

Infosec Rock Star 2020+

How to Accelerate Your Career



Part I: Introduction

The Pandemic: I'm going to make the perhaps bold claim, that what we cover in this document is even MORE important during and after times of large disruptions!

In the field of computers and technology, it's true, the technical stuff matters...a lot, but technology is not *everything* that matters.

If you are ONLY a geek, well, you are a geek, not a Rock Star.

When I was younger, I didn't understand that there were other skills that were equally as important as technical skills. Of course, on some level I did, as not everyone is a technical person; my mailman and doctor and dentist have useful non-technical skills.

But for a technical person, like myself, and probably just about everyone reading this, technical skills were it - in my old thoughts!

Anything else was in a very distant second place, somewhere around Neptune or Uranus.

Wow was I wrong!

Those who get extraordinary results tend to have fantastic technical skills as well as many critical non-technical skills.

Of course we could claim they are lucky, but I believe people make their own luck through persistence, skill, and more!

Geek plus some other skills = Potential Rock Star

Errrr, Rock Star? Read on . . .

Passion

If something is just a job, maybe playing guitar, you are not going to go very far; you will never be a Rock Star at that something.

Maybe you got into infosec by accident, maybe because it pays well, or maybe because you've always been fascinated by security – it doesn't matter why. It's a great place to be.

Now can I use the word "passion"? You need it, whether you started with it or it developed over time.

You will never be a Rock Star if you do not love what you do.

- Keith Richard loves playing guitar.
- So does Eric Clapton.
- BB King loved the blues.
- And Steve Jobs loved doing his Steve Jobs gig, however you might have defined it.

Of course, whatever you do will have good parts and bad parts. No one loves everything about what they do all the time! I'm sure parts of being Steve Jobs bugged Steve Jobs occasionally, for example.

What is a Rock Star?

When I first started my “Infosec Rock Star” talks, I began by asking the audience what Rock Star meant to them. We came up with a bunch of names: Eddie Vetter, Jerry Garcia, Flea, Mick Jagger, Janis Joplin, Keith Richards, Aretha Franklin, Axl Rose, Madonna, Steven Tyler, Cyndi Lauper. You may or may not know them all, but here’s what they have in common as Rock Stars:

- They are all extremely good at what they do (they are hyper “effective” and certainly “experts” at what they do).
- They are all very widely known.
- They are all respected.
- They are all rich (or at least made piles of money).
- They are all artists or creative people.

There are also some negative connotations as well of course!

However, we are going to concentrate on the “extremely good” or “effective” aspects of what they do right now.

Certainly being well known and respected can help you “get great stuff done” to ultimately make a difference.

Just having skills, despite how amazing, is simply not enough.

For example, if you are the best guitar player in the world, but only play in your parent's basement where you live, then who cares?

You are ultimately not being effective at bringing the joy of your music to the world.

See the guy on the right? Despite his raw guitar talent (yes, I know he's playing a bass) you can see he has a bit of stage presence, hopefully can get along with his band members, enjoys playing the guitar, plays/practices often, and more.



To be a Rock Star guitar player, you not only need to be extremely skilled at what you do – playing the guitar – but you need those other as well.

Without those skills, perhaps the guy in the picture could play well and be a killer studio musician, but could not be a Rock Star.

Leaving the world of Rock 'n' Roll, what does it mean to be a Rock Star?

As a working definition, Wiktionary defines a Rock Star as:

“A person who is renowned or revered in his or her field of accomplishment.”

The word “renowned” means “widely known,” perhaps even a celebrity.

This may mean world famous, industry famous, or all the way down to widely known within their company or department.

Plenty of Rock Stars are locally or niche specifically renown.

“Revered” means “respected” and unless you are scamming people, you need to be *really* good at what you do, as well as effective at getting things done to be respected!

Now, instead of viewing Rock Stars as rich, as I previously mentioned, we will substitute “rich” with “successful”.

Success means different things to different people. It often includes a component of lots of money, but quite honestly, many people do not care about lots of money (hard to believe for some of us).

Success is relative and something one defines personally.

Finally, I've also added “unique” to our definition, as you do not become renowned or revered by being like everyone else.

Rock Stars are unique!

