

Career Do's and Don'ts From 2009

What We Learned From Public Figures This Year

by Tom Musbach, Yahoo! HotJobs

Pop stars, pro athletes, and others in the public spotlight had some major career ups and downs during 2009 that offer helpful lessons to us all.

The six examples below highlight instructive hints taken from well-known news and cultural events this year. We all have good and bad days at work, but these tips and insights from career experts can help steer your professional life in the New Year.

1. **DON'T** steal the spotlight at the expense of others.

Singer Kanye West decried Taylor Swift's best female video award as she tried to accept it onstage during the MTV Video Music Awards telecast in September. Since then he's had to do some damage control to restore his reputation.

"People viewed Kanye's outburst as a desperate and immature plea for attention, and they will think the same of you if you attempt to steal someone else's thunder," says Alexandra Levit, author of "New Job, New You: A Guide to Reinventing Yourself in a Bright New Career."

"Your reputation will be stronger in the end if you give credit where credit is due and are gracious in praising others. You will have your time to shine soon enough."

2. **DO** make time for family and personal priorities; they can enhance your career success.

At this year's U.S. Open tennis championship, Kim Clijsters came out of retirement after starting a family and picked up where she left off -- winning major titles.

"It's a matter of having the confidence to choose your own path based on what you value," says Richard Phillips, career coach and owner of Advantage Career Solutions. "I believe that one of the factors behind Clijsters' successful comeback, besides her obvious talent, is that she was clear about her motives, both for retiring and for coming back. That kind of clarity carries with it a tremendous energy."

3. **DON'T** make stands about values and integrity if you can't be sure yours will hold up.

Carrie Prejean, who was stripped of her Miss California USA title, was a fervent campaigner for traditional values before a graphic tape surfaced and discredited her.

"People detest hypocrisy, and it will ruin your reputation," says Levit. "Before you publicly extol your values, think hard to make sure you haven't produced any contrary evidence. In general, in the workplace you should carefully consider whether it's appropriate to be commenting on personal values. You never know who you're going to offend, and in many cases it won't be worth the risk."

4. DO accept defeat graciously.

Many fans and critics were convinced that Adam Lambert was the most talented contestant on "American Idol" this year and were outraged when he came in second. But Lambert was genuine in congratulating the winner, and the loss took nothing away from his talent and prospects for a successful -- if controversial, given his recent performance at the American Music Awards -- career.

"Defeat is commonplace in the business world: loss of promotion or title, downsizing, loss of sales awards," says Pat Mayfield of Pat Mayfield Consulting LLC. "Congratulate the 'winner' and figure out what you can do to improve. Don't be bitter -- be better. Let it go and move on.

"Remember, winning and titles don't always guarantee the ultimate result. Even though Adam Lambert didn't win the 'Idol' title, his new CD is significantly outselling the one from winner Kris Allen."

5. DON'T get romantically involved with employees who report to you.

Late-night TV host David Letterman suffered a loss of personal and professional trust after his affair with a staffer became public.

"A loss of trust is like dry rot; it tends to spread to other areas of your personal and professional life," says Phillips. "People begin to wonder what else you might be hiding or not being truthful about. And if that loss of trust involves a misuse of power, it's doubly hard to overcome."

6. DO resign on your own terms, when you're ready.

Former Supreme Court Justice David Souter was considered on the young side to retire from the bench, but he reportedly didn't care for many trappings of the job and resigned based on what was right for him and his happiness. In November Oprah Winfrey announced she would end her hugely successful daytime talk show in 2011 because "it felt right" to her.

Says Levit, "Some of the most successful Hollywood types -- from Oprah to Johnny Carson to the producers of 'Seinfeld' and 'The Sopranos' -- have left on a high note, while they were still popular and while the power was in their hands. This is exactly how you want to leave a job.

"Even if the fit is not perfect and both you and the employer will be better off if you move on, you want the decision to be in your hands, not theirs. You have to do everything you can to be perceived well until you are ready to make a move."