

By *finweek* team

Five ways to sink your career

The biggest mistakes result from the messy business of managing your managers, your team, and yourself, as the *finweek* team found out when we spoke to management advisers and coaches about common career blunders.

It wasn't long after his promotion that a senior South African executive in a large multinational company started to feel stressed and overwhelmed. He was suddenly in charge of an international business unit, with managers from all over the world, including Asia and the US, reporting to him. His inbox was being flooded with requests for his input at all hours.

Soon, he wasn't coping, falling behind on the strict turnaround times he set himself. Looking for help to better manage his time, he approached [Janine Everson](#), a certified coach and academic director of the Centre for Coaching at the UCT Graduate School of Business. He was horrified when she suggested that he find out from his superiors what their expected turnaround on requests should be. He feared that they would question his commitment to the job.

Eventually, he carefully approached them. Immediately, he was assured that company protocol only requires him to respond to emails during the South African business day.

Without this reassurance, he would have continued to work all hours, resulting in an unsustainable work/life imbalance, and likely despondency, burnout and resignation. This scenario highlights one of the key mistakes managers make in their careers, says Everson. "Holding back and not asking the relevant questions out of fear will have a detrimental impact on your ability to get ahead."

South Africans tend to have a very deep respect for authority, says Everson. "We have enormous and unreasonable expectations of top managers, resulting in overblown reverence." This stokes a massive fear of senior management, preventing many people from speaking up on crucial issues or presenting their ideas to their bosses. Overcome the fear factor and, with a respectful and sensitive approach, keep information (also about negative issues) flowing to your superiors. Don't hesitate to present your ideas and let your true value to the business be known.

Apart from being overawed by your boss, other common career mistakes include:



Janine Everson
Certified coach and academic director of the Centre for Coaching at the UCT Graduate School of Business

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Ian Mizon
Business adviser and executive coach at the Shirlaw Group

1. Disregarding your strong suits:

Too often, people with 20 to 25 natural talents or abilities choose careers that only allow them to capitalise on two or three of these abilities, says [Ian Mizon](#), a business adviser and executive coach with the Shirlaw Group. This is not sustainable in the long run.

"The most successful people can test and stretch their existent skills every day at work. In the end, they grow the most, achieve the most and earn the biggest rewards."

If you choose a job for the big money, or because it will give you an impressive title, but it does not allow you to make the most of your abilities, you will not excel in the long run, Mizon says.

You need to pick a career that needs your talents, a job that is aligned with your own professional purpose. Ask yourself what you want to achieve in life, and be honest about where you can make the biggest contribution.

2. Not valuing people:

One sure way to fail at managing a team of people? Don't acknowledge them as individuals, and disregard their opinions and contributions.

Julia Fourie, a Cape-based coach who works with entrepreneurs and business leaders, says managers

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should prioritise getting to know their team members personally. Apart from spending time with and showing interest in them as people, having the whole team do personality tests (for example, Myers-Briggs) can be very instructive. Make it part of a group activity and share the results, which will help the whole team understand how approaches (including yours) differ.

Be very aware of your impact on other people, says Everson. "Often very subtle reactions to the way you speak or handle a situation will provide crucial information about how you should adjust your behaviour to achieve success." This is especially important in negotiations or when you are managing a team of people.

Become aware of the verbal and non-verbal responses to your way of communicating. For example, if you raise your voice, notice if your colleagues stop contributing to the discussion or look physically uncomfortable. Adjust your tone accordingly.

Sometimes your career goals can be such an all-consuming quest that you don't think much about wounding people along the way. Don't burn bridges, Fourie warns.

3. Telling yourself that you're not ready yet:

Often, people are intimidated by their more experienced colleagues or managers. They shrink from pursuing opportunities because they are letting what they *don't* know hold them back.

"If you have intelligence and common sense, you have a lot going for you already," says Mizon. "You can acquire confidence and knowledge along the way." Don't miss opportunities due to self-doubt and fear of failure.

4. Avoiding socialising:

For many people, small talk is a big pain. Bonding with your colleagues can, however, yield long-term returns. Attend industry events to maintain and establish connections that may help later in your career. Also, ensure that your LinkedIn profile is properly maintained and projects a professional image.