There is only one Mick Jagger, one Post Malone, one Bill Gates, one Janis Joplin, one Bruce Schneier, one Nicole Kidman, one Steve Jobs.

Rock Stars are not just another musician in the band, another cog in the corporate wheel, another IDS Analyst or Pen Tester.

Think about Schwarzenegger, Dr. Eric Cole, Sid Vicious, Confucius, Madonna, Bruce Schneider, Mick Jagger, and more. All unique. Blending into the crowd is not an option – not if you want serious results.



Photo Credit: Gage Skidmore

“The worst thing I can be is the same as everybody else. I hate that.”

- Arnold Schwarzenegger

Arnold is unique, as are all the other people I mentioned.

Whether you love him or hate him, he is a Rock Star. Arnold’s first Rock Star status was as a professional bodybuilder and he is still revered in bodybuilding circles.

His *second* Rock Star status was as an actor. No one could have played “The Terminator” like Arnold. Anyone else, no matter how good they might have been, would have been a very different Terminator. He went on to be governor of California and who knows what else, all with his inimitable style.

Unique just for the sake of uniqueness doesn't cut it.

Put on a bumblebee suit and paint your fingernails purple and you'll look like a fool, not a Rock Star. Unless, of course, you already are a Rock Star with an entourage and you can be as bizarre as you want. Everyone has their own personal strengths and style, and to be a Rock Star, you must to capitalize on them.

Rock Stars also have Stereotypical Negative Traits

Now that we have established the positive traits of Rock Stars (often musical) and technical people as extremely good at what they do, creative, respected, successful/well paid, we can look at more negative, stereotypical traits.

Eccentric

Many Rock Stars are known for being eccentric or rather “out there.” Of course, these are stereotypes many people hold of technical people (and musical Rock Stars), and they are at least partially true.

Obviously, not *all* Rock Stars or technical people are eccentric at all, but we do have that reputation and are given wide latitude to be “different” by others. Technical people are generally creative and respected: sometimes people actually use the word “wizard” to describe us.

Egotistical

Unfortunately, we also have the reputation, at least partially deserved, of being egotistical.

Often, this manifests itself in thinking that non-technical people are not smart, but in fact there are several types of intelligence and lots of information and many skills that are valuable.

For example, I have lots of highly intelligent non-technical friends who are extremely smart and possess valuable skills I wish I did in other fields.

Excessive

Excessive behavior isn't necessarily bad, however it can have some ugly manifestations. For example, a great many Rock Stars have had serious drug use issues and we will briefly discuss this later.

In fact excess can be good. What others consider excessive dedication to our craft, whether it's pen testing, or drumming, or juggling, or iPhone forensics, may be just perfect for us!

Part II: Moving Towards Rock Star



Every Group can have Multiple Rock Stars

Every Troop of Baboons has exactly one alpha male, The Rolling Stones has one front man (Mick Jagger), a company has one CEO, North Korea has one “The Great Leader (위대한 수령) etc.

In any group, however, there can be multiple Rock Stars.

Every member of the Rolling Stones is a true Rock Star in their own right.

Within any company, there are usually multiple Rock Stars – in fact it’s even possible the CEO is a bozo instead of a Rock Star!

And North Korea? Ehhh, no comment, although I almost visited in 1997.

The point is, there are lots of Rock Stars. Can you join their ranks? Maybe! We will explore what it takes.

What is true is that anyone can *move* towards Rock Star. *Everyone* can get better.

“Effectiveness can be learned.”

-Peter Drucker

“Rock Star status can at least be approached.”

-Ted Demopoulos

As a group, Geeks do not tend to know Peter Drucker, but they should (in contrast, anyone in management who does not know him should be shot!). He was the author of 39 books, coined the term “knowledge worker,” and was an all-around brilliant guy who has a lasting and profound effect on how things are done in business; he was an amazingly effective Rock Star!

As Drucker says:

“Effectiveness can be learned.” Rock Stars are effective.

Rock Stars are so effective that they get extraordinary results. By learning to be more effective, one can more closely approach Rock Star status.

And yes, I do have a lot of nerve listing one of my quotations after the great Peter Drucker!

Change

Change is constantly occurring; like it or not, it is inevitable. Change, if left to chance, is random.

