



BOOK SUMMARY

12 Habits of Valuable Employees. Roadmap to an Amazing Career

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12 Habits of Valuable Employees.

Your Roadmap to an Amazing Career by Verne Harnish, Kevin Daum, Ann M Ciminelli

In this summary

What does it take to become the most valuable employee an organization has ever had, securing stability and growth opportunities? Is it that difficult to get noticed and recognized for all the contributions you've made, helping the organization move forward?

12 Habits of Valuable Employees: Your Roadmap to an Amazing Career is a resource for successfully answering all these pressing questions. Focusing on simple daily practices and real-life examples of valuable performance, the book illuminates the details that set some employees apart and play a determining role in their career growth.

Bestselling authors Verne Harnish, Kevin Daum, and Anne Mary Ciminelli surveyed hundreds of employers to document their thoughts about truly valuable employees and what differentiates these professionals from merely adequate ones. Based on that research, they synthesized the 12 habits that the most valuable employees use to enjoy amazing careers and fulfillment at work.

YOU WILL LEARN:

- Simple daily practices that allow for effortless workplace skill acquisition
- How valuable employees are different from adequate workers
- The top habits valuable employees have and how to practice those in your everyday work settings
- What employers can do to inspire learning and outstanding performance among their employees



INTRODUCTION

What inspires people to grow, to push harder, to help a company reach the next level? What is it that makes really valuable employees who never fall into contention and are eager to keep evolving? This book will take you on a journey, helping you discover the answers.

Each chapter provides a story that exemplifies the line between adequate and valuable. We share insights from our work with thousands of leaders and team members. We list daily actions to help you become the most valuable team member possible. Once you truly understand the difference between adequate and useful, you can build habits that will deliver the latter.

PART I - WILL: Habits of Desire

Habit 1: Developing as a Leader

The habits explored in part I require a genuine, heartfelt desire to pursue development in oneself and in company.

Developing as a leader is the first one on the list. Becoming a better leader creates value for the company because:

- You can better lead by example to help those around you become better leaders
- Your consistent, measurable growth practices lay a foundation for progress for the rest of the company
- You help generate an internal pipeline of strong future leaders
- Every employee can start undertaking steps towards building this kind of leadership value today. The most important ones include:
 - Learn something: leaders are committed to continuous learning. Mark Zuckerberg, for example, set a goal to read one book every two weeks. Leadership guru Peter Drucker read fiction books to develop savvier people skills.
 - Get a peer coach: you need to gain experience and objectivity from those on the same journey as you.
 - Be a “multiplier:” some professionals have the power to amplify the results of people around them. Multipliers identify and unlock the innate talents of their colleagues.



Habit 2: Aligning Vision

Setting high goals that are above and beyond expectations is great – but only if those goals fit into the larger plan for company growth.

Aligning your actions to the company's vision creates value for the company because:

- It encourages conversations within and across teams to ensure everyone understands and buys into the goals and plans.
- It allows everyone to discern how to expend time and resources to achieve the company's ultimate goal.
- It's an opportunity to unlock the skills of teammates, make the sum of the parts greater, and create exponential results.

Recognizing strategic opportunities for company improvement takes some effort on behalf of every individual employee. To start the journey, do focus on:

- Absorb the vision: consider your company's BHAG and quarterly properties. Do you know them inside and out? If not, ask the senior leadership team – they will be impressed you're interested.
- Align your priorities: always make sure that what you're working on aligns with the company's overall vision. Question the priorities you've set for yourself. Are you focusing on what's important and not just on what's urgent? If you can't tie an activity back to the company's ultimate goal, you need to reevaluate your actions.
- Enroll your colleagues: are the actions of your colleagues aligned with corporate priorities? Find out whether coworkers have embraced the company's vision as much as you have. If they haven't, help them understand and then reprioritize their own actions.

Habit 3: Enabling Growth

Being popular among a coworker and doing a decent job on a daily basis isn't enough to transform yourself into a valuable employee. To accomplish the goal, you'll have to start adding value beyond taking care of everyday business.

