

WHAT DO YOUNG LEADERS NEED TO DO TO ADVANCE?

EDITOR'S NOTE: BizVoice® asked representatives of four young professionals organizations around the state to offer their insights on the above question.

'Belonging in the Room' – and So Much More

By Savannah Robinson

Young leaders are often at a disadvantage because we find ourselves faced with the need to continuously prove our value. I believe every leader has to do that at some level; however it's even harder for young people because age is often seen as a negative factor.

The next time you walk into a meeting and you see two colleagues of different ages – check in with yourself. Analyze your assumptions and challenge them. It is likely you will think the young person is the subordinate and the older person is in charge.

I spent years trying to hide my age from my co-workers because I was afraid they would think I was unqualified based on my age. Early in my career I went so far as to alter my appearance in order to appear older and more “professional”.

I never shared anything that would allow someone to pinpoint my age. I moved past those feelings when I began teaching college classes at Purdue Fort Wayne. My students were older than I was and were eager and ready to learn from me. Thanks to those students, and a wonderful professor, I realized I was worthy, and I belonged in the room.

Five key attributes of young leaders:

- 1. Grit and Determination.** The very first things that come to mind when I think of young leaders are grit and determination. Young leaders are determined and won't stop until we reach our goals. I often ask people if the day runs them or if they run the day. It is so easy to surrender to the agendas of other people and get bogged down. We have to be so determined that we force our long-term goals to guide our decision making and focus on being strategic.
- 2. A High Vibe Network.** Someone once said we are the sum of the five people we spend the most time with. I love people and trying to help them – figuring out how they think, why they are who they are, etc. My close friends have always been wiser and more successful than me, which makes me want to push myself even harder. We bring the power of our friends and our networks to all aspects of our lives.
- 3. Courage.** I remember when I first started working at my current law firm and was once again faced with a staff of people reporting to me who were older than I was – and openly making comments about my age. I was determined to prove myself and I knew I needed the support of the partner leading the office. I'll never forget the perplexed look I received the first time I asked: “How can I improve?” Young leaders are courageous enough to ask for feedback and smart enough to know when to implement it.
- 4. Change Agents.** When you grow up playing Oregon Trail, hoping that the dial-up internet won't get interrupted by a phone call, to now having the internet at your fingertips, you get used to fast-paced change. So many people get stuck in their comfort zones with the mindset, “If it isn't broken, why change it?” Young leaders approach most situations from another angle and ask, “How can it be better?” We aren't afraid of new ideas or innovation. We foster environments that encourage them.
- 5. Servant Leadership.** Young leaders take responsibility for empowering others on our teams to be successful first and foremost. We mentor and encourage our teams to hit their goals, rather than asking them to serve us. I once heard someone say “to live is to give,” and I could not agree more. I believe we get from life what we put in, and I want nothing but goodness coming my way.

Overall, young and engaged leaders are determined to pursue their goals regardless of age barriers that may get in their way and be a source of positive change in their careers and their communities.



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YOUNG LEADERS OF NORTHEAST INDIANA

The group's mission is to attract, develop and retain emerging leaders through community, professional and social engagement. YLNI is a network of over 1,000 young leaders who are playing an active role in their community. YLNI is a volunteer-driven organization with 16 board members who not only provide a voice for our demographic in the community, but deliver quality of life and career-changing programming such as leadership development, entrepreneurial workshops, a flourishing farmers market and much more.

Advocating for the Alternate Route

By Jared Luegers, CFA

Drink the corporate Kool-Aid. There is no doubt this is a noteworthy technique to rise to the top over time, especially in larger, established organizations. My biggest problem with this option is it often does not move the organization forward.

Challenging the status quo, thinking differently and trying new things are what move an organization forward in my opinion ... or at least keep the organization level-headed. And for those who bring positive change and results, they *should* be rewarded more than those who follow the status quo. This is why I would encourage taking an alternate route.

For a young, ambitious future leader, it can be tough to influence an established organization, which is why many young professionals will choose to play the “office politics” game instead as it’s the path of least resistance. However, I do believe it’s possible to bypass the office politics (*for the most part*) and advance in your organization while moving the organization forward in a progressive manner. The key is to make yourself indispensable while being respectful and thoughtful in the process.

Here are five key thoughts I have for young leaders to ponder when contemplating how to advance within an organization while making positive organizational change along the way – whether that be for the most free-thinking start-up or the largest, stodgy dinosaur.

Put yourself out there

You have to make yourself known to those around you before you can even start to think about advancing higher. Building relationships is the name of the game in every aspect of life. You must be willing to share your thoughts, opinions and ideas with your colleagues. And even more importantly, you must do this in a clear, articulated and confident manner. They don’t say “confidence is everything” for nothing.

