

# THE POWER OF ADDING VALUE

*by Inés Temple*

**M**y father was a very intelligent, good, and respected man. A physician by profession and vocation, he worked his entire life at the Workers' Hospital of Lima.

He also died there.

When I started working, I followed the model that he had taught me. This model was simple: Work hard in school. Get good grades. Find a job at a good company and make a brilliant lifetime career there.

My father would say, "If you follow these concepts, you will have a great job for life."

Most people were raised with very similar job models, but *having a job for life* is an endangered species. In fact, it's virtually extinct, and it is one of the many paradigms that have changed in the employment world. Now we know that in order to thrive, we must move quickly to change and adapt ourselves within this continually evolving work environment. Today, organizations can't even guarantee their own survival, much less offer job security to anyone.

## How Do You Add Value?

Today, management indicators are important regardless of the country in which we work. Technological advances are available worldwide to compare data from many locations objectively and

instantly—the information is within everyone's reach, including our competitors'. Whether we are a French person working in Russia, an American working in Turkey, or someone from Japan working in Chile, the indicators our employers use to measure the quality of our performance are quite similar. By assuming that working in our home country gives us the luxury of coasting along in our career, we are making a mistake that compromises our employability.

It is important for us to keep up with international standards and continually ask ourselves what is changing, what improvements are being made, and what others who are in my same field of work on the other side of the world are learning. These questions are important because international workers are our direct competitors. To maximize our value, we need to be both productive and good team players. We not only have to be good at what we do, we also have to be known for being good at what we do.

Four points are key to ensuring that we are as competent and competitive as possible. Beyond our intelligence and functional or technical knowledge, the most important points are

1. Having a clear idea of the value we add
2. Always being up to date on the latest trends and technology

---

## *We are paid to add value.*

---

3. Being bilingual and having international personal or business
4. Demonstrating energy, enthusiasm, and passion

We are not paid to go to work—we are paid to add value. It is important that we clearly understand that we are paid to drive achievements, add value, and contribute to results. Many believe that our accomplishments serve as *fillers* within our portfolio, but this is not the case. We need to be conscious of what we are doing and how we are contributing to justify our salary. We don't get paid to show up or occupy space, and we are most certainly not getting paid *just because*.

### **Do You Have a Clear Idea of the Value You Add?**

In my experience, very few people who are currently employed have a clear and organized list of their achievements accompanied by quantitative proof of the value that they are adding to their jobs. This requires conducting an ongoing follow-up of one's achievements. The first important recommendation is to make a list of your achievements and keep it up to date. This list will be useful when you are putting together a portfolio or need to provide your boss with evidence of your contributions. In addition, the list will come in handy when you are drawing up a career plan or intend to ask for a raise or promotion. This list will be very useful in helping you determine if you are actually adding value.

How should we create this list of achievements? That's an easy question, but first, we need to define what constitutes an achievement.

An *achievement* is embodied in the things we do that give us satisfaction and allow us to contribute to the

organization's goals and strategic vision. Achievements let us know that we are doing our jobs well.

For example, let's say that we are in charge of selling gourmet chocolate cookies in northern Florida. We can define ourselves within our portfolio as *responsible for selling gourmet chocolate cookies in northern Florida*. A potential employer, however, is only going to be concerned with how many cookies we sold, whether we contributed to increasing our company's market share, how many clients we added, how the ROI on our merchandise improved, and anything else that provides concrete evidence that our efforts were successful.

The best way to review our achievements is by using the system we have adopted at Lee Hecht Harrison-DBM. This system, which is known as PAR—problem, action, and result—is very practical, and it can be used effectively both by those in career positions and by job seekers. It entails identifying the *problem* or opportunity that existed at a given point in time, explaining the *action* that was taken, and recognizing the *results* that generated from this action. This provides a very objective measure of your accomplishments against specific organizational challenges.

