

Business guru Richard Moran spells out 20 career dos and don'ts

1. **DO avoid the dreaded “DNF” label.** A “Did Not Finish” acronym next to your name, in writing or spirit, is certainly not NBD (No Big Deal). “It means you start things and that’s as far as you go,” says Moran. “It means you are good at thinking but not at doing.” In other words, follow through on doable projects rather than merely thinking about BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals, of course).
2. **DO show up. It still matters.** Working hard and showing up are not the same thing. Both things are important. “Being around” still matters. Hanging around with the boss still matters. Being a colleague still matters. Being part of the team still matters, even in a virtual world. It’s easier to get rid of people no one knows.
3. **DON’T order a complicated coffee drink.** The coffeehouse is the new “lunch” for networking and interviews, and the stakes here are wound up. “Coffee is more than just a caffeine buzz,” explains Moran. “It’s a parallel universe to the office.” A potential employer can judge you by anything, including an elaborate coffee order that screams “high maintenance!” Take one for the team and go simple.
4. **DON’T underestimate the importance of traffic.** *Driving traffic* is all about your platform. It’s what you’ve created about yourself, your brand, based on the traffic you generate on social media. The more traffic, the bigger the platform, the more employers notice you might be an expert in something. *Being out in traffic* is about networking. Never miss a chance to have lunch, to buy a coffee, to build a new relationship, so people know you are competent and cool. If you’re not out in traffic, you’re being left behind.
5. **DON’T ignore the career clock...** “Entry-level jobs can stay at the entry level for *much* longer than you planned,” cautions Moran, “and mid-level career jobs can be a waste of your talent if you’re not careful.” His advice? “Gauge where you are in relation to where you want to be at your age. If you’re way behind, it might be time to plot out a timeline and make changes.”
6. **...and on the other hand, DON’T ever think “It’s too late.”** Our youth-obsessed culture worships at the hand of the barely-out-of-college billionaire. Moran isn’t buying it. “A 40-year-old is not a geezer,” he reminds us. “Colonel Sanders was 65 when he started KFC. So for all of you who are thinking big and want to start something and make changes: It’s never too late. Your ideas are still worthy; passion doesn’t have an expiration date.”

7. **DO get up and get going early.** The “real world” isn’t college; you can’t register your day into starting at 1 p.m. “Sleeping in is a habit you absolutely need to break,” says Moran. “The successful people I’ve been around are up when the rooster is crowing.”
8. **DO read every chance you get.** You might be conditioned to think all reading’s a chore, but a great book is a wondrous experience. Moran sums it up simply: “Interesting people are successful and interesting people read.”
9. **DO watch trash TV (or practice other forms of down time).** “The brain is rejuvenated through trash TV,” says Moran. “Your own version of this doesn’t actually require a TV; it’s a metaphor for downtime. It resets you to go back to work fighting the good fight and ultimately perform better.”
10. **DO become a project manager.** Job requirements are overwhelmingly bloated with sought-after skills. But Moran cuts to the chase: “The most important skill you need today is project management. Guiding a project all the way through to success makes you an office hero. Demonstrate your ability to do that well and you’ll get the job and get ahead.”
11. **DON’T shy away from negative feedback.** You need to know how you’re truly doing, not just what you’re doing *right*. “Don’t get your feelings hurt; just listen and take the bad with the good. It’s the shortest way to a raise and promotion.”
12. **DON’T believe the Vegas thing (or do other stupid shit).** “What happens in Vegas doesn’t stay in Vegas,” cautions Moran. “In fact, what happens anywhere—physically or virtually—doesn’t stay anywhere. Don’t break the rules. To join my Stop Doing Stupid Shit campaign, just stop doing stupid shit.”
13. **DON’T fall prey to the three presentation killers.** There are three phrases Moran insists are sure to kill your presentation. “Those numbers don’t look right” likely means your numbers are indeed wrong. It’s also likely no one knows what you’re trying to say when someone asks, “Can we do a process check?” And if you catch yourself saying, “I know you can’t see this, but,” you’ve lost the whole room. Moran’s remedy for all these PowerPoint ills? “Prepare. Prepare. Prepare.”
14. **DO pay attention to the message your car is sending.** Your car is obviously an integral part of your own life, but you may not realize that it’s also sending a message to others that can impact your career. “It’s a piece of your wardrobe,” advises Moran. “A fast car can signal a high-action person, and an old beater can signal a slob. Next time you go car shopping, choose wisely.”
15. **DON’T end up in Abilene.** The “Abilene Paradox” refers to a notion of group dynamics based off a legend of individually indecisive family members who somehow end up driving to Abilene, even though no one really wants to go there. “It’s in play when a

group settles on doing something that no one wants to do,” explains Moran. “Abilene decisions can come back to haunt you when you’re held accountable. Learn to say, ‘I don’t want to do that,’ and you’ll save yourself a lot of pain.”

16. **DON’T be an asshole.** “An asshole is a bully prone to outbursts who manages through intimidation and fear,” defines Moran. “Despite what you might’ve heard, assholes *don’t* always win. It might take time, but they’ll get what’s coming to them.” If you find yourself tempted and veering closely into Moran’s “Asshole Hall of Fame” territory, remember, leaders who are authentic, credible, and honest are the ones who ultimately prevail.
17. **Women, DON’T compromise who you are for the boys’ club.** While the glass-ceiling struggle is still real, women are running Fortune 500 companies. And they’re doing it well. Has anything changed in recent years? “One theme comes up consistently,” says Moran. “Women today don’t have to act like men to succeed. They can define themselves by their own terms with no apologies or changes required to fit in with the boys.”
18. **DO find a way to (digitally) disconnect.** “I don’t know anyone who has made a major scientific discovery between the constant ping of emails, or anyone who’s written a great book while the Twitter feed is clinking along,” Moran reminds us. “The best productivity hack is to disconnect. It sounds impossible, but try it for an hour every day.”
19. **DON’T ever check a bag.** Business travel sucks. That’s why Moran includes in his book a list of ways to make it suck less. One is this: “If you have too much stuff for a carry-on, dump it out and start over. It’s not about the fees or the schlep factor; it’s about the flexibility in changing flights. If you want to change flights, which you will, the first question the gate agent will ask is, ‘Did you check a bag?’“
20. **DO know what matters.** Moran recalls a student in a management class asking a simple question: “What matters?” The room raised their hands in a frenzy of reasonable answers. Moran’s easy thesis on the subject concludes: “What matters is your ability to assess what’s important and make a contribution in that direction. It’s simple: What matters is what you can do to make the organization better. That’s what you need to know.”

Richard Moran is the current president of Menlo College in Atherton, California, and the author of “The Thing About Work: Showing Up and Other Important Matters.” Inspired by his experience and accomplishment in the world of business, the book provides accessible advice for all-level employees from an insider perspective that changes how we think about work.