

Getting to the Top: Getting Unstuck

By: Deborah Henken, President, Highland Team

Are you feeling stuck in your career? What can you do to energize yourself to start moving on? What should you tolerate and what should you change? How do you change careers?

Our panel of coaches in “Getting to the Top: Getting Unstuck” provided tips and techniques on these issues and more.

Featuring Susan Bernstein, Work from Within, Deb Colden, Deb Colden Executive Coaching, Lili Pratt-King, Career Advocates and Jennifer Winn, Winn Performance, the workshop provided insights, tips and effective techniques to get unstuck.

Renewing, Exploring, Re-Entering the Market:

1. Identify people you believe have fun in your company or outside your company. Ask to interview them about what a day in their lives is like. Get them talking about themselves. Ask them who else they know who are doing something intriguing or interesting. Pursue several directions at once; don't cut off any too soon.
2. If you are looking to make an industry change, you must prove you understand the industry first. Don't ask them to make a leap of faith about you. Go to industry conferences, volunteer to help at events. Learn the language, the models, and the business. Show you are an insider, not an outsider trying to get in.
3. Thinking of new professions but don't know about them? Shadow someone for a day or volunteer to work in an event in the profession or try Vacation Vocations, an organization which will set up a way for you to experience a new career.
4. Have you taken time out from your career? Later in life? Making a change? Have low-risk conversations with your network. Ask them who they know, get introductions, and connect. By having conversations, and not going in selling, they get to know you in a low-risk way. Build your network in this way and find opportunities without people feeling “sold.”

Are You Stuck?

Lili Pratt-King introduced her tool to determine how stuck you are (and provide motivation to make a change.) As she commented, “Most of us stay too long as resistance to change is an adaptation of humans. John Gardner, Founder of Common Cause, Stanford former professor, etc. used to say people should replot themselves at least nine times during their careers.” Lili continued, “ He would say that you should jump while you were still energized He was a model for understanding your gifts, finding a place, following to its logical conclusion and to then move on.”

To reinvent yourself, you must decide it is the right time to change. The tool provided an objective assessment and reality check of the situation. What are the signs of being stuck and needing a change?

- Your enthusiasm and sense of identify begins to erode
- You lose the sense of what you like to do
- Close observers and family members notice you are no longer excited

These are signs that you need to change the complexion, pace, function, level or environment of your job.

Identify Your Successes:

Jennifer Wynn introduced her Success File tool and concept. “When you are in a place of feeling stuck, it’s difficult to remember your value and successes. Many people enter a spiral of negativity.” A Success File provides an ongoing tool to assure you remember your successes. It provides you fodder for building your resume, answering interviewing questions and building your confidence during difficult days.

The success form provides a way to document your results in detail. It focuses on the three main successes: Did you save money, increase revenues or save time?

It documents what you did, when you did it, what processes you created, and what skills and competencies you developed. Your Success File is an ongoing archive of your success stories that can boost your attitude, pull you along the process of getting unstuck and help you find the next step in your career by reminding you of your successes.

Getting Unstuck From the Inside Out:

Susan Bernstein introduced another technique to get energy to get unstuck. She pointed out “When you feel stuck, it’s hard to change your thinking. It’s hard to change your emotions. However, one area that can be shifted is the sensations you feel in your own body. Shifting sensations can affect your emotions and thinking.”

In the exercise she introduced, audience members thought of a time they had been successful and thought of their body language—their posture, their breathing, their expressions, what they saw, felt, smelled and heard when they had succeeded.

Susan explained, “We all know that body language conveys people’s attitudes. During the times of success, thinking, emotions and sensations are all in alignment-- positive thinking, emotional excitement, and “feel good” sensations. Your head goes up, your shoulders go back, you stand straighter and taller.”

She then asked the audience to think of a time they felt stuck. “Immediately, thoughts and emotions become negative and the body tightens up with knots in the gut, limited breathing, tiredness, and slouching,” explained Susan.

By being aware of these reactions, you can change your sensations in your body. In this simple exercise, she showed how concentrating on your body sensations can free up energy when you need to make a shift. Shifting sensations from the inside out—deeper breathing, relaxing, assuming a straighter posture—allows you to make a change and get energized to get unstuck.

Making Breakthroughs From The Future: Getting Unstuck

Deb introduced a 10 minute approach to getting unstuck by presenting the Dream-Act-Encourage™ model for creating breakthroughs in your career. Deb explained that, “The Dream” is figuring out what you want and making it so compelling you can’t wait to go after it. The “Act” is figuring out how to get there and The “Encourage” is having the confidence to dream the dream and take action.”

Deb explained how a “toleration,” something that annoys you or drains your energy, can be a launching point for getting unstuck in the “Dream” or goal setting stage. Deb starts by asking people what they are putting up with. She then asks them to “..assume that it is 3 months from now and you have completely reversed this bad situation. What does it look like now?”

After identifying the “tolerations”, and what a good situation might look like, she then moves to “Act” and provided a method to get unstuck by working from the future backwards. She asks, “Now that you have this great situation, think back: What did you think would get in your way? What was the first baby step you took to overcome or minimize that barrier? Who did you talk to first? Who helped you?” By working from the future backwards, and focusing on the first, small, concrete action steps, not the whole plan, people are put more at ease in their process of getting unstuck. By working as if the goal is already accomplished, “people can more easily and objectively identify the steps that have to be taken without being overwhelmed.”

Deb also outlined the importance of having a circle of advisors—people you trust who will be there to encourage you—as an important part of getting unstuck. “Getting unstuck is hard and scary and time-consuming. Having a group of supporters to cheer you on and be there for you is an important part of the process.”

About the Getting to the Top Career Series

Alumni Career Services at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, together with executive recruiting firm Kathryn Ullrich Associates, Inc., and marketing consultancy the Highland Team, present the speaker series for career development – *Getting to the Top*. This series explores the skills and knowledge successful marketing and sales leaders leverage in their careers to get to the top.

June 6	Getting to the Top in Public Relations
September 7	Getting to the Top in Strategic Alliances and Channels Management
November 9	Getting to the Top - CEOs with Marketing and Sales Backgrounds