

Ten Recommendations for Success



By Ann Simmons Nicholson

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People ask me all the time to give them career advice and I do not give “advice”. However, when a woman asked me to share what I felt made me successful, I was more than happy to share my journey. If any of these make sense for you – use them! In honor of David Letterman, these are the top 10 things I learned on my journey:

10. Title doesn't not make a leader.

There are so many instances where people are considered leaders simply because of their title. More frequently, I have found informal leaders are taking action, building trust and bringing positive energy to their teams without a leadership title. Ask yourself: How positive are you? How many judgments do you make in a day? How much do you encourage those around you? Does what you chose every day help the organization? I was doing these things before I had a leadership title and encourage you to do the same.

9. Positive and constructive feedback.

Both positive and constructive feedback are valuable – get good at providing both. I was given one particularly memorable piece of constructive feedback by a supervisor almost 25 year ago after one of my employees resigned saying I was too tough to work for. The supervisor said, “Ann, you're really great at your job. You get more work done than anyone else who reports to me and I appreciate that. I just can't keep picking up the bloody bodies in your wake.” I asked that supervisor if she would

have given the same feedback to a man. She admitted, “I don't know if I would give the same feedback to a man, but I'm giving this feedback to you.” It was invaluable. Certainly, not in the moment! However, from that, I learned that kindness does not equal weakness. I began to change my behavior to ensure that I was still good at my job as well as using kindness as a strength in performance management and providing feedback.

8. Set high standards. Communicate then clarify. Watch people rise.



The Pygmalion effect says high expectations we have of people will be met. In the same way, expectations we have of ourselves impact what we accomplish or fail to accomplish. If we do not expect much of ourselves or of others, we will get that outcome. It is important to examine your expectations and consider how changing them can open up new possibilities and personal growth for you. Your expectations of those around you have a significant impact on their performance. If you expect very little of them, you will get very little. On the other hand, if you have high expectations presented with encouragement, they will tend to live up to these expectations. You have a choice about the expectations you have and communicate to your team. Often times, someone communicating his or her confidence in your ability to do something is all it takes for success to happen.

7. Be a lifelong learner.



In today's world, you are behind if you aren't learning something every day. If you are not uncomfortable at least once a day, you're not learning. We stop growing when we stop learning. The world is constantly changing, and, with that, you get to change with it. I know you are thinking, “When do I have the time?” Listen to books and podcasts on your commute, which are great for learning and can be fun. You are on the commute anyway! “Girl Stop Apologizing” by Rachel Hollis is Simmons Group's current favorite. Audit a class on something you are interested in – no worries about a grade, and you get to learn something. Create and host a work book club. Join a non-profit board and practice a skillset you would like to learn. There are so many learning opportunities out there – take advantage of them!

6. Keep your eye on the WHY.



I constantly keep my eye on my WHY and center my work and life around my WHY. Understanding my WHY keeps me aligned in all that I do – from my clients to my family to the nonprofits that I choose to serve. For an engaging and powerful look at “Why”, watch Simon Sinek's Ted Talk, “Start with why -- how great leaders inspire action” (https://youtu.be/u4ZoJKF_VuA).

5. Be willing to be vulnerable.

I have a girl crush on Brene' Brown. Her message, research and, quite frankly, human and humorous approach to vulnerability has changed my life. Watch her on Netflix or Youtube (Ted Talk – Listing to Shame) and read her books to understand this concept. When you see someone who is vulnerable, do you see them as being weak or courageous? When I ask that question,

people usually respond they see the person as courageous after going through a vulnerable situation. Yet we don't see ourselves the same way. Brene! Brene! Brene!

4. Learn emotional intelligence.



Researchers have repeatedly shown emotional intelligence competencies are crucial to success in leadership and in life.

Emotional intelligence is a set of skills that can be molded, improved, and changed. In most environments, you have the opportunity to assess situations and can choose to behave in an emotionally intelligent way.

