

■ Do You Know Your KASSIs?

Thoughts on Individuality in the Workplace

by Tom Terez

Of the 22 keys to a meaningful workplace, the one that seems to stir up the most raw emotion is “self-identity”—the driving desire most people have to exert their individuality in the workplace.

Since we’re talking about differences, let’s take a slightly different approach with this column. Instead of pondering other people’s differences, let’s address yours. And instead of me doing all the writing, you can do some. I promise that the five or so minutes you spend on this will be time well spent. Ready?

1. What unique **knowledge** do you bring to the workplace? Pinpoint what you and you alone contribute in the way of needed know-how. Jot down your top three responses.

2. What are your special **skills** and **abilities**? These are things that only you possess, that help you turn an average job into something magnificent. Again, write down your three biggies.

3. What about your **style**? In twenty words max,

describe how it’s completely different from the many other styles that surround you in the workplace.

4. Think about your **interests**. We’re not talking about passing fancies, but about your deepest interests—things you could explore and engage in for hours and hours just because you find them

Chances are your colleagues won’t fully appreciate your differences unless they benefit in some way.

so fulfilling. Note that your interests and your skills might be worlds apart.

5. Now for the grand finale: How do your unique knowledge, skills, style, and deep interests **benefit** your colleagues or external customers? What might be the future benefits? Look back at your notes and come up with some concrete ideas. If you draw a blank, dig deeper. Unless you work for the Sisters of Charity, chances are your colleagues won’t fully appreciate your differences

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■ Do You Know Your KASSIs? *continued*

unless they benefit from them in some way.

If this exercise seems a bit flat when done alone, take copies of this article to your next meeting, and use it to seed a conversation with colleagues. You'll end up learning a lot more about the people around you, and they'll learn more about you.

Please note that we're dwelling on knowledge, skills, abilities, styles, and interests. There's no need to divulge anything that involves law-enforcement officials and/or large quantities of tequila.

Oh, and don't be surprised if the conversation gets stuck on knowledge, skills, and abilities—or KSAs, as they're labeled in so many businesslike organizations. Styles and interests always get the back seat, maybe because they're not spelled out in job descriptions—but more

opportunities haven't come your way, go out and grab one. If all of your deep interests have a creative bent but your day-to-day work involves mind-numbing repetition, try to take on new activities or start looking for an entirely new position that calls for creativity. In these and all other situations, it almost always helps to talk things over with a colleague or two. Who knows, your sounding board just might point you to a ready-and-waiting opportunity.

Then there's the challenge of helping others. This is a tough proposition because it requires empathy, diplomacy, and sincerity—all of which are seriously lacking in these sample comments:

- “Hey, Gina, I understand you're big into hang-gliding. You sound like a real risk-taker. You're just the person to hang-glide over to the CEO and tell her about the dismal sales figures for this month.”

- “Sam, I didn't know you were so good with numbers! You can have the honor of crunching the data from our 1,319 field reps—or was it 2,319? Anyway, I'll have the crate of paperwork shipped to your office. Actually, I think it's two or three crates.”

- After sharing the findings from a type-style inventory: “Wow, Chris, you have a really weird combination of personality traits. Remind me to invite you to my next party!”

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likely because KSASI would be such a clunky acronym. Fair enough! Let's move the letters and call it KASSI (rhymes with “sassy”). Such a lovely acronym! Now there's no excuse for not having a conversation that covers all the bases.

Of course, knowing more about yourself and your colleagues is a first step. You need to act on this information—and the sooner, the better.

If you've come to appreciate the fact that you're an awesome facilitator, but facilitation

The alternative? As you learn more about

■ Do You Know Your KASSIs? *continued*

your colleagues' know-how, skills, styles, and deep interests, take the conversation one big step further by exploring how this good stuff can be put to greater use in the workplace. There's no need for a choreographed conversation between "boss" and "employee." In fact, it works much better as an informal chat, often between friends. So what about it? Is there someone close by whose sense of self-identity needs your help?

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