5. Losing your balance:

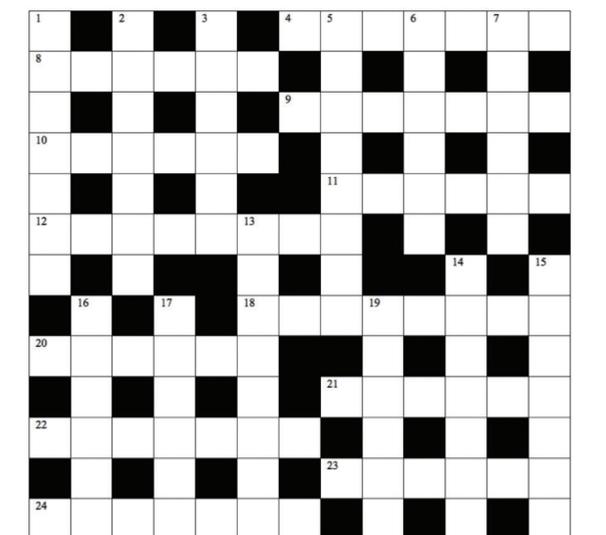
In Fourie's experience, the biggest regret senior managers have when they look back on their careers is that they focused on their work at the cost of everything else. Make sure to look after all aspects of your life, including your health and family. This will help maintain sustained energy and help you avoid burnout. ■ editorial@finweek.co.za

This week, you can stand a chance to win a copy of Jillian Howard's *The Best Pocket Guide Ever for Family Finances*. To enter, complete the online version of this quiz, which can be accessed via fin24.com/finweek from 22 February. Good luck!

- True or false?** President Zuma has announced that government was considering moving Parliament to Pretoria.
 - Bantu Holomisa
 - Mmusi Maimane
 - Julius Malema
- In which SA city did a whale recently wash up on Saunders Rocks beach?
- Which politician accused the president of living on 'Planet Zuma'?
 - Bantu Holomisa
 - Mmusi Maimane
 - Julius Malema
- Which health insurance company recently donated R1m to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (Sadag)?
- True or false?** Adele won Best Album at the recent Grammy Awards.
- Which index shows the broadest possible measure of world equity markets?
 - Global ESN Index
 - Baltic Index
 - MSCI All Countries World Index
- Which entrepreneur did artist Kanye West ask for a \$1bn donation on Twitter recently?
- Who is the CEO of Anglo American?
 - Steve Phiri
 - James Wilcock
 - Mark Cutifani
- Who did the Proteas beat in the recent ODI Series?
- True or false?** Students have erected 'Shackville' at the University of Pretoria to demonstrate a lack of housing for students.

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD 620 JD

- ACROSS**
- Quick riddle about Welsh lady's extremities (7)
 - He provided Cockney woman with young animal (6)
 - "Almost all about Rays" – a book that's brilliant (7)
 - Bawling-out for Jack Tar (6)
 - Assemble Annie's gun first (6)
 - US Bachelor of Arts degree given to two men jointly – that's unusual (8)
 - Rant and roar to get change from teller (8)
 - Solicits credit to go to "The Birds" (6)
 - One in diplomacy (6)
 - Prison food? (4-3)
 - It's a laugh! I'm replaced by nothing to look at (6)
 - Sound happy when crossing road (7)
- DOWN**
- Heat needs a large current (7)
 - Girl's time with soldier long gone (7)
 - Schoolgirl right from the middle getting more skinny (6)
 - Bandy words with Regius scholar at Cambridge (8)
 - Write "Fated to die first" in bold (6)
 - In other words, superfluous underwear causes delay (6)
 - Musician had short time on the street relatively (8)
 - Stifle horse disease shortly (8)
 - The cad's going on foot (7)
 - Catholic routine gets church support (6)
 - Keeps away from a green on Sunday (6)
 - Managed Portuguese contingent (6)



Solution to Crossword NO 619JD
ACROSS: 1 Undersea; 5 Scar; 9 Smart; 10 Emblems; 11 Asia; 12 Closeted; 13 Cash dispenser; 18 Electric; 19 User; 20 Numbing; 21 Arson; 22 Earn; 23 Syringes
DOWN: 2 Nemesis; 3 Earbash; 4 Everlastingly; 6 Creates; 7 Resider; 8 Abusee; 13 Cleanse; 14 Steamer; 15 Detail; 16 Neutron; 17 Eyesore