

SUMMARY

WORKS WELL WITH OTHERS

ROSS MCCAMMON



Summary of “Works Well With Others” by Ross McCammon

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Learn how to shake hands, shut up, and other crucial skills in business that no one ever teaches you.

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Introduction

When people begin a new job that may be out of their comfort zone, many believe that they don't belong. Ross McCammon felt this way when he began working for the magazine *Esquire*. Before taking the position as an editor for the well-known magazine, Ross was a young editor in chief of *Spirit*, the in-flight magazine of Southwest Airlines, and his immediate reaction when taking the phone call from the *Esquire* recruiter was, "This is a mistake." Of course, it wasn't a mistake and soon Ross was in New York City working for one of the biggest magazine companies in the world. However, Ross felt like an imposter and found himself thinking, "I don't deserve this." This phenomenon is not uncommon. In fact, the term *imposter phenomenon* was coined by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978 and is used to describe the feeling people get when they believe they aren't as successful as other people think. Many successful people have felt this, including Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor who said, "My first month as a judge I was terrified...I still couldn't believe this had worked out as dreamed, and I felt myself almost an imposter meeting my fate so brazenly." Others like Kate Winslet, Chuck Lorre, Tina Fey, and even Meryl Streep have all felt similarly after finding success in acting, comedy, and writing.

When Ross arrived in New York he didn't know how to dress, how to have a business lunch, or even how to order a drink at a bar. He didn't know how to work at a big magazine and he didn't know how to live in New York City. After a few months, however, Ross learned the truth: Everyone is an imposter. "Everyone is weird and nervous. No matter how famous or important, everyone is just really weird and really nervous. Especially the people who don't seem weird or nervous." This book is more than just getting over your insecurities and landing the job of your dreams. It's about the small things that occur during the hiring process that cause us great anxiety. This anxiety is unnecessary and through *Works Well With Others*, you can learn to overcome it and make a lasting impression.

Talking to a Recruiter

Finding a job in today's world is more than simply trying to impress your future employers, you must also impress your recruiter. As you may (or may not) know, big companies use recruiters to help them in the hiring process and according to Ross McCammon, interviews with recruiters can somehow be more intimidating than interviews with your future employer! But with Ross' tips, interviews with recruiters no longer have to be stressful.

Ever wonder why recruiters ask such personal questions? Well, not only do recruiters want to fill a vacant position for an employer, but they also want to build a relationship with you. If they don't find something immediately for you, that doesn't mean you won't be the right fit in the future for another job that might come along. Therefore, recruiters will try to gather as much as they can about you, so you should treat each interview as an opportunity for them to learn about your career goals.

When researching for this book, McCammon met with a top New York-based media-industry recruiter to find the answers about a recruiter's role in your career. This conversation allowed McCammon to get an inside view about what a recruiter is looking for and the first rule for recruiter interviews is: never be late. Seriously, don't do it. It's okay if it happens, but it definitely won't look good.

As always, you need to be truthful. Be candid about where you are in your career and what you are looking for. Being honest will help your recruiter find you the perfect fit. While you're at it, don't be *too* honest by stating all the things you hate about your current employer. Instead, talk about your weaknesses and how you are working on them, and be sure to discuss how you could contribute to your new employer. And lastly, don't be afraid to ask more questions. Learn as much as you can about the position and the company, learn about the qualities they are looking for and highlight those qualities about yourself if you get the chance to interview with the hiring manager.

After the meeting, you should send a thank-you note to the recruiter; however, don't send any gifts. They're excessive. "Like you're trying to make up for some professional deficiency."

Entering a Room

When walking into the room for an interview, your potential employers are getting a first look into you, their future employee. As humans, we have animalistic instincts that form first impressions, we are judging warmth, trustworthiness, confidence, social dominance, and whether or not someone is well-groomed. And when it comes to first impressions, we are very good at knowing whether or not we will “like” or “dislike” someone. This provides you with a great opportunity.

Now, when you enter a room to meet new people, it can be quite intimidating. However, just remember that you’re in charge and you can take responsibility for determining the mood of the room. And the best way to make that great impression is through eye contact. “Do not look down, to the side, through them, at their chest, into their souls. Look everyone in the eye.” Studies show those interview candidates who maintain a high level of eye contact make a better first impression and is a critical determinant of interview success.

There are many ways we use eye contact to gather information. For instance, when someone shifts their gaze, it can indicate that they feel uncomfortable, uncertain, or out of control. People who maintain eye contact, however, feel confident in their setting. But there’s more to eye contact than just looking people in the eye. The gaze is critical during interviews and when you look at people for too long, they begin to feel uncomfortable as you stare into them. Avoid freaking people out by keeping eye contact during your interview for at least half the time. This will make you seem confident and competent without making people feel as if you want to kill them.