Looking at the company through growth lens requires asking yourself these important questions:

- What is being done consistently poorly, according to our current standards?
- What are the existing processes, procedures, and behaviors in the company that will inhibit future growth and scalability?
- Once you have the answers, you will need to:



- Adopt company growth objectives as your own goals
- Identify and flag systemic issues that could inhibit growth
- Encourage and enable people and systems that support scalability

Unfortunately, many employees still believe thinking about growth is someone else's job. They have their small patch of territory to cultivate and rarely look over the garden wall. Companies need smart people who make the company's growth their mission. Good senior leaders are watching for employees who can see beyond the here and now. Try one of these methods to advance the company and yourself at the same time:

- Learn the whole business: It's imperative to have a good understanding of how the company works. Enlist colleagues in other departments and experienced leaders in your own department to show you the big picture so you understand company cycles and how all the moving parts connect.
- Study scalability: There are plenty of books and articles on corporate growth and innovation. Commit time and effort to learn how companies grow and what keeps them from reaching their potential. Absorb Verne's tips in *Mastering the Rockefeller Habits 20th Anniversary Edition*. Hit up your mentors and networks for stories of growth and innovation and become a growth information junkie.
- Create growth committees: you don't have to figure out everything yourself. Enlist other ambitious colleagues in your growth-oriented activities. Within your team, share some of what you've learned and be a vocal champion of growth so others will make it a regular part of their thinking, too.

Part II - Values: Habits of Character

The habits explored in part II require awareness of the world beyond your cubicle (or video chat screen). They show how you can contribute to a culture of mediocrity and boredom or one of excitement and success.

As you read the following three habits, consider how ego and insecurities restrict the growth of both the employee and the company. How do these employees inspire others to move beyond acceptable standards and into greatness?

Habit 4: Integrating Core Values and Purpose

Recognizing the importance of core values is vital within any organization. As a valuable employee, you need to be a proactive entity that encourages the company to institute a more robust core value program.



To do so, you'll have to:

- Embody the core values with every decision and action and look for tangible ways of living them.
- Recruit others who will elevate the desired culture.
- Hold others consistently accountable for their values and communicate with them when you see a particularly good or poor performance.

Leaders talk about the importance of living core values. In a practical sense, this means aligning ALL your behaviors and decisions with the core values of the firm. In other words, will the action or decision you're about to take support or violate a core value? Like the rules of any sport, core values play the same role inside an organization. And like with all sports, the umpires and referees are there to make sure the rules are followed.

Therefore, if you see others violating core values through their behaviors and decisions, will you speak up? If you feel comfortable talking privately with the individual, do so. Otherwise, escalate your concern to their leader. Additionally, if you are watching for core value behavior, you will see those who shine as examples. Call them out so others can learn and encourage all to follow that path.

One of the tenets of core values is that they are "No Matter What!" values. Thus, there are only two types of employees: those who actively live the core values and those who detract from the core values (through behaviors and decisions not in alignment with the core values). Everyone can integrate core values, including employees who don't have an executive position. Simple everyday steps can be utilized, and some of the most effective choices include:

- Identify your company and personal core values: if you don't know your organization's core values – ask! This demonstrates your willingness to be proactive and learn more about the organization. When you have a good understanding, you can quickly figure out how the company's core values align with your own personal values.
- Incorporate core value evaluation into your responsibilities: take the organization's list of core values and align your various responsibilities with a specific value as best as you can. Then, set measurable performance goals for each one. It's not as difficult as it seems. Seek the assistance of a leader in the company if necessary. They will appreciate your initiative to ask for help.
- Enlist others in core value behavior: valuable employees don't act in a vacuum. You are as much responsible for having the right people on the bus as anyone else in the company. Help your colleagues apply the core values in their work and daily behavior.



Habit 5: Managing Conflict

We believe real value emerges when the underlying issues fueling conflicts are not ignored but productively brought to light.

So much company time is spent on firefighting and reactive attempts to pacify disgruntled staff members. Employees create value when they assess the root cause of problems, find productive ways to resolve differences, and make systemic changes that eliminate problems completely. Treating only some of the symptoms does not solve the problem.

