

HOW TO GET BETTER AT...

# SAFEGUARDING YOUR CAREER: WHAT NOT TO DO IN THE WORKPLACE

There are plenty of potential pitfalls in any career – but what if some of them are of your own making? In the first of a new *F&M* series on ‘How to get better at...’, **Jennifer MacKay** takes a look at self-sabotaging behaviours...and how to avoid them.



We’d all agree that fraud or embezzlement is a quick-fire way to end your career. Yet many of us blithely damage our careers unwittingly, courtesy of the slow monotonous drip of self-sabotaging behaviours (SSBs).

## What is self sabotaging behaviour?

Self-sabotage revolves around little everyday choices; those times when we opt to ‘comfort’ and not ‘confront’ ourselves. It’s that



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seductive voice that says “why push yourself, when it’s so cosy right here?” We like SSBs because on the surface they validate our actions and make us feel better.

## The damage of SSBs

Self-sabotage is a bit like getting a 1980s mullet hairstyle or wearing skinny jeans in a misguided moment of optimism. It may appear normal – even popular. But that doesn’t make it good.

Unchecked, SSBs can become our modus operandi. Before long we stop noticing them and how they impair our performance.

Below are seven frequent self-sabotage offences – of how many are you guilty?

### 1. Rarely set goals

You’re a member of the ‘if it’s meant to be...’ club. But if you don’t know

where you’re heading, the answer may be ‘nowhere’.

Action: Get a ‘goal buddy’. Meet monthly with friend or colleague to plan goals and keep each other accountable.

### 2. Gossip

You ‘share’ with others how lazy your colleagues are, what a terrible manager you have and the shortcomings of the firm. But gossiping doesn’t paint you as a leader ripe for promotion.

Action: If there is a problem, speak to the person involved. Own it, don’t moan about it.

### 3. Go in ‘cold’

Who’s got time to prepare, you think? So you live on the edge, attend meetings unprepared and make important phone calls cold. Yet while you may feel in total



control, chances are others don't see it that way.

Action: We all know that preparation prevents poor performance, so make time to prepare.

#### 4. Coast

'If it feels scary, don't do it', is your logic...after all, coasting got you this far. So you avoid putting yourself forward or learning new things.

Action: Set targets to stretch yourself. Improve your public speaking by joining Toastmasters; test your leadership by chairing a meeting, meet new people by joining a networking group.

#### 5. Over-promise and under-deliver

You tell people what you'll do, then don't complete the task in full – and usually what you do complete is late, too.

Action: Make friends with time management. Break down into chunks exactly how long a task will take before you commit to a deadline. Then do it.

#### 6. Excuse, blame, ignore

Your policy is to have loads of excuses when things go wrong and, whenever possible, blame others and ignore feedback.

Action: Take responsibility. Own up if you make a mistake. Ask for feedback, rather than waiting for it.

#### 7. Hide your light

You undersell yourself by allowing others to take credit for your ideas, apologising for things that aren't your fault and saying "anyone could have done it" when someone compliments your work. Regardless of your capabilities and achievements those around you

never know your true strengths, successes or potential.

Action: Raise your profile. Put yourself forward for promotion, ask for work that showcases your abilities, and find people to champion you. Get out there, speak up for yourself and be noticed. And when the time comes, help someone else to shine too.

#### Conclusion

None of us is immune to self-sabotage. Understanding what it is, why we do it and the consequences can help us to rein ourselves in.