You are not going to wake up suddenly as a Rock Star if you do even the bare minimum at work...and then watch TV and drink Bud Light every night and every weekend, too. There is nothing wrong with television, of course if you enjoy it (or Bud Light, although it is tasteless industrial swill).



If you are all about doing the bare minimum at work, watching TV, and drinking Bud Light, change will mainly be very slow and random.

If you are happy, more power to you, but you are probably not reading this if that is all you aspire to!

Now, don't get me wrong: we all "coast" during various periods of our lives. I certainly have and suspect at times I may have coasted for too long and at times coasted for not long enough!

The entire point of this guide is to achieve positive evolution/transformation rather than random change: moving towards Rock Star.

You, absolutely *is* a very fluid concept.

We are all capable of and are probably doing things we could not imagine we, just a few years ago, would ever do. I never imagined I'd ever be writing anything like this as one small example!

Since this picture was taken, over 30 years ago, I've changed!

Although friends often say "You haven't changed at all," and my essential core (whatever that means) is the same, I *am* a very different person.

I've learned a lot in 30+ years and it has positively changed me!



Of course, change isn't necessarily positive; one can be worse off and extremely bitter and negative with age as well.

One of the reasons to have goals is to try, to a certain extent, to channel change in positive directions that you choose. Of course, you do not have total control over the ways in which you change, but you do have significant influence.

Change can be very rapid: a hit record, a new relationship, a new job, a meteorite killing dinosaurs. So, let's say your wife throws you out of the house (permanently), you take up heavy drinking (temporarily), start dating the babysitter (probably temporarily), and get a new job or contract – four very positive things (potentially). That, my friend, is rapid change!

In case you haven't noticed, we are in a period of rapid change right now!

Punctuated Equilibrium and Quantum Change

Punctuated Equilibrium is a theory from evolution which states that usually change is slow to non-existent, a state called stasis.

When significant change occurs, which is rare, it tends to be rapid.

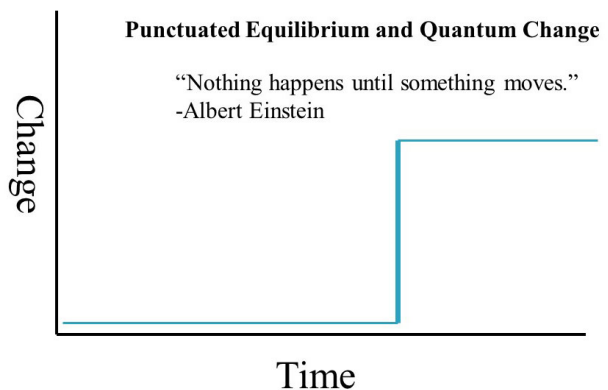
If you are Joe or Josephine Minimum Work/TV/Bud Light change will usually be slow to non-existent, but will occasionally be significant and possibly disastrous.

Think of a salt water clam living in an estuary that suddenly gets cut off from the sea and must live in fresh water or die!

Quantum Change (from paleontology) is essentially Punctuated Equilibrium on steroids: massive changes quickly. It is often adapt or die! Rock Stars thrive during Quantum Change. Others may or may not.

Massive Change is happening now!

Our field generally changes much faster than most others. If you want a job where things stay the same and your daily routine never changes, you my friend are in the wrong field!



Lifelong learning is important, and I'm going to convince you, if you do not already know, that lifelong learning is not just about technical stuff!

This is about positioning yourself for future success; with such a rapidly changing field, it is important to keep up technically, and at least as importantly, to build and grow nontechnical skills.

Fundamental Competence

You must be at least capable of (fundamental) competence, which is a fair bet if you are reading this.

Geeks regularly underestimate their competence in my experience.

Fundamental competence includes the core innate ability to “get it.”

Look, some people are just not designed for security, just like I'm not designed for music – I'm pretty tone deaf and that just is not going to change. You need basic aptitude, ability, and knowledge.

I can bang on my piano playing old time jazz and blues forever, but I'm never going to do much more than have a lot of fun (a most honorable goal in itself) and perhaps annoy my neighbors!

You've got to be (or become) damn good at what you do.

Yes, being great isn't enough, just like passion alone isn't enough.

Rock Stars are Rarely Accidents.

People do not excel in any field or endeavor by mistake.

