



HOW TO BE A Trusted Advisor to Senior Execs

EXCERPT

Companion piece to our book,
HACKING WORK, By Bill Jensen and Josh Klein
Excerpted from Bill's book THE SIMPLICITY SURVIVAL HANDBOOK © 2010

Bill Jensen • Bill@HackingWork.com

Josh Klein • Josh@HackingWork.com

www.HackingWork.com

Also see our other sites:

www.simplerwork.com

www.josh.is

The Simplicity Survival Handbook

BILL JENSEN
author of *Simplicity*

32 Ways to Do Less and Accomplish More

HOW TO ...

- ✓ Deal with Bosses Who Don't Get It
- ✓ Delete 75% of Your Emails
- ✓ Communicate Anything to Anyone
- ✓ Clarify Your Goals More Quickly
- ✓ Decide: Stay or Go?

...PLUS 27 MORE

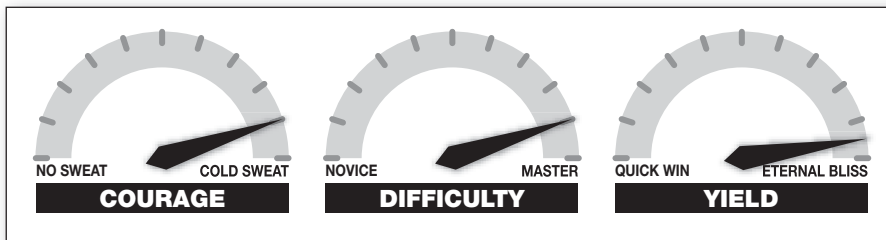
24

How to

Be A Trusted Advisor to Senior Execs



LESS•O•METERS



STEPS: 10 lessons

TAKEAWAY: Pick the 3 that work best in your situation

KEEPING SCORE: Getting in, behind those closed doors...and staying there

WHY DO LESS

You could take years to master the skills, and gain the wisdom of a sage and the patience of a saint

- Or...You could take a sneak peek at what goes on behind those closed doors

HOW WE WENT BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

A panel of 15 senior vice presidents put together a list of the ten most important things to know about consulting with head honchos. These trusted *consiglieri's* all have at least ten years experience in coaching, coaxing, and the care-and-feeding of the executive suite in Fortune 250 companies. And all have been granted anonymity — they don't want their bosses to know they're sharing these secrets with you.

Ten Lessons from the Masters

1

The stated problem is never the problem

- The perceived or stated problem is never the *whole* problem, and often not the *real* problem. Issues and challenges at the senior level are complicated, interconnected, and overlapping. And personality problems are often part of the mix. You will have to dig deep to get to the problem.
- Senior execs always have a personal perspective on major issues. That's one of the reasons for their success, and sometimes for their failure
- Play devil's advocate:
Get everyone's assumptions in the open and on the table, including your own

2

Data will set you free

(If it's used to tell a story or start a tough conversation)

- Data can create uncomfortable discussions. That's good.
- Be Switzerland: Detach from emotions and politics.
Data are just facts and trends that leaders must figure out how to use
- When senior team behaviors need to change, or there's a lack

of alignment: feed them their own view of the world.
Present data on how they assess themselves, and facilitate
from a neutral position

3**Be proactive. Be opportunistic**

- Get issues, ideas, and options on the table first
- Contract to do data gathering for them, so you get to see, understand, and deal with the data before anyone else does
- Help define the agenda. Literally.

(Be the one who organizes the agenda for executive meetings, and facilitates those meetings. This creates opportunities to influence what gets discussed, and how decisions are made.)

4**Be a “pair of hands”**

(Help with executive’s day-to-day tasks and priorities, and be involved in delivering the exec’s messages and plans throughout the organization.)

Gets you in — behind those closed doors**5****Consistent delivery on those priorities keeps you in****6****Never assume that what a senior executive just agreed to
is ever complete and final**

- The deal and the work always change.
That’s neither good nor bad. Just the way it is
- So be sure to check in with them constantly

7**Always take the high road. Always!**

- Especially if alignment between senior team members breaks

down, or politics grow: No matter how painful it gets, take the high road

- Tell the truth, take the blame, present bad news, whatever it takes. Always be able to look at yourself in the mirror

8

Be sure you know who the decision-maker is

- Decisions are only made by *one* person, *never* a team or committee
- Always get the *real* decision-maker to sign-off on what happens next. (That may be a different person from the one who is touted as the decision-maker. Some leaders let others sponsor and champion initiatives, but retain final-decision authority for themselves.)
- Beware of advocates, with their own agendas, masquerading as decision-makers
- Once you know who that decision-maker is, carefully observe the dynamics of meetings. Often, it's invaluable to sense when a premature "no" is about to happen, and get the topic off the table until the timing is right

9

Senior execs are savvy, smart, and not to be underestimated.

Yet their directives often need to be clarified

- The more senior the executive, the more savvy they are. Never underestimate any executive, and always assume they know how to get what they need from you
- Most executives need to be forced to choose: Good, Fast, or Cheap? Get them to pick one, maybe two. *Never* all three. Nonetheless, they'll still believe they're going to get Good *and* Cheap *and* Fast. So be sure you repeat back to them, several times, the choice they made.

- Be part of the team that drafts how they communicate directives. This often clarifies the directive itself
- Sometimes, the best thing you can do is listen — intense and active listening. Waiting to ask the right questions until you’ve reflected on things can earn you immense respect

10**The best laid plans of mice and men...****WHAT’S BEHIND DOING LESS**

“My boss is one of the smartest leaders in business today,” says one *consiglieri*. “Smart enough to surround himself with bright people who help him be his best. As well as letting us know how to challenge him. The Top Ten list I wrote up is pretty much how we operate as a team. Kind of like **Guiding Principles for the Executive Suite**.”