Many might say, "But I am not sure what the result was because I haven't measured them or I haven't been told." This is why it is good to always have an updated list of achievements. We need to ask what the direct impact of our actions was and what we contributed to the organization through our actions. If we keep track of this data, when the time comes to update our portfolio or prepare for an interview with our boss or a third party, we won't need to undertake an archaeological dig to unearth data that date back years. We will have updated our list of achievements within our portfolio, and we will have identified our results using the PAR system—determining the problem or opportunity that arose, the action that was taken, and the result of that action.

Above all, we must be very aware of the fact that *generating achievements and adding value is what we are paid for*. So, by keeping close track of our achievements, we do ourselves a big favor by consciously raising our value to the organization. This helps to transfer

our achievements from the realm of the vague and uncertain to the concrete and real world of numbers and solid facts. Every day we need to ask ourselves what we contributed and achieved while defining the value we added to the company through these achievements.

### How Up to Date Are You?

Just as we are rarely asked in a job interview to deliver the equation for compound interest, few potential employers will ask us if we have read the book written by the most recent Nobel Prizewinner in our field. However, we must be very up to date in two areas to ensure our value.

The first is staying up to date on national and international news, as well as articles in trade magazines, involving our profession, industry, or the role that we play in the organization for which we work. The second area of interest is technology, because it evolves on a daily basis and acts as a catalyst for growth by providing interconnection and access to global information.

How do we keep up to date? By reading on a daily and weekly basis. During a presentation I gave a few months ago, I placed a great deal of emphasis on this point and caused more than one person to shift uncomfortably in his seat. I received answers such as, “I don’t have time to read the paper or check on the news in the morning,” “I’ll read them when I have a minute or at the end of the day when I get home.” Their responses led me to infer that this was fairly low on their priority list. That is unacceptable. If we are going to be up-to-date professionals, we can’t be taken by surprise by news that we receive in the afternoon at the office or even the next day when it is too late to make a decision that could affect our business.

To shed light on this point, I asked one of the participants, “Did you brush your teeth before coming today?” “Of course,” he answered. I went on to ask, “And why?” “Because it’s important,” he replied. Everything is a matter of priorities. The same goes for news and information. Anyone who considers themselves relatively educated and informed, and as such, employable, must read regularly and be well informed. Ideally, one should read books, subscribe

---

## *We must fine-tune our digital identity.*

---

to various business and trade magazines and journals (and any other of interest to you), check online news sources, and read local and international reviews on a weekly basis.

It is also very important to be familiar with technology and make it a part of our daily routine. This isn’t an issue for the younger generation, but for people over the age of forty, it can be a sore spot.

What we need to know is clear: how to surf the Internet to find necessary information, use our e-mail appropriately, manage word processing tools, spreadsheets, and software, and navigate social networks. All of these things are like knowing how to write, add, and subtract were several generations ago. Today, we must fine-tune our digital identity and continually update our profiles on the Web. We need to be very proactive in building our image and our personal brand within social networks, and on the Internet in general. Remember that today, more than ever before, we can find out about people through Google or LinkedIn—we are tracked whether we like it or not. Rejecting technology or not being up to date is professional suicide.

### Are You Bilingual? Do You Have International Experience?

Last year I worked with a top-notch sales executive from a local Peruvian company. He was about forty-eight, but didn’t speak English—he was not bilingual in both Spanish and English. After an intensive job search, he found some positions, but the fact that he didn’t speak English meant that the companies offered him a maximum salary of, let’s say, X US dollars a year. Another professional, who had a similar profile and was

the same age—but was proficient in English as well as his native Spanish—found positions that offered him up to 30 percent more than X, and after a much shorter job search. In a global market, English, Spanish, and Mandarin dominate all languages. We need to learn to speak well at least two of them.

Just browse through the job ads and you will find a number of positions, generally those that are better paying, that require the ability to speak and write in a second language, whether it's Chinese, Spanish, French, Japanese, Arabic, English, or any number of other languages. Globally, a second language is vital, not only because it is important to speak another language, but also because it expands our ability to conduct research on the Internet, study manuals, and pursue specialized literature in our field. It also increases our ability to keep up with breaking news about technology and to understand another culture well. English is the language of the global business world, and it is used to conduct a great deal of business. If you are a native English speaker (and you are if you are reading this article in English), then learn Spanish or Mandarin!

