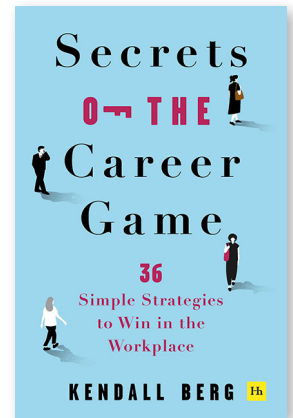


Executive Book Summaries[®]

Secrets of the Career Game

36 Simple Strategies to Win in the Workplace

by **Kendall Berg**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

What if I told you to sit down and play a game— say it looks a bit like chess, but the board and pieces are subtly different. You're sure you've never played this game, but you can tell it's competitive, so when I refuse to tell you the rules and then ask you to stake your livelihood and that of your family on the outcome, how would you respond?

There's one crucial rule that's common to both chess and the career game: Even when you start out as a pawn, it's possible to become the queen. To do that, you must learn how to identify the tasks that will add maximum value to your career, how to understand the vernacular of leadership, and how to navigate interpersonal conflict successfully.

In *Secrets of the Career Game: 36 Simple Strategies to Win in the Workplace*, Kendall Berg gives people the tools to understand that while the work that they do is important, everything else they are not doing is just as important. It is learning the right way to position themselves for opportunities, relationships, and promotions. Most importantly, it is to stop gambling, learn the rules of the game, and start playing to win.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY:

- Learn to propel your career quickly.
- Build advocates and great relationships.
- Understand and develop your skills.
- Expand your network.

CHAPTER 1: What is the Game?

People need to move away from thinking of themselves in terms of the basic workplace functions—as order-takers, widget-producers, and output-machines—and understand that workers are individuals who add unique value to the system and ultimately meet the clients' needs.

Secret #1: You are an entrepreneur, and your career is your business

Run your career like a business. When you start to see yourself as a product of your business, you can begin to deliver a stronger and more valuable impact to your company, rather than becoming an order-taker without clear prioritization or direction.

Secret #2: Relationships matter more than the work

Develop your work relationships. People need to make the conscious effort to learn about and understand the others they'll be working with, on both a professional and personal level. When they do, the chances are they'll get along much better in both capacities and build advocates rather than adversaries.

Secret #3: Communication is key

Upskill your communication. Whether they're an introvert or an extrovert, neurotypical or neurodivergent, outgoing or reserved, people can learn to communicate well.

Secret #4: No one is responsible for your career but you

Accept responsibility for your career. An individual in a job that aligns with their skills, passions, and interests will always be more successful than someone who ends up at odds with the role or the company culture.

CHAPTER 2: Promotable and Non-Promotable Tasks

Start by dividing work into the following broad categories:

1. Work that is core to the maintenance of the position; refer to this as "business as usual" (or BAU) work.
2. Work that drives forward the goals of the organization and generally will include collaboration across various groups; refer to this as high-impact or high-visibility work
3. Work that makes people more marketable or valuable

as an individual through the development of their personal skills or improves culture and engagement across their organization; refer to this as self-development or engagement work

Secret #5: You must have and maintain healthy boundaries

Use boundaries to prioritize, bundle, and rebrand. The trick to progressing while holding strict boundaries is that people have to deliver within those boundaries. There's a three-step process to achieving this: prioritize, bundle, and rebrand.

Secret #6: Your boss does not know what you are working on

Don't keep your successes secret from your boss. Ensure that the right communication strategy is in place to inform, escalate, and advocate.

Secret #7: How you talk about your work matters

Understand the three types of work. Assuming people have identified the BAU work in their job, what do they focus on next? The two other types of work: high impact/high visibility and self-development/engagement.

CHAPTER 3: Your Most Marketable Skills

People need to stop worrying about their weaknesses and instead focus on the ways they can bolster their own strengths. This will allow workers to have a greater impact on their overall company and thus advocate for more progression.