A good illustration of these principles in action is Xerox’s recent turnaround. Incoming CEO Anne Mulcahy took the reins of a company that was \$17.1 billion in debt, with only \$154 million in cash. Yet by mid-2003, Xerox had \$3 billion in cash and reduced debt by 21% — causing board member John Pepper to say, “I never thought I would be proud to have my name associated with this company again. I was wrong.” What changed?

First, Anne Mulcahy brought a new approach to leadership, which, in turn, changed how her top lieutenants support her. “Part of [Mulcahy’s] DNA is to tell you the good, the bad, and the ugly,” says a colleague.¹ She is doggedly focused, and her advisors support her tough decision-making and fast action.

Another top advisor who contributed to this list isn’t so lucky: “My boss has an ego the size of this building. I use these techniques to serve this leader, but not get caught up in his power plays and politics.”

Is it possible then, for most of the lessons from the masters to play both ways — as guiding principles for advising leaders who “get it,” as *well* as how to work with bad bosses?

Seems like it!

I sent this list on to 37 people who report to a CEO in big and small firms, in for-profit and nonprofit companies, or who serve senior teams as outside consultants. And the consensus was, yes, this list works both ways.

Says Ron, a management consultant and coach to some of business’s biggest stars and notorious Bad Boys: “I use most of these techniques to help good leaders become great, and to protect myself and others from the bad leaders.”

•

It’s all about jumping through fewer hoops, and accomplishing more

- If you assume that **the stated problem is never the real problem**, you’ll dig deeper in both questioning and advising senior execs — ensuring you get to what really needs to be done a lot quicker.
- **If you use data to tell a story or start a tough conversation**, you’ll approach numbers-driven presentations a lot differently than you do now.
- If you know that **getting issues in front of them** before they do it to you will help you control your own workflow, you’ll be more proactive.
- If you know that being a “pair of hands” will **get you into doors that are currently closed to you**, and that consistent delivery on those tasks will **keep you inside the executive suite**, you’ll look for more opportunities to do so.
- If you know that **what they just agreed to is never complete and final**, you’ll stop assuming that the strategic plan drives everything you do, and you’ll touch base with those execs a lot more often.

- If you **always take the high road**, no matter what you're asked to do, you'll never lose yourself or your moral center in the push to deliver the numbers.
- If you **carefully define who the decision-maker is**, you'll be jumping through only one hoop, not many!
- If you always assume that **your senior exec is more savvy than you** (even when he isn't), you'll never underestimate him. And, if you always assume that his directives **need to be clarified**, you will always make executing those directives a whole lot easier.
- Finally, if you truly understand that the **best laid plans of mice and men** often go *kaflooy*, you'll be more willing to try to advise that exec to try something new.



Take an Advisor to lunch

You've got the list, now ask a top advisor how he or she applies it at your company. Based on what you hear, boil this list down to the Top Three that will work best for you, and start putting them to use.



THE CV OF

A Simpleton

Harvard Business Review, CNBC and *Fast Company* have called Bill Jensen today's foremost expert on work complexity and cutting through clutter to what really matters.

He has spent the past two decades studying how work gets done. (Much of what he's found horrifies him.)

He is an internationally-acclaimed author and speaker who is known for provocative ideas, extremely useful content, and his passion for making it easier for everyone to work smarter.



Some people see things that are and ask, Why?

Some people dream of things that never were and ask, Why not?

Some people have to go to work and don't have time for all that...

George Carlin

- His first book, *Simplicity*, was the Number 5 Leadership/Management book on Amazon in 2000.
- His next best-seller is *Simplicity Survival Handbook: 32 Ways to Do Less and Accomplish More*.
- His current book, *Hacking Work: Breaking Stupid Rules for Smart Results* reveals an underground army of benevolent hackers — breaking all sorts of rules so everyone can do great work.

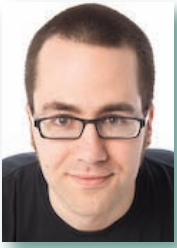
Bill is CEO of The Jensen Group, whose mission is:
To make it easier to get stuff done.

Among the Jensen Group's clients are Bank of America, GE, NASA, the US Navy SEALs, British Petroleum, American Express, Chevron, the government of Ontario, Pfizer, Merck, L'Oréal Italia, Johnson&Johnson, Guangzhou China Development District, and the Swedish Post Office.

Bill's personal life fantasy is to bicycle around the globe via breweries.

The Jensen Group
1 Franklin Place
Morristown, NJ 07960 USA
1 (973) 539-5070

bill@hackingwork.com
bill@simplerwork.com
www.hackingwork.com
www.simplerwork.com



THE CV OF

A Hacker

“Josh Klein is the quintessential hacker — someone who takes his greatest joy from combining the unexpected and seeing the result work in new and better ways.”

Josh has practiced and was trained, both formally and informally, in hacking — social systems, computer networks, institutions, consumer hardware, animal behavior, and, most recently, the publishing industry. When he’s not taking things apart or putting them back together again he speaks, writes, and consults on new and emerging technologies that improve people’s lives — and has tremendous fun doing it.

Most of Josh’s time is spent speaking to companies and at conferences such as Gadgetoff, TED, SICS, LA-IP, BIF, and Serious Play, and he has appeared on the Sundance Channel, Nova, and other programs. He also spends a significant amount of time consulting to companies large and small, such as Microsoft, Oracle, Frog Design, Nokia, Johns Hopkins, Bankinter, The United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and others.

But really what Josh does is this: he examines systems, he takes them apart, and he puts different pieces together to produce something new and more effective.

He hacks. Everything.

josh@hackingwork.com
www.hackingwork.com

josh@josh.is
www.josh.is