I am not saying that one needs to be completely bilingual, but possessing proficiency in a second language is a definite plus in the employment world.

If you don't know a second language, what are you waiting for? Start taking classes today! Begin to hone your listening skills by watching films without subtitles. Invest some time in learning another language—at the executive level this is akin to going from the minor to the major leagues. New languages change our lives completely and expand our cultural horizons.

---

*Globally, a second  
language is vital.*

---

Another attribute that continues to be very valuable in the world of business, and as such is important to our value, is related to how much experience and contact we have had with other cultures. Contact with other cultures opens our minds so that we can learn more. Diversity is a fundamental value in the modern business world. This contact enhances our ability to share with people who are very different from us and contribute our very different perspectives on the same situation. This allows us to grow as people and professionals. Discrimination is unforgivable in the modern business world.

Even traveling as a tourist helps enrich our working lives because we are exposed to different worlds and diverse cultural realities and perspectives. But most of all, we have the opportunity to interact with people who think differently than we do. Yet some people who do have the time and means to travel prefer to remain in the comfort of their own cities. We need to take advantage of every opportunity we have to travel and to expand our horizons both inside and outside the country. No one can take these experiences away from us, and their value far exceeds the money we spend to enjoy them.

### **Energy, Enthusiasm, Passion: Do Your Eyes Sparkle?**

Imagine that I want to work at your company and you are interviewing me. Imagine that I sit before you with my head down and in a low voice say, "I want a job. It isn't that I like the position, but I have no other choice, because I need to take care of my children. Help me. I don't want to do anything that requires too much effort, because my back hurts if I work too much. But give me a job, please, because I need one." Would you hire me?

The problem is that many people still believe that they will get a job simply because they need one. The truth is we are hired to do a good job and add value to the company. And what differentiates one applicant from another is the desire to work in that position and being passionate about becoming part of the company's team. So we must include the *passion factor* in the equation.

---

*Our drive and passion have to be evident in our eyes.*

---

However, one of the traits, or better said, shortcomings, that many of us demonstrate is fear or discomfort with demonstrating our energy, desire, and passion. Perhaps we believe that by showing too much interest, we will appear desperate for the job. Instead of reacting with excitement, we often choose to project a lack of interest. But it is important that we realize that nothing sells better than enthusiasm. Our drive and passion have to be evident in our eyes. We need to say, “I want to work here because I like what you do. I have researched and I really like this company and its values, products, and way of doing business.” We need to speak energetically, instead of keeping our distance and saying, “I think it’s interesting and I could get used to working here.”

Many professionals are reticent to show passion at work. It shouldn’t be this way. Sometimes we forget that by expressing emotion and our enthusiasm, we become professionally *attractive*. The sparkle in our eyes is an expression of personal interest—it demonstrates our desire to do something. And this makes the difference.

## Conclusion

I sincerely believe that the secret to a long and enjoyable career and a high level of employability is to find out how to add value to your organization while enjoying the work itself. Not only will you feel the pride that comes from a job well done, but you will be rewarded for your efforts doing something you personally value.

As a leader, it is also your job to help your people discover how *they* can provide value to their organization while adding value to their careers through doing what makes them passionate, and thus very productive. By teaching them what you yourself have learned, and guiding them in positive instead of negative ways, they will improve their performance and their long-term competitiveness.



*Inés Temple is president of LHH-DBM Peru and LHH Chile. Both companies are the leading career transition and executive coaching organizations in their respective countries. Inés also serves as president of the board of CARE Peru, the leading nonprofit humanitarian organization in Peru fighting the injustice of poverty with a special focus on working alongside poor young girls. She is author of the national best-seller Usted S.A. Empleabilidad y Marketing Personal, published in 2010 and now in its thirteenth edition.*