If you want to practice your eye contact skills, here’s a simple experiment. Look at yourself in the mirror and hold your gaze for a second before glancing away. Now do it again and hold your gaze for five seconds. You’ll find that you trust the second version of yourself more than the first. You’ll

feel comfortable with that version and you'll like yourself better. So take that experiment with you into your interviews and make that great first impression.

Why You Should Screw Up

When starting a new job, you may feel as if you don't want to make a mistake. You want to make a good impression and seem as if you are qualified for the job you got offered, right? Well, McCammon suggests that making mistakes and screwing up is a good thing! If you don't screw up, then you are too overqualified for the position. When you mess up, you allow yourself to learn and grow. So embrace the mistakes and remind yourself that you are simply being challenged and that you are succeeding.

McCammon lists some critical mistakes that he made when beginning his position at *Esquire*. Here are some of the crucial mistakes that allowed him to learn and grow as a person:

- Reached out to shake an important person's hand in inappropriate circumstances, such as while they were eating food, in the middle of a conversation with someone else, or even in the restroom
- Screwed up a presentation by choking on his saliva.
- Conspicuously avoided making eye contact with someone he admired because he was intimidated by their power.
- Spoke loudly due to anxiety.
- Loitered around a group of people at a party, sidled up to them, and then inserted himself into the conversation awkwardly.
- Due to fatigue and intimidation, he clammed up at dinner on his first day at work with all his new colleagues, including his boss. He literally did not say anything.
- Pretended he knew something he clearly didn't and continued to speak about it until his ignorance became obvious.

Speaking of pretending to know something you don't, McCammon made this mistake on the first day of his new job. He believes at thirty-years-old he should've known how to navigate a business dinner in which he was the guest of honor, clearly, he did not. He felt intimidated and as if he wasn't worthy of being the guest of honor, he fooled them all and if they only knew

him, they would find out he was vastly underqualified for his job. He felt like an outsider and he worried too much about what they would think. He felt exposed.

That night, McCammon was speaking to no one, that is until a colleague asked him about his thoughts on Werner Herzog. Wait, who? Today, McCammon knows Herzog to be the eccentric German director of strange film sagas and esoteric documentaries; however, that night Herzog was just another cultural reference that McCammon didn't understand. When someone tried to include McCammon by saying, "Let's see what Ross thinks about Herzog," McCammon was certain this was a setup. He could either admit ignorance or he could try and bullshit his way through. McCammon chose the latter. He responded, "That guy. I think his early work was derivative. But his recent stuff has moved the needle."

Considering his response made no sense to his colleagues, they completely ignored him and McCammon sat the rest of the night awkwardly feeling like the new kid at school. So when you become confronted with a topic or a question that you don't know about, be honest. When people admit ignorance, it shows that they are honest and curious. In an interview, you can reply with something like, "I'm sorry. I have no idea what you're asking. Can you please explain?" Authenticity is key, you can't be interesting or have a genuine conversation with someone if you are faking interest in something, it just doesn't work.

How to Speak in the Workplace

In today's environment, we are communicating with people 24/7 as we text, email, and make phone calls with ease. As communication has become more casual, there are still some words and phrases that we should avoid in the workplace. But why? Well, if you want to be a professional, then you'll need to learn how to talk like one. This means that some phrases are more appropriate at home rather than in the workplace.

For example, a professional should never have to apologize. While this may seem confusing or even impossible, let me explain. When you make a mistake at the office, there are many ways to address that you made a mistake without saying the words, "I'm sorry." The problem is that when we apologize in a professional environment, we create an uncomfortable space and bring emotion into the workplace. Instead, take action by speaking professionally and saying something like, "I understand what went wrong and it won't happen again."

Speaking of emotions, we should avoid beginning conversations with the words, "I feel..." When you say the words "I feel," you are communicating that you have doubts about your work and yourself. Those words lack confidence and make you seem uncertain about what you are saying. Instead, saying "I believe" or "I'm certain" will show your peers that you show conviction and confidence in what you're saying. Another phrase that suggests that you are unsure about the intelligibility of your statements is asking the question, "Does this make sense?" When you ask this question, you are simply proving that you might not think it makes sense; otherwise, you wouldn't have asked the question in the first place.

Lastly, it's important to keep things professional, so we should avoid using phrases like "grab" in the workplace. You may hear it all the time as people say things like, "Let's grab lunch" or "Can I grab you for a second?" When you use the word "grab" you are implying that you do not value the other person's time. Instead, you should show respect by saying, "Let's discuss

this over lunch” or by asking, “Can we have a meeting?” These phrases will make you seem much more professional and respectful of people’s valuable time.

Continue the professionalism by avoiding the phrase, “It is what it is.” This is a throwaway line and a sign of laziness. It doesn’t resolve anything and it literally means nothing, so just don’t say it. And finally, avoid entering a meeting and immediately announcing, “I’m late because...” In other words, less is more when it comes to tardiness in the workplace. McCammon believes “Discretion is a virtue and the most underrated tactic in the workplace is silence.”