That said, a “Rock Star” can be ambiguous – exactly what does it mean to you?

Well known and respected in your company, in your business vertical, as a top Mac forensic analyst, as a thought leader in paranormal phrenology, as a kick-ass world-class guitar player, or what?

Also, what you consider to be “Rock Star” is going to change, is going to evolve.

What you originally think might even look foolish in a few years (or maybe even in a few minutes). That is absolutely okay, and you do not have to share what you think with anyone. *But*, it will help to write something down – initial thoughts, goals, answers to these questions.



Yes, this is a picture of a baboon. Notice that baboon is in deep thought. OK, maybe baboons do not have deep thoughts, I don't know. Maybe he thinks he's a Rock Star. Maybe he is.

I can tell you I believe that baboon's thoughts are not going to change a lot over time. Yours will.

Your thoughts will evolve. The fact that you are reading this proves it.

WHY do you do what you do?

Start With Why is a TED talk and book by Simon Sinek. Here are the parts broken down:

What: Everyone (and every company) can tell you what they do. That is easy.

How: How they do it is tougher, but many can tell you how or at least some of how. For example, I can tell you much, but not all, of what I do to connect with and engage audiences when I'm speaking.

Why: Why is harder. It comes from a deeper and more primitive part of the brain, a part of the brain that doesn't understand language.

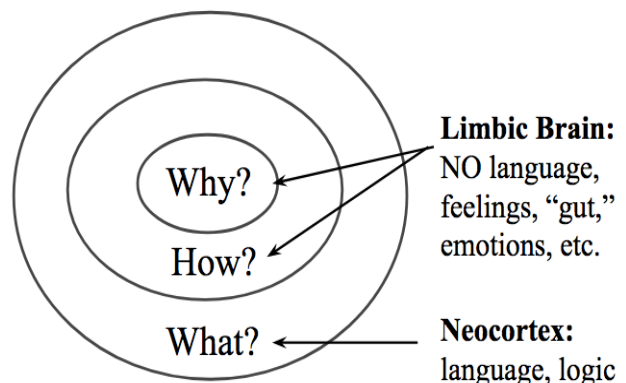
It is the “Why” that is the most important for connecting with others at a (literally) deeper (brain) level.

Why is not to make money; that is a side effect or result, albeit an important one. Why is your purpose, your beliefs, your cause.

Ever notice Rock Stars connect with others at a deep level?

Think Apple for example, a Rock Star of a company. People (literally) connect with Apple at a very basic level, one that cannot easily or entirely accurately be described with words.

We could say Apple is just a computer company like many others.



Why then is Apple more creative than all their competitors (probably combined)?

It's their "Why."

If verbalized, which is hard, it would be similar to:

"We believe in challenging the status quo in everything we do. We accept nothing as set in stone. We believe in thinking differently."

Everything flows from their "Why."

Personal Mission Statement

A very related concept to your "Why" is a personal mission statement.

Many organizations have mission statements, perhaps most. You probably have zero control over your organization's mission statement, but you can have a personal mission statement.

Yeah, I know it sounds touchy-feely, but actually having one written down works well. Plenty of research has shown this.

It's not like Ouija boards, séances, or palm reading (although knowing the basics of palm reading are pretty useful for amusing and attracting – errr, see the not yet fully completed section on "sex and drugs").

Companies spend millions of dollars coming up with mission statements: often they suck. Stephen R. Covey came up with the idea of having a person mission statement in *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People* in 1989.

Personal Mission Statements, which may also be called purpose statements or similar, are common today, a quarter century later. They look at what you are trying to do or become, and how you will stand out from the crowd. Your personal mission statement will need to be revisited and it will morph over time.

As with the “Why” of a company like Apple, your personal purpose statement is closely related to personal branding: what do people think of when they think of you?

Action Step One:

1. Watch “Start With Why,” a TED Talk by Simon Sinek (Google it!)
2. Write a preliminary “Personal Mission Statement” or “Why.”

Get something down. You can change it later. It will almost certainly change over time.

This type of – well, I call it “Future Thinking” – can absolutely help guide your priorities and decision making.

Write something down – anything! It’s just a start perhaps, an ultra rough draft!

Part III: Rock Star Basic Knowledge

As Stephen Northcutt puts it, “We are the tail, not the dog.”

