



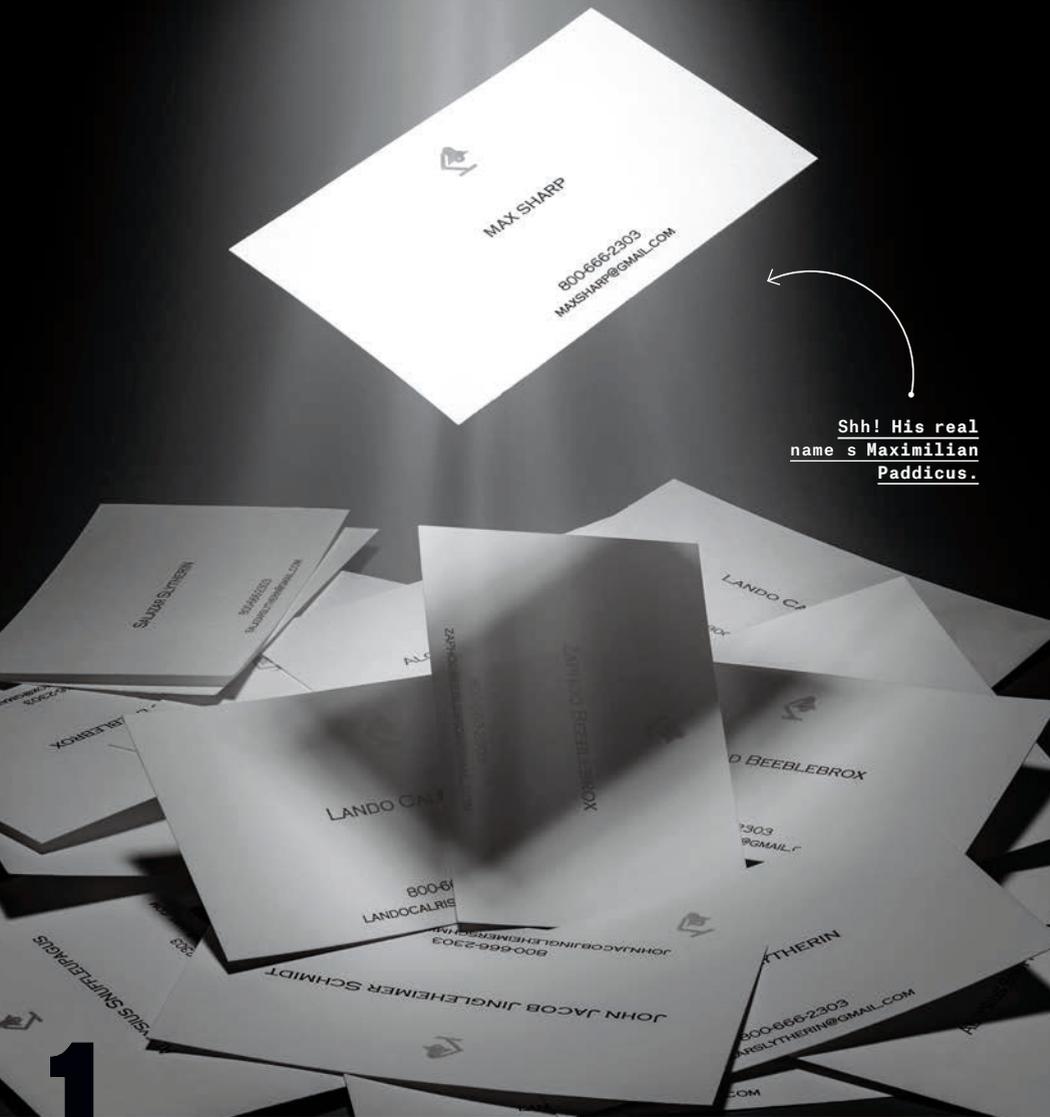
Your mission:  
Rise above  
your peers.

# Break Through the Cash Ceiling

The guys with the fattest paychecks are no smarter or more diligent than you are. They just know how to stand out. BY STEVE BRAZELL



I ONCE HELPED A CLIENT WITH THE BRANDING OF HIS NEW investment bank. He was a big lug who liked to say, "I don't mind being the biggest prick in the room." One might wonder how he ended up being so successful, but for all he lacked in social graces, the guy was respected—even if he wasn't liked. Most important, the Biggest Prick knew how to promote himself. Over the 20 years that I've been building personal and corporate brands, I've realized that lots of successful people share this ability. And guess what? You can steal their strategies. Keep reading and I'll show you exactly how.



