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INTRODUCTION

Global workforces. Changing demographics. Outsourcing. Downsizing. Streamlining. Restructuring. We're all running as fast as we can to keep up with changes in business and within our fields of expertise. In our quest to keep up with the times and move ahead, it seems something critical is getting lost in the shuffle.

Advances in technology have dramatically changed our lives and the way we do business. We recognize the importance of and rely on the equipment we use, but we are losing sight of the most important factor for success—*our relationships with other people*. Due to the ease and efficiency of electronic communications, more and more of our correspondence is completed this way rather than dealing with people directly. As the workplace becomes increasingly impersonal, many of us are no longer sure how to act toward our bosses, peers, employees, customers, and colleagues.

In addition to the skills or expertise needed to do your job, the “people” skills, enthusiasm, and leadership qualities you possess—and display—are critical to your success. Your ability to work smoothly with others, communicate effectively, maintain a positive attitude, and resolve problems will distinguish you and enable you to *gain the professional edge*.

Maybe you're content with your current position; maybe you're itching to make a change. Perhaps you are young, just starting out, or perhaps you've had a long career and fear you may soon be forced to leave your job. You could be unemployed and looking for ways to improve your job search, or you could have a job and be looking for ways to improve *yourself*. If you manage others, are self-employed, or are a budding entrepreneur; if you're unappreciated, working in unpleasant conditions, or dread the thought of going to work each day, it doesn't have to be that way. This book can help you make the changes you want to make.

It doesn't matter if you are reaching the peak of your career or hitting your lowest point; if you want to increase your chances of success, this book was written for *you*. Don't read it as a novel or hurry your way through; don't

assume it doesn't apply to you. If you read it to benefit from it, you will. You will become a better you.

How to Gain the Professional Edge made its debut in February 1997. Just two weeks after its release, I received a call from the producer of *The Drew Carey Show*. I assumed that when I heard from a television producer, it would be someone from a talk show or morning news program. I couldn't imagine why a sitcom would be interested in a self-help book, but the producer told me she wanted permission to use it for an upcoming episode. "Are you sure you have the right book?" I asked. After all, the book had been out for such a short time. "I have the manuscript with me," the producer said, then proceeded to read the cover page, verifying the title of the book and my name. She told me someone had given it to her. At first I was nervous about my book being featured in a sitcom, but then I felt honored that *The Drew Carey Show* wanted to use *my* book. I knew it was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

How to Gain the Professional Edge first appeared on national television on April 27, 1997. Drew and Mimi, the main characters of the show, were competing for a new position. Wanting to gain the edge and outshine the competition, Drew buys *this book* for tips to help him improve his image. He succeeds and manages to impress the members of the board. Mimi, who is wondering what Drew is up to, discovers the book, takes it, and decides to use it to her advantage. When the finalists meet with the board in the company dining room, Mimi and Drew seem to be making a favorable impression, but before long they both slip up.

The entire episode centers on the first edition of this book, which has now been revised and greatly expanded, with twice as many chapters as the previous edition.

Sometime after the episode aired, in an interview with Matt Lauer, Drew Carey talked about his lifelong interest in reading self-help books and the influence they've had on his life. As he held the first edition of this book in his hands, he talked about how some books have inspired ideas for his show.

The plot played out on *The Drew Carey Show* was fictitious and the characters' behavior a bit extreme, but they were not all that far removed from reality. Similar scenes play out in real life every single day. People become complacent, don't know what to do or how to act, and they too slip up.

Don't wait until *you* slip up to realize you're missing something or need to improve. Continuously update and improve both your "softer" and "harder" skills. Knowledge is power; protect yourself and your career by being knowledgeable and staying informed. Be eager and willing to continue to learn,

change, and grow, both personally *and* professionally, for the rest of your life. It is the key to your personal happiness and career success.

In seeking to identify the top characteristics employers look for when hiring an employee, Chuck Martin, author of *Managing for the Short Term*, surveyed more than 2,000 senior executives and managers. An overwhelming majority of the respondents—87 percent—said they would look for and hire people who are willing to learn.

Are you willing to learn? *Business* is changing. *Technology* is changing. *The workplace* is changing. *People* are changing. Are you changing too? If you aren't interested in learning and changing, don't be surprised if employers show little interest in you. Continue to learn about yourself and others. Know what is expected of you. Don't do it because you *have to*; do it because you *want to*.

Whether you purchased this book yourself or received it from someone else, read it with the expectation of *learning something new*. If you do, I guarantee you will find information in this book that was written just for you. It's never too late; you can become the successful person you were meant to be.

Go for the edge!

Sue Morem