Tackle the unwanted tasks

One of the surest and quickest ways to impress those higher up than you is to volunteer to take on the unwanted tasks that no one else wants to do. Managers understand when they have painful or mundane tasks to give out and, trust me, they will not forget the man or woman who always offers their services with a smile.

You can take this a step further by purposely asking to take tasks off your higher-up’s plate to make his or her life easier. Always remember your life will become better by making other lives better.

Build a bullet proof reputation

Make yourself known as the person who flat out just gets stuff done. By building a reputation of doing high quality work and going above and beyond what is expected, you will build trust with those in your organization who will then come to count on you without a blink of an eye.

This is a sure way of ensuring more responsibilities will come your way over time. The old adage “under promise, over deliver” will take you farther than you ever could imagine.

Master the divide

I think many would agree that the younger generations take a different view on blocking and tackling problems and solutions relative to older generations. I’m not going to argue who is right (p.s. I’m a millennial) but it’s important to understand this divide exists and how to maneuver around it. As a younger, less experienced member of an organization, you must stay humble and respectful in your thoughts and opinions.

While you think you may know everything, you probably don’t. There’s probably a good reason why something is done the way it is, even if it’s not optimal. The key to becoming a center of influence is to first acknowledge and portray understanding for why things are the way they are, but then to back your idea/view with data and facts. Respect is earned, not given.

Trust the process

Advancement does not come instantaneously. You have to trust the process and believe your hard work will pay off over time. If you don’t, your worrying and lack of enthusiasm will significantly affect your quality of work – and not in a good way. But it’s normal; we are all humans.

Just understand that if you build a strong reputation and track record in your organization and in the community, I can almost guarantee you someone will see your value and want to bring you on and move you up in their organization. Long story short: Grind more and worry less.



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YOUNG PROFESSIONALS OF CENTRAL INDIANA

YPCI is Indiana’s leading networking organization for young professionals with over 300 paying active members. At its core, YPCI attempts to attract and promote the brightest talent in the Indianapolis metropolitan region while providing a social environment to foster lifelong relationships for its members. YPCI strives to be a well-rounded organization, mixing fun, education and charity into its lineup of 18-plus annual events.

Tap Into Your Passion ... Be Involved

By Briana Stiner

When you ask young leaders what they need to do to advance in their organizations and in their communities, you will get many different answers. Advancement looks different for many people and can be achieved in many different ways.

YPN South Bend hosts Executive Conversations, moments where young professionals get to pick the brain of a local leader in a small and intimate setting. Guests have included non-profit CEOs, entrepreneurs, Latino leaders, executive directors from Venues Parks & Arts, and Downtown South Bend and many more.

Among the many questions that come up, the leaders always seem to hear, “What do I need to do to advance in my organizations and in the community?” Again, while many answers are different, they all seem to have a common link: Finding what YOU are passionate about and getting involved.

These leaders we hear from often talk about how they found something they believed in and could become passionate about and gave it their all and found moments to get involved in the community or step up in their business/organization. They work tirelessly and treat people well. They have encouraged creating and maintaining meaningful relationships.



Brandon Williamson

opportunities, listening to different perspectives, collaborating. Ultimately, you get out the amount of work you put in.”

Buy someone a cup of coffee or take them out to lunch. Get connected. Be intentional. All these similar answers come from leaders who had already achieved many of their goals and are considered successful.

We reached out to a couple of YPN South Bend advisory council members to get their input on how to advance your career and in the community. They are working to reach their goals and are currently making an impact.

Brandon Williamson, business development officer with First State Bank, shares, “As young leaders, we often allow our age and lack of experience to limit our impact potential. It is critical to be the change we want to see by getting involved in your organization and community, meeting decision makers, sharing ideas/resources, exploring



Jacque Stahl

active member. This is the impetus behind the existence of YPN South Bend. The mission: to develop, connect and empower young professionals in the region. By doing this, we advance our businesses, communities and region. We are proud to have a thriving young professionals’ group in our area that not only educates on how to advance as a young professional but attempts to provide opportunities to excel as well.

In collaboration with regional partners, YPN South Bend will be hosting the second annual YP Summit (presented by the University of Notre Dame) on October 3 in South Bend. It is a full-day professional development conference aimed to equip young professionals (ages 21-39) to advance in their career and community. Breakout sessions include Building Your Brand, Building Wealth and Managing Money, Understanding Influence and Making an Impact.

We also asked **Jacque Stahl**, director of marketing for Allied Physicians of Michiana.