A systemic, holistic approach to managing conflict involves:

- Committing to respectful honesty and truth-telling in your own interactions.
- Encouraging others to speak their minds while following the rules of civil discourse.
- Learning to facilitate discussions where all parties can disagree and debate and then come to a consensus on the proper action steps to take.
- Conflict can be either a culture killer or a culture maker. Select one of these three strategies to turn a negative into a positive for the whole company:
 - Banish “quiet politeness.” Healthy organizations value openness and communication on all levels. Get in the habit of sharing your ideas and concerns. Concentrate on writing or saying your thoughts clearly. Avoid prefacing your comments with apologies or other caveats.
 - Become an active listener and teach others to do the same. Follow active listening rules and make sure you’re paying attention to everyone’s contributions to a conversation.
 - Create an “idea circle.” This type of gathering allows individual team members to communicate a problem or challenge informally. It can even be done anonymously using cards. Once all the concerns are read aloud, you can dedicate the next portion of the meeting to discussing viable solutions.

Habit 6: Driving Excellence

Cultivating and maintaining a strong reputation is one of the most crucial undertakings for a company. However, when these efforts aren’t properly aligned with a corporate vision, they become hard to sustain and can lead to a quick failure burnout.

Creating content in a reactionary way doesn’t help the company build for the future. Instead, the quality quickly falls off and the entire effort becomes a burden to maintain.

To build value within this realm, you’ll need to focus on:



- Actions that create opportunities to position the company better in the future
- Systems and processes that help colleagues develop the best work product possible
- Creative thinking and activities to expand competencies

Adequate employees work to improve their efforts. Valuable employees take their new knowledge and spread it systematically throughout the company. You can do the same with one of these strategies:

- Act with the future in mind: always consider the potential implications of your actions. Both short-term and long-term thinking are crucial for becoming a valuable employee.
- Create templates. Find ways to share knowledge and help others use it effectively. If you find a better and more efficient way to perform a task, institutionalize it! Create a template, checklist, workflow, or how-to guide for your fellow employees.
- Engaging in creativity means focusing on innovation and creative problem-solving. Inspire your coworkers to seek similar approaches and to apply ideas that are outside the box.

Part III - Results: Habits of Performance

The valuable employee sees beyond the actions of the day. Rather than following the patterns of the past, they approach tasks with curiosity. They seek to improve systems and processes to increase growth and efficiency.

The habits explored in Part III certainly address action and completion, but they also support inquiry and process improvement. Together, they help you identify patterns of excellence and mediocrity. Once you understand how work processes and productivity occur in real time, you can master both to enhance output and harmony.

Habit 7: Surfacing Issues

Colleagues and clients often admire people who achieve success under pressure. It seems like they are always pulling a rabbit out of their hat at the very last minute to save the day. However, their heroics can cover the fact that their behavior caused the need for heroics in the first place.

Practical issue surfacing that focuses on delivering substance and tackling any situation optimally entails:

- Becoming an expert in your line of operation.
- Solving problems proactively, even before they've occurred.
- Improving the capabilities and reputation of the company.



To accomplish these goals and become better at identifying hazards, focus on the following problem-solving strategies.

- Take things apart: learn everything you can about why things are the way they are – formulas, processes, inner company mechanics. Knowing how everything operates will make it much easier for you to determine why breakdowns occur.
- Create a diligence process: Develop a standard preparation process and a checklist for completion. Actively pursue information through company resources. Ask people in other departments to explain how things work.
- Reduce “division labor:” Look for areas where you can reduce the number of people who touch a process. Eliminate as many handoffs as possible to avoid the need for heroics to save the race.

Habit 8: Improving Process

Scalable processes that can be taught, measured, and improved are at the very heart of creating value within the organization.

Developing such processes depends on a couple of key practices:

- Examining each process with a long-term, scalable view
- Establishing metrics that drive efficiency
- Aligning your processes with the company’s
- You can begin to improve processes in your company by trying one of the following:
- Meet with your peers cross-functionally: Have lunch each week with someone from another department and explore how you can better support each other in a shared process.
- Establish clear metrics for each process: processes are generally measured in three ways – quality, time, and cost. Learn what these are for each of the processes you touch as a part of your job.
- Contribute to process improvement: document each process that is created so others can learn from your successes and mistakes. Find ways to simplify even the complex ones.

Habit 9: Getting Things Done

Getting things done depends on numerous things – from ongoing performance reporting to the provision of effective stimuli that encourage optimal outcomes.

