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**What You Should Never Compromise On While Building Your Career**

As a career coach to mid- and senior-level professionals, and in my former work as a therapist, I’ve come into contact with thousands of questions, concerns, mistakes and crossroads that emerge in people’s personal and professional lives.  Observing the long arc of many careers, I’ve noticed that the worst missteps – the ones that make us feel deep pain, regret, sorrow and remorse – are mistakes reflecting what people have chosen to compromise on or to give up in order to be “successful.”  These compromises don’t feel like “choices” at the time, but they are, and they lead to [common crises and challenges](http://www.amazon.com/dp/1576755592/?tag=ellicomminc-20) that are disastrous for the individual.

**Below are the top five things you should never compromise on while building your career (or you’ll regret it deeply):**

**1.       Your Standards of Integrity**

I view “standards of integrity” as core principles and values that guide our behavior.  Integrity is a choice, and while it is influenced by a myriad of factors (your culture, upbringing, peer influences, etc.), it can’t be forced.  (If it is, you have played a part in that.)  One who has strong and well-defined standards of integrity behaves with wholeness, integration, honesty, and does right by himself/herself and by others.  Standards of integrity involve values and virtues such as honesty, kindness, trust, wisdom, loyalty, transparency, objectivity, acceptance, openness, empathy, and graciousness.

I’ve seen so many people in midlife awaken as if from a long stupor to realize that they’ve compromised their most core values in order to get ahead in their work or keep jobs they hate.  It hurts them to find that they’ve walked away from who they are, and what they value and cherish most.

People mistakenly believe that in these tough recessionary times they have to give up on their values and integrity to stay employed, but that’s simply not true.  Those who are guided by a strong sense of integrity fare much better in professional life, and will be successful where others fail.

**2.       Your Self-Respect**

I’ve personally lived through the heartache of compromising my self-respect to stay in a job. Years ago when I was a corporate marketing professional, I knew that how I was behaving (because I felt pressured to), was beneath me.  I wasn’t the leader or manager I longed to be, because I couldn’t manage and navigate through the toxicity, stress and overwhelm I felt in my job or in the organization.  I tried to speak up about what I saw around me that wasn’t right, but I got crushed down.  In the end, I completely lost my self-respect, and felt that I was “prostituting” myself in order to keep my job and maintain my high salary.  I knew literally in the first week that the job and company were wrong for me.  What should I have done?  Find a new job fast.

**3.       Your Soul for Money**

Money – and our relationship with it — is a topic that’s spawned millions of books, articles and seminars.  Many of us struggle each day with maintaining a healthy balance and appropriate power dynamic with our money, and most of us fail.  I’ve seen countless professionals give up their souls for money – not because they are struggling to pay the bills, but because they’ve become enslaved by their lifestyle and their need to impress.  These folks have forgotten that they’ve come here at this time on this planet to do more than pay the bills, acquire things, and keep up with the Joneses.  I’m not saying that fulfilling your financial obligations isn’t important – it is.  I am saying that you are much more than your paycheck or bank account.

You know if you’ve sacrificed your soul for money – it’s a painful, debilitating state that you can’t pretend your way out of.

I know I’ll hear from many of you who will say, “Kathy, you’re nuts.  I have to stay in this job I hate because I’m financially responsible for my family and it’s the only job I can get.”  Not knowing your situation, I can’t say for sure, but my guess is that you absolutely do not have to work in ways you despise in order to do what’s necessary for yourself and your family.

**4.       Your Health and Well-being**

In my corporate [training and seminars](http://www.elliacommunications.com/coaching-services/#Career_Enhancement), I see hundreds of high-level professional women who are brilliant, achievement-oriented and accomplished, but at the same time exhausted, depleted, depressed and demoralized.  In the pursuit of a great career, they’ve compromised their health and well-being.  Much of this has to do with the ever- complicated issue of [work-life balance](http://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2011/12/03/if-you-believe-work-life-balance-is-a-pipe-dream-youre-part-of-the-problem/) and how to stay competitive and ahead of the curve.  But to me, it’s much more.  Sacrificing your health and well-being demonstrates your lack of prioritizing yourself as important, failing to understand that you must care for yourself – and yes, *put yourself first* — before you can be of true service to anyone else, your organization, your family or your employer.  If your body is shutting down, diseased or broken down from the way you work, rapid change is needed.

**5.       Your Legacy**

Finally, the saddest professionals I know have sacrificed their legacy in the process of building their careers.  What is your legacy? It’s what you will be able to say about yourself when you’re 90 looking back — what you’ve stood for, given, taught, imparted, and left behind. Not what you dreamed of being, but what you have been.  It’s the impact you’ve made on the world, your family, and your community.  This is not a dress rehearsal, but the real thing here, and so many professionals forget that they have this one chance to build a life that’s meaningful for them.   Instead, they compromise their legacy in a vain effort to grasp “success,” accolades, security, or power.

If you think you have to compromise on any of the above in order to be employed or build a successful career, I hope you’ll think again.  I’ve lived and witnessed the pain of giving yourself up in the processing of creating a professional life, and despite all your best efforts, it will never bring you the success, fulfillment and reward you long for.