“In order to advance, young professionals/leaders should always be learning. Bringing fresh ideas and innovation to the table will show your interest and value to your organization. Work time into your day to listen to podcasts, participate in webinars related to your industry and subscribe to emails with industry-related content as those are all great and FREE ways to stay up to date and educated,” she advocates.

“Also, do not be shy about sharing your ideas. If you feel particularly passionate about something, go for it. Drive, passion and having the motivation to succeed are all needed in order to make an impact and advance in your organization and your community.”

Merriam-Webster defines advancement as an improvement. In order to improve your community and organization, you must be an active member. This is the impetus behind the existence of YPN South Bend. The mission: to develop, connect and empower young professionals in the region. By doing this, we advance our businesses, communities and region. We are proud to have a thriving young professionals’ group in our area that not only educates on how to advance as a young professional but attempts to provide opportunities to excel as well.



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YPN SOUTH BEND

Formed in 2005 as a program of the South Bend Regional Chamber, the Young Professionals Network (YPN) South Bend seeks to develop, connect and empower individuals ages 21-39 in the South Bend region. YPN’s role is to be a facilitator and resource in bringing together young professionals to grow connections, build relationships, showcase the community and contribute to the future of the South Bend region.

Disruption Serves as Invitation to the Future

By Josey Roth

Being a part of the Young Professionals Alliance of Southwest Indiana for the last three years has exposed me to various connections within the regional area. More than anything, however, it has given me friendships that I know I will still have five to 10 years from now, and mentors that I know will be the reason for any success I have moving forward in my career.

Connection is not just something I believe can come out of young professional groups but from a healthy work culture, which in return is one of the keys that drives organizational effectiveness and success.

Millennials and Gen Z'ers are the upcoming generations of leaders. Current leaders, planning for the future, are making it a priority to recognize those within their companies and in their communities that show attributes of an impactful next generation leader.

Our YPA group just concluded its second Regional Young Professionals Conference, where many young leaders got the opportunity to connect with both each other and executive management. This could lead to mentorships and new opportunities in the future. Giving young professionals the platform to network and grow was the reason some of us came together and created the conference in the first place, and it will continue to be our goal.

In doing this, it not only helps the success and influence of young professionals, but also helps tenured business leaders who are looking to innovate and bring their companies to the next level by connecting next generation talent to their businesses.

Looking ahead

What is it that a next generation leader brings to a company?

In its new book, *It's the Manager*, Gallup discusses various conclusions it has gathered from its experienced research when it comes to the millennial generation entering the workplace. I have studied this book and also witnessed trends from interacting with various young professionals in the community. The next generation brings new perspectives, advanced technological skills and a strong desire to find purpose in their jobs.

Some call the millennial generation the “disruptors,” with some in upper management looking down upon the ideas surrounding the connotation that verbiage brings. To this I say – DO NOT BE FEARFUL.

Disruption is not a threat; it is an invitation to build a better tomorrow. Millennials do not want to take your jobs. They simply bring a new perspective based on where the world stands today. More than anything, they want their managers to invest in them.

I would say the same thing when it comes to advanced technological skills. Upper management has several more years of experience in the workplace, and in life, that I and other young professionals yearn to learn from. So, while some of the older generation may be taken back by new ideas and the constant consumption and development of technology that the millennials bring to the table, I think the older generation underestimates the power and value this could bring to a company.

Partner to benefit all

To any senior level executive reading this, I would say teach young professionals how to survive in the business world through crisis, hardship and navigating various levels of relationships. In turn, they will teach you how to market, reach, sell and engage the younger generation. Not only do millennials have a new perspective, they have a craving for purpose.

Why is this important? Author and motivational speaker Marcus Buckingham paints the picture perfectly when he discusses how a strength is not just something a manager recognizes that their employee is good at, but what their employee is truly passionate about. This passion is what they will continuously lean into and keep putting energy into.

A young leader with purpose in the right position within a company is the start to an effective team and evident results. Attributes of young leaders are not a deterioration or disruption. They are keys to use as a strategy for long-term effectiveness.

Place tenured management and driven young talent together and you begin to develop an experienced, wise and committed team with innovation, fresh branding and a new energy. Succession within a company shouldn't just be a transition. It should be a connection that makes an influence and impact on the current generation and generations to come.



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YPA OF SOUTHWEST INDIANA

The Young Professionals Alliance engages, develops, connects and empowers young professionals to actively shape the future of Southwest Indiana. Events provide unique opportunities for the region's young professionals to meet new people, connect with like-minded peers outside the office, develop and enhance skills, and make a lasting impact on the future of our community.