

5 traits of career climbers

With all the mystery that surrounds getting ahead, there really are only five ingredients you need to accelerate onto the fast track, says Susan Marshall, a leadership development consultant based in West Bend, Wis.

- 1. Critical thinking.** When confronting a problem, approach it like a scientist trying to discover cause-effect relationships. Don't get so close to the matter that you begin to take it personally or lose your perspective. Instead, from a distance evaluate the variables involved, the implications of your choices and the relevant facts that drive your analysis.
- 2. Decisiveness.** Career advancement won't just happen; you must be proactive and make it unfold. By demonstrating a steadiness under pressure and a refusal to cave in to opposition, you show that you possess the confidence to stand your ground.
- 3. Clear communication.** If you have something worthwhile to say, find a way to express it clearly. By making your ideas easy for others to understand, you position yourself as a lucid thinker who's not afraid to lay out a proposal in a bold, well-organized manner.
- 4. Integrity.** Top executives want to promote the best people for the job. And they often decide who's best by selecting the individual whom they can trust the most. Integrity means doing what you say and maintaining your core values at all times, especially when compromising your honor would provide an easy way out.
- 5. Consistency.** While go-getters often reinvent themselves to nab promising career opportunities, they don't reinvent the process by which they make decisions and approach their professional duties. Promotions usually go to the most predictably effective executives—the ones who repeatedly beat deadlines or weigh both sides of a tough issue without allowing their biases to interfere.