Secret #8: If you do not have an impact, you will not see progression

Maximize your impact above all else. It is so much more important to deliver impact than simply to do a job. People might meet more resistance to new ideas, but even within that resistance there is an opportunity to utilize their skills to drive impact, measure that impact, and then share that impact to their leadership.

Secret #9: An unneeded skill is unvaluable

Take your strengths where they are most needed. Knowing oneself allows them to identify their strengths, invest in them heavily, and align themselves to roles and companies that will best allow them to shine.

Learn to brag. You are not bragging, you are informing. You must inform your boss of the work you complete and the effort it takes when they are not present.

CHAPTER 4: Brand Building

The 11-List

To create your 11-List, write out the following:

- Five things you want to be known for at work.
- Five things you don't want to be known for at work.
- One mission statement.

Secret #10: What people think of you at work is directly in your control

Keep your brand message on the tip of your tongue. When you have, and know, your personal brand, you should describe your work consistently and frequently within the bounds of that brand.

Secret #11: Your brand will enter the room long before you do and leave long after you are gone

Let your brand do the heavy lifting for you. Your goal is that, when people have new opportunities in their teams or are discussing possible promotions, one person in the room will mention your personal brand positively and everyone else will nod in agreement. Even without you present to describe yourself or to talk about all the good work you've done, you want your personal brand in attendance and corroborated by the other leaders.

CHAPTER 5: Competencies and Performance Reviews

You need to understand your employer's requirements, often referred to as competencies, as well as the expectations surrounding them, to maximize your chances of progressing in your job.

Secret #12: People prefer to work with people that they like

Make sure you know what your boss thinks about your competencies. Realize that once you understand the importance of communication in working effectively, you control how you interact with others and how you are

perceived, rather than letting the circumstances around you influence your career.

Secret #13: A desire for a promotion without a plan will land you exactly where you are now 12 months in the future

Learn to brag. You are not bragging, you are informing. You must inform your boss of the work you complete and the effort it takes when they are not present. It needs to include efforts taken to improve the overall company, deliver on major initiatives, and innovate new ideas.

Secret #14: Work that your boss doesn't know about doesn't matter

Cover your... assets. Even resolved issues generally make their way up the management chain. It is much better for your reputation if you are the one who informs your boss.

Secret #15: Most conversations about your career will take place without you in the room

Set yourself up for cross-calibration success. A cross-calibration is essentially where leaders bring the reviews of their teams into a room to compare against the reviews of the other teams in the organization. Then they calibrate scores across seniority levels and comparable job types. It is important to understand how these reviews work, both to apply the previous advice effectively and to set yourself up for success in these conversations.

CHAPTER 6: The 9-Box

People often get confused regarding the difference between their performance and their potential. Companies invest a lot of time and effort into understanding the various performance metrics and comparisons across their organization. However, potential is a bit more subjective. When leaders evaluate an individual's potential, it is essentially an assessment of how rapidly and how high an individual will progress.

Secret #16: Your potential, not your performance, is what gets you into senior leadership

Boost the soft skills that will show your potential. It is much harder for managers to teach soft skills than it is to teach technical skills. You will do your team a disservice if you hire someone expecting to teach them soft skills when you don't know how.

CHAPTER 7: Skill Maturity with Seniority

When you progress in your career, you will be expected to enhance and strengthen various skills in alignment with your newfound seniority. The problem is that many people struggle to develop skills without clear instruction and guidance, ultimately leading to a plateau in their growth.

Secret #17: Building your leadership skills allows for not only your success but the success of your team

Develop the skills needed not only for the level you're working at, but for the levels you aspire to

This skill development takes part in four stages:

1. technical acumen,
2. social skills,
3. managerial capabilities,
4. strategic vision.

CHAPTER 8: The Network

Your progression will often rely on leaders from within your area knowing who you are, what you're good at, and what you are capable of. It is not enough to depend on your manager to advocate on your behalf. In short, you're going to need to build yourself a network.