Whether you’re a leader or an employee keen on meeting goals, you’ll need to focus on the following essentials that create value:



- Help establish and participate in ongoing training for required activities, so others aren't negatively impacted by someone who doesn't know what they are doing.
- Make sure people have the structure, processes, and tools they need to get things done.
- Support meaningful consequences for those who can't make the grade.
- Productivity only occurs when people are accountable for the work they take on. You can encourage those around you to step up by:
 - Starting with you, you'll first need to focus on evaluating your performance. Identify places where you are unproductive because you are unmotivated, you lack structure, or there are no consequences.
 - Emphasizing curiosity: encourage examination of processes with a critical eye to identify both inefficiencies and opportunities.
 - Setting daily and weekly goals to exceed them requires effort in pinpointing team priorities (making adjustments along the way if needed). This approach should be used to tackle everyday projects and work processes on a weekly and even longer-term basis.

Part IV - Skills: Habits of Influence

Habit 10: Fostering Communication

A valuable employee takes on the responsibility of understanding where people live and how they communicate. They work to expand beyond the norms of basic thought and practicality to inspire others to break out of existing conventions.

To become a better communicator, you'll need to:

- Craft communication around key takeaways
- Master the various mechanics and styles of business communication
- Create planned messaging campaigns that go beyond a single event or person

To accomplish these goals, experiment with the following steps:

- Focus on the key message: begin with an end goal in mind and design all the communication around this focal point.
- Expand your communication repertoire. Writing, public speaking, and active participation in online communities are just a few of the techniques and methodologies you'll need to master.



- Design a campaign in a variety of formats: understand the various formats, the benefits they bring, and the audiences that will respond best to each communication approach.
Communication
- is evolving, and you'll need to keep yourself educated and informed about the new approaches and possibilities.

Habit 11: Inspiring Creativity

Efficient creativity doesn't involve throwing everything against the wall to see what sticks. Instead, it is tempered by careful research and tapping into others' experiences.

If you want to create value for your company through a creative approach, do:

- Understand the end goals of the organization before planning any campaign
- Apply creativity in practical and expansive ways
- Actively engage others in the process

If you are hired to be creative in any organization, you must be prepared to lead others down the creative path toward specific objectives. Valuable employees leverage their skills and interests to grow the company in meaningful ways. You'll need to go beyond your brain and activity. Dedicate yourself to one of these three methods of driving creativity within yourself and others:

- Establish clear, data-driven goals. Don't just ideate. Help the company clearly define its objectives. Then, ensure that everyone's ideas are focused on the desired outcome.
- Develop a creative process. Creativity rarely comes from the same old routine. You should always be looking for and learning about what is new. Join forums, go to conferences, and visit museums! Expose yourself to learning opportunities beyond business and use what you know to develop new creative processes.
- Surface the creativity around you: you never know where the next great idea will come from. If you want your creative work to be well received and implemented, help your colleagues understand the creative process. Give them clear points to check in and give feedback. A great creative can identify and share compelling stories that are rooted in the core values of the organization.

Habit 12: Effecting Change

A truly valuable employee and better leader would recognize that someone needs to affect change by convincing the team to follow. For that to happen, a valuable team member will have to make a well-supported argument for his plan that explains exactly how the goal will be achieved and why the team should be involved.

If you want to become that employee, you'll need to:



- Understand the root of the problem and craft an effective solution
- Be able to communicate the mission in a way that gets others excited
- Know how to execute the plan

Valuable employees can affect change by communicating their vision, explaining why it is the preferred future, and getting people to back their plans to get there. When you need to affect change, follow this three-step process developed by iconic Zingerman's Deli CEO Ari Weinzweig:

- Write an envisioned future: describe all the details of how things will be better when the change is made.
- Make a list of everyone affected by the change
- Meet with each person and influence them to support the change

Conclusion

Thank you for investing the time and effort to learn about these 12 habits of valuable employees.

The following steps are up to you. Take command of your future. Create real value for your company and advance your career by embracing these 12 habits. And remember to do the job you want next!

The key is one step, one behavior, at a time. Work on one habit/chapter per month and one behavior per week! Mastery is an iterative process.

Once you've completed the year-long journey, repeat it—like accomplished tennis, golf, or pickleball players who go back to the fundamentals with every stroke. You'll find new ways to impact your company's bottom line and your top line. No doubt you'll also gain fans among your colleagues and leaders as you share what you've learned.

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