For employees to get ahead, learning beats burning the midnight oil

Are those employees who come in early, stay late and work superhuman hours charting the quickest path to an illustrious career?

In fact, an employee’s motivation to learn new skills is the most important factor in getting ahead on the job, according to a new Accountemps survey of CFOs. Motivation to learn was followed by interpersonal skills and employees’ ability to adapt easily to change.

What doesn’t help career advancement? Putting in ridiculous hours. Only 7% of respondents said a willingness to work long hours was what it took to build a successful career. The poll asked 2,200 CFOs, “Which characteristics do you consider most necessary for an employee to succeed?”

“Successful people never stop learning,” said Bill Driscoll, a district president for Accountemps. “The world is changing quickly and constantly, and it’s vital to stay informed of the latest trends and sought-after skills in your industry.”

Driscoll noted, “Putting in extra time at work doesn’t necessarily lead to positive outcomes. Managers can help reinforce reasonable work hours by prioritizing projects, assigning realistic deadlines, bringing in temporary support and setting a good example themselves.”

How can employees best advance their skills? Accountemps suggests that they:

- Join industry associations.
- Volunteer their expertise with nonprofits that offer opportunities to grow and learn.
- Further their education with an advanced degree or certification.
- Perfect their communication skills by paying attention to details, making eye contact and listening fully to what others say. Improve speaking skills by joining groups like Toastmasters.

What creates career success?

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Motivation to learn new skills: 30%

Strong interpersonal skills: 27%

Ability to adapt to change: 24%

Seeking more responsibility: 13%

Working long hours: 7%
Source: Accountemps survey, July 16