

# PROFESSIONAL STRATEGIES

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## EVERY DETAIL COUNTS

*“The magic behind every outstanding performance is always found in the smallest of details.”*

If you long to accomplish great and noble tasks, you first must learn to approach *every* task as though it were great and noble. Even the grandest project depends on the success of the smallest components.

Many people downplay small details, dismissing them as minutia—the “small stuff” that we’re encouraged to ignore. But in fact, our entire environment is simply an accumulation of tiny details. Although we measure our lives in years, we live them in days, hours, minutes, and seconds. Every action—every detail of our lives—has bottom-line repercussions, and it’s dangerous and derogatory to think of any of those details as trivial, unimportant, or inconsequential.

## *Everything Counts!*

Successful people, in many walks of life, understand the importance of detail:

- Crime scene investigators know that it's often the smallest, most obscure detail that results in the arrest and prosecution of criminals.
- Athletes and coaches are all too aware that one minor misjudgment can swing momentum to their competitor and result in a loss rather than a win.
- Doctors and nurses understand that the slightest mistake or loss of focus can result in a tragic situation that carries massive liability.
- Business people carefully oversee the details of their products and services, knowing that one simple slip-up can cause a series of events that negatively impacts the bottom line, brand integrity, and public perception.
- Engineers and architects know that the stability of the most gigantic structure depends on the integrity of its smallest element; a failed bolt or a misplaced pin can have huge consequences.
- Firefighters, first aid responders, and other emergency personnel are trained to focus on details even as a tragedy unfolds; every second can make the difference between life and death in an emergency situation.
- Amusement parks know that the safety and physical well-being of their guests—and the financial viability of the company—require consistent and meticulous attention to the minute mechanical details of rides and attractions.
- Computer programmers spend their careers tightly focused on detail, as one incorrect digit in a code of millions can create an operational nightmare for the end user.
- Automotive detailers make their living by restoring a car to showroom condition. This requires the removal of every last piece of lint, dirt, and grime; and the major tool of their trade is a simple Q-tip.

Ultimately, the key to quality in every aspect of our lives is doing little things correctly—all the time, every time—so that each action produces a quality result. When every detail is lovingly attended to, and each step in the process is given complete and careful attention, the result inevitably will be of the highest quality.

Passion for your work, a pervasive commitment to quality, and relentless attention to details are essential markers of excellence. Quality work and an appreciation for the importance of details benefit not just the clients a business serves; these attitudes and habits also bring joy and peace of mind to

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the person who delivers the work. To know how to do something exceptionally well is to enjoy it.

The magic behind every outstanding performance, exceptional meal, and fine piece of furniture, jewelry, or clothing is always found in the smallest of details. Those who enjoy the greatest success understand that it takes hundreds of small, seemingly insignificant details repeated perfectly day in and day out to create an unforgettably excellent experience.

The people who deliver superior results are not simply doing more of the same things everyone else does; they are doing *better* things. Very small differences, consistently practiced, produce superior results.

In business, it is the attention to these little things—the details—that create and build long-term customer loyalty. From the training of employees and the quality of products and services, to the type of stationery used in correspondence and the music customers hear when placed on hold, a successful company knows that every detail counts. The thread count of a sheet, the font style for a product's label, the lighting of a room, the welcoming smile, the floral display in the lobby, or the polish and shine of a doorknob—all of these are “small” details that leave big impressions. In the successful organization, no element is too minor to escape close attention. If you believe that you are too busy to focus on details, or that attending to the minutia of your business or life would make you less effective in delivering your services, then I encourage you to reexamine your thinking.

Further, I can tell you the following with confidence: No matter what business or personal activities in which you are engaged, you will be continuously challenged by larger problems that could have been prevented if you had paid closer attention to the details at the beginning. The particulars of your work affect your company's ability to compete and prosper. A careless or cavalier approach to these details is the kiss of death to success. Those committed to excellence know that the real threat to success isn't the Armageddon of some huge and horrible slip-up; it's the much more insidious danger of being nibbled to death by the smallest of mistakes or oversights.

No lapse of judgment, taste, or quality can be shrugged off by a true professional. Successful people know that everything counts. It's not that the devil is in the details, but that every small particle contains a seed that can potentially determine the difference between success and failure. Therefore, if the benefits of hard work are to be maximized, attention *must* be paid to detail.

Excellence in any endeavor is a production in which every little detail tells a story about one's intention, commitment, and character. Pay attention to the small stuff. Consistent attention to fine points produces excellence—that's why every detail counts!

## EVERY DETAIL COUNTS—CALL TO ACTION

To explore your own commitment to making the details count, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you pay adequate attention to the details of your life? If so, what are the supporting benefits and how can you apply the same lessons to more areas?
- Do you believe that taking the time to focus on the details of your work would harm your effectiveness—or others' perception of your effectiveness?
- What step will you take to bring more focus to the details of your life?

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### PORTRAIT OF A DETAILED BUSINESS

#### The Ritz-Carlton Hotels

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel is a legend in the hospitality industry, with a 100 year track record of impeccable service and meticulous attention to detail.

Modeled after the grand hotels in Europe of the previous nineteenth century, the Ritz's tradition of privacy, sophistication and elegance continues unchanged, as guests continually attribute the Ritz hotel chain's personal attention to the small things that matter as the key item that sets their service apart from all others.

One story from the chain's Boston era hotel particularly illustrates how this focus supports their reputation. During the 1920s, it was a commonly known fact that glass imported from Europe underwent a chemical reaction when hitting the Boston air, and turned blue. Blue glass windows meant the homeowners could afford imported glass. The Ritz-Carlton, being quite fashionable, ordered glasses in this color; and to this day, you will still find blue glasses in their dining rooms.

Even as other hotels change hands, become homogenized and cut service to make up for lower occupancy levels, the Ritz-Carlton Company grows and prospers while remaining the industry's shining star. These hotels are places where the genuine care and comfort of guests is the company's highest mission. Every Ritz-Carlton associate knows that their role is to pay

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attention to the small kindnesses that create the Ritz experience for their guests.

It's no surprise that the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company has received all of the major awards that can be bestowed by the hospitality industry. In fact they were the first and only hotel company twice honored with the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Their standards of excellence serve as benchmarks for hotels and resorts worldwide.

It is the Ritz's continued attention to the little things that made them famous that reinforces their reputation for quality with their present and future guests.

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