

# HITTING YOUR STRIDE

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

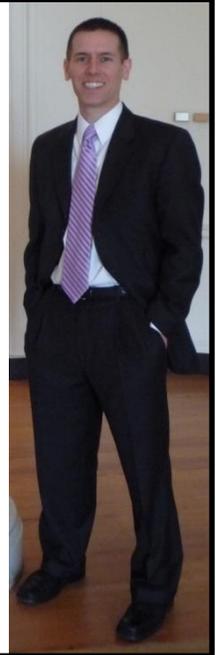
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During a 2011 interview, Northwestern University football coach Pat Fitzgerald explained, “You can’t control opportunity. You can only control if you’re prepared for it.” Unfortunately, many people fail to prepare for opportunity because they simply don’t consider that they might be presented with it.

Last week, though, I heard a great story from a reader, Mark, about preparing for and capitalizing on opportunity. On a recent morning, he heard that Chicago’s mayor, Rahm Emanuel, might visit his workplace. Mark had seen an article about Rahm in the latest issue of *The Economist*, so he read it and devised a question based on the article, on the off chance he had the chance to meet him.

As it turns out, Mark did meet Rahm. The mayor liked Mark’s question, and the two ended up having a short conversation. By spending just a few minutes preparing for a potential opportunity, Mark was rewarded with a very cool experience—and a terrific story for future business dinners and cocktail parties. Are you in the habit of preparing for opportunities that may come your way?

Stride On,  
Michael



## STAYING IN FRONT

*“In reality, knowledge is a very dynamic universe—and what is most valuable is not the body of knowledge, but the leading edge of it.”*

*- Bill James, baseball historian & statistician*

### **Books to Read This Quarter**

[\*The Marshmallow Test: Mastering Self-Control\*](#)

- Walter Mischel

[\*Performing Under Pressure: The Science of Doing Your Best When It Matters Most\*](#)

- Hendrie Weisinger & J. P. Pawliw-Fry

### **Articles to Read This Quarter**

[Bosses Seek ‘Critical Thinking,’ but What Is That?](#)

- Melissa Korn (*Wall Street Journal*)

[The Post-Bedtime Ritual of Successful Working Parents](#)

- Laura Vanderkam (*Fast Company*)

[5 Questions to Ask Yourself Every Morning to Advance Your Career](#)

- Jayson DeMers (*Forbes*)

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## CATCHING UP

*Being on the leading edge of knowledge is important, but it is vital to be familiar with thinkers and ideas from past years as well. This will help you to be more innovative when creating and problem-solving, and also can prevent older colleagues from patronizing you about your age or inexperience.*

### **Books to Read This Quarter**

[\*Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies\*](#)

- Jim Collins & Jerry Porras

[\*Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership\*](#)

- Lee Bolman & Terrence Deal

### **Articles to Read This Quarter**

[\*How Do You Manage Up in the Workplace?\*](#)

- Michael Freedman & David Bradford  
(*Harvard Business Review*)

[\*Managing Yourself: A Smarter Way to Network\*](#)

- Rob Cross & Robert Thomas  
(*Harvard Business Review*)

## REFLECTING

*“The single biggest danger in business and life, other than outright failure, is to be successful without being resolutely clear about why you are successful in the first place.”*  
- Robert Burgelman, Stanford University business professor

One of my favorite quotations comes from the book, *The Art of Possibility* (Zander & Zander, p. 9):

A shoe factory sends two marketing scouts to a region of Africa to study the prospects for expanding business. One sends back a telegram saying, SITUATION HOPELESS STOP NO ONE WEARS SHOES. The other writes back triumphantly, GLORIOUS BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY STOP THEY HAVE NO SHOES

When reflecting on the success or failure of an endeavor, you should evaluate not only the planning process, resource allocation, and fidelity of implementation, but also the mindset you held and the attitude you exhibited. Did you approach your project with a glass half-full view, believing a solution could be found or improvements could be achieved? Were you upbeat and positive with colleagues, even when faced with setbacks, or did you display negativity and frustration? After conducting this exercise a few times, you may realize that your mindset and attitude are helping you succeed, that you succeed in spite of them, or that your failures can be attributed to them. Use this knowledge to make adjustments in the future, or as confirmation that your current *modus operandi* is working.

## WEBSITE TO KNOW

Doodle ([www.doodle.com](http://www.doodle.com))

About: Allows you to easily find common dates & times when people are available to meet.

Usefulness: Eliminates reply-all e-mail clutter when attempting to set up a meeting or dinner for a large group of people.

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## PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For many people, e-mail is now a *de facto* filing system. They save everything, and when they need a document they search for the message to which it is attached. This may work well when you start a new job, but in 3-5 years you probably won't remember the word that is key to finding one important e-mail out of 50,000. In addition, there may be times when e-mail is not available because the Internet is down, your hotspot is out of juice, or there is an outage (Gmail has had at least one major outage in each of the past 5 years—including last week). If you rely on e-mail in this way, try the following:

- Create a filing system on your hard drive, or on Dropbox. Ensure that folder and sub-folder names are specific and organized by year when necessary.
- Create a naming convention for your files so you can easily find things in the future. Two big considerations are how the date is written (1415, 14-15, 2014-2015, 2015-03-01, etc.) and where it goes (20150301 Tech Inventory vs. Tech Inventory 20150301).
- When you receive e-mails with attachments, save the files immediately to the proper folder using the naming convention you have developed.
- If searching e-mails remains a part of your filing system, create folders in your e-mail account so you can file messages. That way, if you need a finance document you can search just the 1,000 e-mails in your finance folder instead of the tens of thousands in your entire account.

## BEING (AND STAYING) INTERESTING

Whether connecting your contacts in person or via e-mail, the right approach is essential. For example, when introducing accountant Ava and data analyst Don, don't only provide their job titles and company names; also share one fact about each person that reveals something unique (“Don is a master snorkeling instructor, and Ava restores antique pianos.”), a connecting point (“Ava is a Stanford grad, and Don is headed to Stanford for his MBA next year.”), or a topic that can be expanded upon (“Ava just started a really neat project at work that I think you'll find intriguing.”). The goal is to make each person think, “Okay! I'm excited to talk with this person.” Then, you can step away as they begin a conversation. Your contacts will appreciate you giving them an entry point to talk more about themselves, and they will think you're interesting for having such interesting contacts!

## DID YOU KNOW...

While some argue that college [isn't necessary](#) or [isn't worth the cost](#), more education means, on average, [a bigger paycheck and a lower chance of unemployment](#). So if you're considering going back to school and taking on student loans, pay attention to the numbers and not the naysayers.

## WORDS ON WHICH TO RUMINATE

“If you wait to be convinced that you can do something, you'll never do anything. People always ask me, ‘How do I become a comedian?’ And I always say, ‘Well, I think one thing you should do is get on stage and tell jokes.’”

- Jon Stewart, host of *The Daily Show*