I like simplification so I remember **RUM** to describe what emotional intelligence is. "Your ability to **Recognize** and **Understand** emotions, and your skill at using this awareness to **Manage** yourself and your relationships with others." – Dr. Travis Bradberry, Emotional Intelligence 2.0 (<https://amzn.to/2uJ4vaK>)

I wish we would start teaching emotional intelligence in 2nd or 3rd grade and eliminate another subject. I use emotional intelligence every day and I cannot say that about many other subjects.

3. Suspend judgement

I have been practicing suspending my judgement for over thirty years now. I used to do a quick (instantaneous!) assessment of something or more likely someone. I would immediately pop off with whatever judgement I was feeling based on my observation only – not understanding at all from that person's perspective. Thankfully I have been practicing being curious instead of certain for a long time! Earlier this year I had a trouble with an airline (imagine that!). I got it sorted out, however, it did add stress to my day.

At the airport that same day, at the TSA checkpoint, the agent took my driver's license and said, "Ma'am, I can't accept your driver's license." In my past, I would immediately have judged the TSA employee and likely lost my stuff! Because I have been practicing for 30 years to suspend my judgement and ask questions (curiosity instead of certainty), I asked him, "What seems to be the problem, sir?" He said, "This has to be a fake ID." Now I'm thinking, I haven't had a fake ID since I was 17 and my blood pressure was rising. Instead of losing my stuff on him, I asked,

"Why do you think this is a fake ID?" He responded, "You can't possibly be this old." Because I was able to suspend my judgement, be curious instead of certain and ask a question, I was able to get a compliment and everyone around me had a good laugh! That feels great!

2. Focus on solutions, not problems.

For most of my career, I focused less on success and more on making a real contribution. When identifying a problem, I think about options to solve the problem and evaluate these options. To this day, when people come to me with a problem, I say – "what do you think would be a good solution?" You can help people get into good habits! My team is solution-oriented and I'm able to improve my effectiveness by narrowing my focus and creating pathways with possibilities. When I or my team come up with a solution and it is successful, we celebrate that win. If a solution is unsuccessful, we value the lesson(s) learned.

1. It's all about relationships



The most important part of my journey are the relationships that I've built along the way. I like people. That's the reality of

it. As a human and business owner, I find myself consciously reverting to face to face conversations versus electronic conversations, since 93% of the message gets missed via electronic communication. Humans are hardwired to connect with each other "socially" (Thanks, Brene!) and that does not mean social media. All kinds of good chemicals are released in your brain when we connect with other people.

When conducting business, my business partners and I evaluate all clients by relationship factors. We have been committed to being considerate and responsive in our business. A specific example is, during the recession, clients still needed help and usually didn't have a budget to pay for our services. We often did the work pro bono because it wasn't about the money, it was about being there for others in times of need. While this was not intended to be a good marketing idea, most people remember how we helped them during that time and reach out to us now.

We live by the motto - Take care of the relationships and everything else will follow.

We put people and relationships at the forefront of everything we do. I hope these are helpful to you. I especially hope you choose every day to be responsible for the energy you bring, encourage those around you, suspend your judgements and be positive. ■



About Ann Simmons Nicholson

CEO and Founder of the Simmons Group, Ann Simmons Nicholson is recognized as an expert in Strategic Planning, Talent Management, Human Resources, Organizational Development and Training in non-profit, government and private industry. Having opened, expanded or transitioned from one owner to another over 50 hotel casinos, manufacturers, cruise ships, water parks and furniture marts during her career, she has worked with all the major players in the gaming industry including: MGM, Station Casinos, Scientific Games, Caesars, and numerous Tribal Gaming Entities. Her work has encompassed all areas of strategic talent planning and talent management.

Ann is a board member for the non-profits Noah's Animal House, United Way of Southern Nevada and Communities in Schools, Nevada. She is also Secretary of the Board for Global Gaming Women and a member of the nomination committee. In addition to financial support, Ann donates scores of hours each year to numerous non-profit organizations helping them with Human Resource and training needs. Ann has the unique ability to partner with her clients and becomes an invaluable resource to companies seeking her services.

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