Never forget that we exist to support our organizations.

A Rock Star knows a lot about their organization, what it does, its customers, its industry, and more.

Every organization exists for a reason. Why does yours? Money is rarely the ultimate reason. What does it do? What are its products, services, etc.?

Every organization has customers, even if they don't use that term – who are they and what are their concerns? The more you know about the customers, whether internal or external, traditional or untraditional, the better.

“Corporate Culture” is the set of written and unwritten rules of how things are done. If you want to be effective, you need to understand the corporate culture.

Action Step Two:

1. What is your organization's mission?
2. Does your organization have a mission statement? If so, does it make sense or is it any good in your opinion?
3. Who are your organization's customers?

We all have customers. We may or may not use the word customers, but we have them, whether we work for government, a non profit organization, a for profit company, do sales, internal IT support, external pen testing, or work for ourselves.

It doesn't matter...we have customers. Serving your customers is a *major* part of supporting your organization.

Customers can be external or internal. We might be selling them some physical widget, a service, providing internal support, or even providing them something they do not really want (for example, security!).

In the first action step you wrote down a "Why?" or Personal Mission Statement.

Although this doesn't need to align with your organization's mission, it better not conflict with it. If it does, there is an excellent chance you are working at the wrong place!

Leadership

Maybe people often order what you do at restaurants because you have great taste, maybe they get you to order wine for the table because you can decipher a wine list well, maybe they change something they do or modify how they do it at work simply because you set a good example, maybe they start shaving their heads because you did first, or maybe because you are "the boss" and they have to.

It doesn't matter why people follow you; if they follow you, you are by definition a leader.

Leaders have authority, and there is both positional authority, which depends on position, power, or title, and personal authority, which is earned.

Positional authority can be because you are “the boss” or “a manager” or maybe you have the guns and badges!

However we all know that sometimes the real person (or people) in charge in any scenario is *not* the positional leader, but someone else without a title or guns/badges.

Personal Authority: This is someone who is well known and respected who really is in charge. They may or may not be liked, but they are respected.

They have earned personal authority. Ideally a positional leader also has personal authority.

Leadership is a subject that humans have studied for thousands of years, and “The study of leadership can be dated back to Plato, Sun Tzu and Machiavelli” – ref: Wikipedia.

Note that someone can be a great manager (who has positional authority) without being a leader.

Rock Stars are leaders!

Leadership is a mindset, not a position; leaders are simply people who have followers and “authority” be it personal authority or positional authority.

Now, it’s important to note that management and leadership are two very different things.

While position can create a platform to be a leader, it takes personal mindset and action to lead well.

A great manager does things right; a great leader does the right things.

Communications

A Rock Star *needs* good communication skills.

Technical people are not known for solid communication skills verbally, in writing, or in any way (body language etc.).

To an extent, this stereotype is often true, *but* communication is a skill that can be worked on and improved.

Remember, when communicating technical information to non-technical people, be patient. Use analogies, simple language, and if one explanation doesn't work, try changing it slightly. Often non-technical people are “afraid” of technology.

Also it’s very likely the person you are trying to communicate with is intelligent; lacking technical skills does not make one stupid. There are many types of intelligence.

In general, if not communicating within your peer group (which often means non-technical people), you want to explain things at perhaps a 12 year old level, and you want them to explain things to you at a 12 year old level.

And if you don't understand something, it doesn't make you stupid. Ask for clarification.

What seems trivial to someone else (perhaps business or management concepts?) may be complex to you initially, just as technical information may seem complex initially to non technical people.

And remember, often non-technical people are afraid of technology, and hence may even be somewhat afraid of you. This includes management, because although they have a lot of power over us, we also have a lot of power and they may fear that!

Creativity

Rock Stars are creative. They do not mindlessly accept the status quo.

You don't become a Rock Star by playing covers, i.e. other people's music, regardless of how well.

HP, during their dark years, when they had their first layoffs ever and were not doing well, was an incredibly uncreative place, at least where I worked.

The status quo was accepted as the only way to do things. Any new idea was simply rebuffed with “That’s not the HP Way.” We renamed “The HP Way” to “HP-ness.”

Lest you think I am bashing HP, they were a wonderful company to work for, albeit imperfect and going through rough times, and certainly a company I admire and respect.

