

STARTING OUT & STANDING OUT

John Randall



A different take on the [Sullair.com](https://www.sullair.com) blog; John Randall, President & CEO of Hitachi Global Air Power shares his firsthand insights into what sets job candidates apart and what allows employees to thrive within an organization.

“What can I do to stand out?” I get asked that question a lot - sometimes by those looking to advance in their career, but most frequently by first-time job seekers. I remember well my first job search and all the uncertainty that comes with it, so I thought I should share my thoughts on the matter and what has worked for me in my career.

With a shiny new degree or certification, and lots of ambition in tow, how does someone just starting out with no real experience – stand out enough to land the job. And what do they need to do to keep standing out when job market conditions change? My best advice for both scenarios is simple: don't be a commodity.

Qualifying for That First Job

When beginning the search for that first career job, candidates often don't have a lot of relevant work experience. To compensate for this lack of robust job history, figure out what sets you apart from your competition and lean into that difference; it will make you look less like a commodity and more like someone who can bring a unique perspective to the role. Have you traveled abroad? Did you intern in the field? Do you have a background or other experience directly or indirectly related to the job? These types of experiences can really go a long way to help you stand out beyond your degree or certification and are important concepts that many young people don't get or don't think about leveraging. If I work for a global company and I am hiring for a role, even a regional one, if you are an avid international traveler, you are already more adept at navigating foreign settings which may benefit the company down the road. Those travel experiences telegraph to me you are comfortable in an international setting. Congratulations, you just stood out.

Go-to-Guru

And this advice to differentiate yourself holds true further in your career when the labor market may shift, or your job description changes. Build a reputation for being indispensable. Become the 'can do' person that takes on challenges and finds a solution rather than relying on the next person, department, or team to get it done. In my experience, if you go to your supervisor

with a problem, be sure to have thought out and propose a solution. It may not be the chosen solution, but you are acting like an indispensable, non-commodity when you are providing solutions instead of waiting for someone else to figure it out. So, whether through collaboration, facilitation or through your own efforts, be the person who people can rely on.

The Importance of Knowing the 'How'

Of course, before you run you have to walk and before you are a go-to-guru, make sure you do your homework. I majored in engineering in college and soon after I graduated, I had a boss who had a slide rule in a glass case that read 'break in case of electrical failure.' The joke was all the computer-aided work is irrelevant if the program or system you are using is wrong and I'm a firm believer you need to be able to call B.S. on the data without the help of technology. As an example, I had an engineer who worked for me some time ago doing a load analysis. The bolt broke but he couldn't figure out why. He said the system indicated it shouldn't have broken, but he didn't know how to build the load path to get the data to simulate real world conditions. The model, unfortunately, was never going to give him the right answer; he needed to know how to manually validate back to the model rather than rely on the computer. After all, automation won't help if you still don't know what "looks" correct. The how, therefore, is and always will be important to (deeply) understand.

Sometimes you don't know the how when you are starting out – and that's o.k. Continuously ask questions and seek to answer the big questions. Be curious in your approach to how to do your job and assignments. This curiosity is what leads to great (and small incremental) break throughs. If you are always asking questions, always willing to learn something broader and beyond your domain, the more value you bring to your team - and the more you will stand out.

I never expected to move to India and China when I began my career. I never thought about being a CEO– I didn't have an end game in mind when I graduated college. I took each opportunity to stretch myself to fit the role, focusing on getting value out of each position and always asking (a lot of) questions. Knowing the how and staying curious should continue throughout your career. Even today, I'm learning other parts of our business and still searching to find answers to those big questions. You never know where that next bit of knowledge will lead you so stay open to those opportunities and push the limits of your comfort zone.

Savor the Start

While you are making yourself indispensable and deepening your how and why knowledge, don't forget to smell the roses. A lot of young people want to start at the top; they don't remember seeing their parents struggle, they only see the nicer home and money in the bank. Meter your expectations and enjoy the road you are on. I remember when

I started my first job, I got a reality check very quickly – I learned right away that the first few paychecks don't quite cover the lifestyle you had at home or that you thought you were going to have. And that's o.k. Starting out in your new career can be a frustrating time with fits and starts as you weave and bob your way into a job where you can both add value and enjoy. I remember many paths that diverged and led me to my current role – each of those opportunities built upon the next and provided great and varied experiences that I have come to really appreciate. If I could, I would tell my younger self to remember to savor the journey a little more. After all, more responsibility and income also mean less personal flexibility.

A career worth having involves effort, engagement, and dedication. Stay curious and relish the bumps and the curves in your journey. Be a guru, be indispensable, and above all, don't be a commodity.