things happen to you.

A simple way to look at this for engineers is Event + Response = Outcome (E+R=O).

- ✓ *Breathe* – Do this, especially when you're overwhelmed. Hold, not in an overtly and obnoxious way. Take a few minutes to collect your thoughts and answer the question. If the topic is not good news or if the situation is too big to overcome, and that nothing is too

- ✓ *Make work a goal* – Set goals for yourself, monthly, and annually. These goals can be productivity, a good attitude, or a spike in satisfaction and a

- ✓ *Plan ahead* – Every morning to plan your goals. Do not get upset if you don't achieve them. If that plans change, and that's a change, embrace the change as an opportunity.



To view the remainder of the course material and to take the quiz for PDH credit, you must purchase the course.

Close this window and click "Add to cart" on the product page.