# 2

## Simplify Your Brand

Consider Yevgeny Grebenshikov. He's not a real guy, but I know plenty of people like him; their names are hard to say and harder to remember. It's almost easier to avoid Yevgeny than to introduce him around the office. Maybe the guy has a good reason to keep his name. It was his dad's name. Fine, but it's not helping his career.

Science backs me up here: Researchers in New Zealand found that people are less likely to trust those with names they can't easily pronounce. You even see this in politics: Barack aside, most winning candidates have names we're familiar with, says Adam Alter, Ph.D., an associate professor of marketing at New York University. Fair or not, the career paths of people who have tricky-to-pronounce, foreign-sounding, or unconventional names are far steeper. You want people to think of you first when they have a problem that fits your expertise? Well, first they have to remember your name.

So does that mean that Yevgeny Grebenshikov is forever destined to be buried in the IT department? No, he just needs to tighten up.

► **SHORTER IS BETTER** A good name is one that sticks. More than a couple of syllables? Even if you have a longer name, if it's familiar, it's more likable, says Alter. So if you're naming your kids, your yacht, or yourself, stick to short, memorable sounds. Gordon Matthew Thomas Summer may have realized this before calling himself Sting. Same for Stefani Joanne Angeline Germanotta (Lady Gaga) and Ralph Lifshitz (Ralph Lauren).

But let's say Yevgeny keeps his name. He can still win big if he defines himself clearly. Make yourself indispensable in a core area of your business, and you'll be impossible to forget. The key: Be known for something important.

Photograph by TRAVIS RATHBONE; prop styling: Sarah Guido-Laakso/Halley Resources; illustration by ARTHUR SHLAIN (icon on cards)

# 1

## Make the Right Friends

Maybe you have a tightly knit group of office pals. They're the guys throwing paper airplanes from nearby cubicles and dragging you to happy hour after work. It's good to have a group like that. They make work a hell of a lot more fun. But these aren't the guys who are going to add an extra zero to the end of your paycheck.

The people who soar through the corporate ranks are those whose names bounce around in the big meetings. If the managers responsible for giving out promotions don't know you, then you're invisible. And that makes you expendable—or, at the very least, destined to languish in servitude along with the other office cogs.

Take my friend David Tuba Britt. Tuba graduated from the Naval Academy 20 years ago with a guy we'll call Archie. Tuba didn't outwork Archie or get better grades. But he had one big advantage: He understood the importance of rubbing shoulders with the top brass.

I learned early on that if I wanted to succeed in the navy, I needed to perform in front of the people who could recommend me for the best assignments, says Tuba. That thinking earned him a promotion. Then another and another. Today Tuba is a captain, while Archie is hanging out two pay grades lower, as a lieutenant commander.

► **SHAKE HANDS WITH THE WINNERS** Odds are you only need to win over two or three people to earn your next promotion. Among them could be your boss, your boss's boss, the head of HR, or

in a smaller company—the CEO. These are your career makers. Identify them, introduce yourself, and let them know you're willing to help out in any way you can. If an opportunity arises to volunteer for a project, do it. Have an idea that could benefit the whole company? Shoot them an email about it.

But you don't want to be a pest, right? So to spread the reach of your Promote Me campaign, enlist the help of the career swayers. These are the assistants, confidants, and office drinking buddies the career makers regularly consult with. Introduce yourself to two or three of these people, and do whatever you can to stay on their radar. Now when your career makers start asking around, you'll look like one of the most notable people at the company. And career makers like notable people.

## 3

**Solve a Boss Problem**

In the career market, there are A players, B players, and C players. Your uncle may have had a lifelong career as a midlevel C player at tech firm, but that was before data and performance metrics made it easy for executives to measure an employee's impact. If you're a C player today, you're already on the chopping block. The A players can work anywhere they want, but you're likely a B player. Don't worry—you can change that.

Here's what I've found: Most B players hold themselves back professionally by trying to be generalists in their field. They could quickly bump up to being A players just by honing their focus. After all, your boss doesn't have many general problems. He or she has specific problems. And if you become an expert in one or two things, the boss will start turning to you to solve them. This is how you become indispensable.