Secret #18: Your network must extend beyond your own team

Grow your network organically. The reality is that hiring managers have a higher chance of success when bringing in someone who they know, value, and trust, rather than taking a risk on someone based solely on their resume and interview skills.

Secret #19: Without a network you will fail

Grow your network intentionally. First you need to understand the most powerful people in your organization and create an influencer list of them who would be important to your net-

work. Then score them in accordance with the following:

- Relationship
- Seniority
- Risk
- Power
- Exposure
- Fear
- Validation
- Future

Once you have everyone added and scored, create a total for each person and then rank them.

Secret #20: People who help you will think of you more fondly than people you help

Allow the people in your network to help you first. Each person across your company, especially those with influence and power, will have their own unique brand and skillset. The best thing that you can do for your current and future development is hone in on the skills of those individuals by identifying their personal brand, and then leverage that knowledge as the platform for building your original relationship while scaling your abilities.

CHAPTER 9: Interpersonal Conflict and How to Disagree

“You can't be honest at work. People who provide feedback or try to make things better, end up on a 'list' and get fired.” This is a widespread belief. The reality is that this is a lie. People hide behind the 'fact' that they were right rather than take ownership for their tone, language, and communication skills in a way that sets them up for success in the long term.

Secret #21: How you communicate your disagreement is more important than your opinion

Your leadership does not always want the most direct solution. Politics gets more present and more difficult to navigate at more senior levels of leadership. This means that sometimes when solving or addressing a problem, leadership is also navigating politics at a senior level that you are not privy to.

Your leadership may have context that you do not have visibility into. Most people are intrinsically self-absorbed

Manage the patterns, not the person. As a manager, you need to be able to identify patterns in behavior rather than merely symptoms.

and focused on their own priorities. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but in the workplace environment it is easy to get tunnel vision, where your priorities eclipse those of the larger company.

You are not effectively bringing people along on the mental journey you have experienced. Some people are natural problem-solvers. Some people are highly analytical. Unfortunately for these individuals, what can seem so obvious to them given their experience, knowledge, and acumen is not obvious to their counterparts and leadership. Learn the type of person you're disagreeing with: The King or The Specialist.

Secret #22: Catering your communication to the individual will prevent conflict and disagreements before they arise

Practice *nemawashi*. The Japanese have a word that applies here: *nemawashi*. This literally translates as 'turning the roots' but is a colloquialism for 'decisions happen in the hallways.' It is the informal business process of layering the foundation for a proposed change or project by talking to the people concerned and gathering support informally before making a formal proposal.

Secret #23: You are not always going to get your way

Accept that some of your best ideas will be rejected. People all think that they have the best ideas and that they know what is best for their team and organization, but sometimes leadership takes things in a different direction.

CHAPTER 10: Managing Vs Leading

The fastest way to propel your career forward is to enter into, and excel at, management. The goal here is to equip you with the skills that you need in order to step into a management role successfully and with a high level of business acumen regardless of what your company provides to prepare you.

Secret #24: Managing and leading are not the same

Understand the three pillars of effective management:

1. Being able to set clear expectations for your team members.
2. Regular check-ins for development and project completion.
3. A keen understanding of the learning styles and goals of your individual team members.

Secret #25: Success starts at assignment, not at completion

Conduct management ceremonies. It is important to your success as a manager and to your team's success to have good ceremonies and meetings in place that allow updates to happen organically.

Secret #26: A successful employee begets a successful leader

Build an advocacy plan for your team. Start by mapping out your team's functional organizational hierarchy—this will describe the high-level work and scope that each team member is responsible for as well as the reporting structure of within the team. Then align components of your strategy or 'stretch opportunities' to each individual. Lastly, map the specific projects to that person.

Secret #27: Negative patterns are more problematic than negative people

Manage the patterns, not the person. As a manager you need to be able to identify patterns in behavior rather than merely symptoms. These patterns of behavior require feedback and management. You can tie multiple issues and areas of improvement to one pattern and then treat the actual disease.