How to Make Small Talk

While it may be important to speak professionally in the workplace, it's just as important to engage in small talk. And not just engage in it, but be *good* at it. When McCammon began working in New York, everyone he met was a stranger and he had to learn quickly how to be likable. For instance, it's hard to get someone to like you when you confuse them for another Oscar-nominated-but-not-a-household-name actor. Oops! Luckily, McCammon has learned from his mistakes and he is a much better small talker than he was before.

As a human being who decides to function in mainstream society, small talk is an inevitability, it's simply a part of civilization. McCammon states that "People who don't speak when close together are really no different from penguins on an expanse of ice, huddled together being mostly silent." As awkward as small talk may seem, it can actually be an enjoyable experience! A 2014 study by the University of Chicago psychologists experimented on people who rode the train and asked them to do one of three things on their morning commute: strike up a conversation with a stranger, sit alone quietly, or just do as they normally do.

Those who chose to chat with a stranger reported having a more enjoyable ride. In the survey, however, researchers learned that people didn't want to initiate conversations with others because they believed others didn't want to talk to them. We call this "pluralistic ignorance," which means we go along with what's happening in social situations because we are afraid of disrupting the social norms. This is why we don't talk on elevators or why we avoid helping others on the street. In other words, we avoid talking to people even though we actually crave interactions.

The next thing to consider is that we must be curious. If we aren't curious about what is being talked about, then the small talk will never work. So in addition to maintaining eye contact and smiling, make an effort to truly listen to what other people are saying. When you actively listen, you can

begin engaging in what McCammon calls *medium talk*. Medium talk is when people connect on a new level. For instance, when you take a genuine interest in others, you show them a side of you they may not have seen before. They see that you are a genuine, humane person. So when you ask someone, “How was your vacation?” Listen to their response and become curious. Then you can get into the nitty-gritty business stuff.

Think About Clothes

Clothes are important, they are powerful. The right clothing can mean confidence, whereas the wrong thing can make you feel as if you don't belong. For instance, when McCammon went to interview at *Esquire*, he was used to outfits that belonged in Texas, not New York City. So when he showed up to his first interview, he simply wore a button-down shirt and nice pants; however, when he began to approach the looming building on a busy New York City street, he suddenly realized he should've worn a suit jacket.

As he walked into the building, McCammon was met with a framed poster-size cover of the June 2005 issue of *Esquire*, which featured Ewan McGregor staring down at him. "And then, swear to god: McGregor shook his head with pity. And then swear to god: One of the cover lines morphed into: 'Putz Doesn't Wear Suit Jacket to Interview. Let's See How This Goes!'" Feeling intimidated and out of place, McCammon stressed over not wearing a jacket to his interview, something he shouldn't have stressed about. While a suit jacket didn't matter to *Esquire*, our clothing certainly has the power to make a good or bad first impression.

For example, wearing something that "fits the part" of the job we are doing can give us the confidence to perform our job better. Don't believe me? Well, researchers at Columbia University studied the effect that clothing can have on mood and behavior. Their findings showed that people who wore a lab coat paid closer attention to detail compared to those who simply wore street clothes. Therefore, clothes matter and they can even help reveal your personality. For instance, wearing a bright-colored tie or a wacky sweater can show people that you have confidence to stand out among others. Or wearing a Star Wars shirt might communicate to others that you are trendy, yet geeky.

Of course, it's important to dress for the job. So if you are heading to an interview at a big bank or hedge fund, wearing an ill-fitted suit might

suggest that you don't know what you're doing. However, a nicely-fitted suit will show that you are confident and perhaps even trustworthy! Plus when you wear something that fits well and makes you look good, you'll avoid feeling uncomfortable or self-conscious. When you wear the right thing, however, you'll feel confident, smart, and maybe even a little sexy. That, my friend, is the power of clothing.

Final Summary

Breaking into the world of business can be intimidating. Even if you've worked in the business for years, many of us feel like imposters in a world of people who have it all together. The reality is, everybody is an outsider. At some point, the most successful person at your company was sitting in your shoes too feeling lost, overwhelmed, and anxious. Luckily, Ross McCammon lays out some tools that will help you ease your anxiety and stand out among the rest. Beginning with tips on how to interview with a recruiter, McCammon goes through many scenarios that will help you gain confidence. For instance, look people in the eye before you shake their hands and maintain proper eye contact throughout conversations and you'll seem confident and sure of yourself. Next, be okay with making mistakes and avoid apologizing for them. Show people that you understand what you did wrong and become curious about learning how to avoid making the same mistake again. Lastly, learn how to turn small talk into medium talk and be sure to dress for success! Oh, and most importantly, never be late.



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