Eric Schultz, the CEO of COTA, a startup that tracks cancer data, recently told me, "We're only interested in individuals who are

the very best at what they do. Mentalities like that create the kind of high performing environment that benefits everybody with the mettle to compete in it. To keep our A players, we have to pay them a lot of money," says Schultz. But they're worth every penny.

**▶ ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO BETTER**

There's no harm in putting some of your energy toward the part of your job that you enjoy the most, but don't lose sight of your top priority: making management happy. Your boss's goals should be your goals, even if that means spending a couple of hours each day doing work you don't particularly love.

Then make sure you get credit. You've already made contact with your career makers, right? Once a week, update them with short emails, office visits, or accidental run-ins at the watercooler. Describe your progress and what you need (if anything) to do your job better. Ask for feedback where appropriate, and give them a chance to offer advice. No project to report on? Ask for one! Once the chiefs see your ambition, they'll start to think of you as an A player. They might even need you to move into that big open office upstairs.

## 4

**Talk a Big Game**

In one urban legend circulating at Apple, Steve Jobs, upon meeting an employee for the first time, might ask, "What do you do?" Seems harmless enough, right? But Jobs really wanted to know what all CEOs want to know about people on their payroll: Why do you matter? Unfortunately, most people answer generically, with something like, "I'm Mike Smith, and I work in IT."

Missed opportunity! If you can't explain why you're important, then you leave it up to other people to determine your value—and there's zero chance they'll think you're as valuable as you do. If you're a fireman or a cop, it's obvious why your job matters. But for Mike Smith in IT, not so much.

A pal of mine, Barbara Laidlaw, is head of crisis and issues management at Edelman, a public relations company. She recalls a recent job interview during which the candidate spoke confidently about his ability to work with clients. But every time I asked him for an example of something he

had done to add value, he had no answer, says Laidlaw. She hired an applicant who did. The truth is, nobody has the time to research your successes. Your ability to pitch yourself and the value you provide is more important now than ever, says Laidlaw.

**▶ PREPARE YOUR 12-SECOND RÉSUMÉ**

You need a short, powerful introduction that shows your ability to solve problems. When Mike says, "I work in IT," the conversation is over. But he can turn himself into an office hero by saying, "As you probably know, our company used to lose millions of dollars due to security breaches. I'm one of the IT experts plugging the e-commerce holes. And I'm happy to report that my team has saved an estimated \$2 million this year alone."

Bang! In the mind of a career maker, Mike is now tied to hard cash. Plus, he's no longer an IT drone; he's a security expert. Try it: Ask yourself what problem you solve for the company and how it affects the bottom line. If you need to ask the head of sales how your department has impacted growth, do it. Now practice your intro so that you're ready when the boss steps into the elevator.

**HOW SUCCESSFUL MEN EASE THEIR WAY INTO THE DAY**

LEWIS HOWES, AUTHOR OF *THE SCHOOL OF GREATNESS*, HAS THE RECIPE FOR ALL-DAY MOTIVATION.

**FOCUS ON WHAT'S GOING YOUR WAY**

Before throwing back the covers, take a few minutes to focus on three to five things you're thankful for—like your killer job or the woman sleeping next to you, says Howes. In a *Journal of Clinical Psychology* study, health care workers were less stressed and less depressed when they kept a gratitude journal.

**MAKE YOUR DAMN BED ALREADY**

One in three guys regularly leave the sheets disheveled, according to the National Sleep Foundation. Don't be one of them: Minor as it seems, that rumpled bedding represents the first challenge of your morning. Making the bed sets a tone of action that will follow you for the rest of the day, says Howes.

**WAKE UP YOUR BRAIN WITH SWEAT**

A morning workout can help improve your self-control and your brain's ability to plan and focus, according to a Dutch study review. But here's the real reason to hit the gym in the a.m.: You'll be less likely to run out of steam later or flake when the office social committee decides to go skeet shooting, says Howes.

**GIVE YOURSELF A SENSE OF PURPOSE**

Before leaving for work, decide which long-term goal—completing a big project, building your professional network—you want to focus on. Jot down three tasks related to that goal; they're your day's priorities. It's too easy to get caught up in distractions, says Howes. Think big to make real progress. —LILA BATTIS