Secret #28: You can't compensate for your team

Build your team up with growth in mind. There are three key factors to keep in mind when you create, establish, or grow your team:

1. Don't be afraid to manage out underperformers.
2. When hiring new people, focus on great attitudes, work ethic, and culture fits first with technical skills second.
3. Delegate.

Secret #29: Strategy is essential

Build yourself a strategy. In order to build a strategy and a vision you really only need to do three things:

1. Understand the goals and objectives of your organization and how your team fits into that larger picture.
2. Learn ‘the rule of threes.’
3. Think through how your team would function in the future if you had unlimited money and resources.

CHAPTER 11: Managing Toxic Workplaces, Mental Load, and Your Boss

This concept of mental load is actually a better indicator of burnout than the number of hours worked or results on an employee engagement survey.

Secret #30: Managing your mental load should take priority over managing your workload

Choose your tactics for reducing mental load.

1. Lists
2. Time/day blocking
3. Prioritization/Deprioritization
4. Delegation
5. Create a strategy
6. Do not share roadmaps that are too long-term

Secret #31: A toxic workplace isn’t good for anyone

1. Leverage your workplace support networks
2. Human Resources
3. Benefits
4. Unions
5. Peer Networks

Secret #32: It takes time to recover from a toxic workplace

Between jobs, give yourself time to rebuild your confidence in yourself and in your skills. Focus particularly on the skills of adding value and contributing to solutions. Rediscover

your unique skills, brand, and abilities so that you can start to find yourself and your confidence again. Build your brand statement and begin weaving it into conversations. Decide what you want for yourself and your career now that you are free from the expectations of your last job.

CHAPTER 12: Do You Even Want a Corner Office?

While every skill a CEO possesses can be learned, some people will be more naturally inclined to learn them, while most will not want to dedicate the time and effort it takes.

Secret #33: Most people will never be executives

If you want to be an executive, prepare to leave your comfort zone behind. There are five non-negotiable skills and attributes you need to possess:

1. Public speaking
2. Moral character
3. Strategy
4. The ability to navigate interpersonal conflict
5. Unwavering confidence

Secret #34: The right path for your career is a natural alignment to your skills and interests

Avoid the ‘accidental career’ trap. Understand your own skills and differentiation in the job market and then use that information to build a personal brand. Once you know who you are, you can network and advocate yourself into better, more senior positions that best suit your skills.

CHAPTER 13: Ghost Cultures and the Leaders You Hire

The reality is that the culture most employees experience is the subculture that exists only within their direct team and supervisor. The imagined culture of the overall enterprise might exist at the highest levels of leadership, but seldom trickles down to the average employee.

Secret #35: Only the culture of your direct manager matters

Get to the truth of your employer company’s culture. This is important for two reasons. First, when you are seeking out new employment opportunities or navigating internal

corporate change, the way that your direct manager thinks about career progression, team member development, and overall work-life balance is the most important thing you should consider when evaluating the right fit.

The second reason that your company's true culture is more important than its cultural tagline: As a manager or leader you have the ability and responsibility to ensure your team has a great subculture.

Secret #36: The leaders you hire determine your company culture

Recruit great leaders. People will all have different ways of prioritizing work, communicating, and even handling conflict, but culture requires core values alignment in order to be maintained.

CHAPTER 14: Conclusion

Finding your career success does not have to be a game of guesses. Instead, you can structure your time and efforts strategically to make the most impact in the fewest number of moves. This will allow you to progress your career quickly, while building advocates and great relationships along the way. Understand your unique skills, build your network, prepare for competency evaluations, develop your skills with each jump in seniority, become a great manager, and establish a great culture that helps you reach new heights in your personal career journey.



As the founder of That Career Coach, Kendall Berg helps her clients and followers understand how to find progression, recognition, and support in their careers. She regularly supports her more than 500K followers across Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube with her take on playing the career game. Prior to starting her company, Kendall worked with and for some of the largest companies in the world including Capital One, JP Morgan Chase, Samsung, and AT&T.

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