Never immediately reject an idea regardless of how outlandish.

Let’s look at some creative yet outlandish and ridiculous ideas that made billions:

- Selling books online...How could that ever work? Everyone knows people want to pick up and look at books before they buy them!
- Cataloging the Internet...For free? How can that possibly be a real business. It’s some stupid Dot Com idea. How can that possibly make money?

Also, creativity can involve using old ideas in new places or ways!

And always remember, do not mindlessly accept the status quo.

Getting Things Done

So many of us seem to have ADD or ADHD or whatever it’s called (or at least some symptoms – I cannot diagnose as I have no medical expertise) that it is worth spending some time talking

about time management or “getting things done” – as in finishing things.

As a group, we are not great at finishing things. Yes, this is a stereotype but generally true of technical people and many others too.

We all know Rock Stars and bands that spend 10, 15 and more years finishing their “next” album, trying to make it perfect.

There is no such thing as perfect. Good enough is good enough (and should usually be great but never perfect).

Perfection is never possible so don't wait for it.

- All software has bugs.
- Best sellers have typos.
- There is zero value to something you never finish!
- Declare it done and release it upon the world!

Managing and fiercely protecting your time is part of finishing things, as is project management, whether formal (for bigger projects) or informal (for smaller things).

This includes doing the right things, not doing some things (which perhaps you used to do), and doing what you do efficiently.

Of course, down time is important too!

No one is telling you to be a workaholic, although there will be time crunches and missed sleep occasionally!

You'll also need time to rest and recover and time to do something fun, although being a Rock Star or working towards Rock Star status *is* fun.

I often get some of my best ideas during downtime.

A lot of brilliant ideas have arisen while “wasting” time singing during unusually long showers. I also often stop during bike rides to jot down ideas.

With only 24 hours in a day, you must get the important things finished, make time for yourself, and expect overload at times.

The “Not To Do List:

People talk endlessly about “To Do” lists. I believe “Not To Do” lists are more valuable!

Since you can't do everything, you need to always consider that saying “yes” to something means you are implicitly saying “no” to other things.

I maintain a “Not To Do List” of things I'm not going to do.

This list has things I want to do, but am not going to, at least not now. It can also contains things that you used to do that you aren't going to do anymore for whatever reason.

Action Step Three:

1. Based in part on your future orientation, what are your three highest value activities (the most important things you do)?

2. Next, quickly list some items that you may consider skipping either now or in the near future (“Not To Do” list).

Three is a good but somewhat arbitrary number. You may want two or four or more, but 10 or 20 are far too many to focus on!

Focus on higher level activities and plans, instead of lower level items like “buy stamps” or “fold underwear” for this exercise.

Of course, if you are a full time employee your boss has something to say about this too.

When I had employees in the past, I would periodically ask them what they thought their highest value activities were, the most important things they did. What they believed were the highest value and what I believed were the highest value almost never initially intersected 100%. Often there was wide divergence.

Discuss what you believe to be the highest value activities with your boss.

You may want to ask for their input first based on what you know about them. Come to an agreement on your highest value activities.

If you and your boss agree on your highest level activities, you will tend to get *enormous* support for what you say “no” to – saying “no” to less valuable activities gives you more time to devote to your highest value activities!

Influence

Influence is getting people to do what you want them to do.

Obviously getting people to do what you want is enormously helpful in being effective!

The science of influence has been studied by many. *Influence, The Psychology of Persuasion* by Dr. Robert B. Cialdini is the classic book on this. It's a fast and easy read and highly recommended.

The principles are applicable to business, your career, personal life, and just about anything else. And there is nothing sleazy about it.

Now, the science of influence can be used for the good, the bad, and even the ugly.

It's based on six "Universal Principles."

Commitment and Consistency

Ever see someone in a horrible situation they won't leave? It may be a horrible job for them, a miserable relationship, etc.

Humans are consistent.

Once they have made a commitment, regardless of how small, they tend to stick with it. Small commitments can lead to bigger commitments, and the *often* do.

Can you get someone to make a small commitment to security, and then leverage that?

Reciprocation

If you do something nice for someone they are more likely to do something nice for you.

Anthropologists claim this pervades all human societies and permeates exchanges of all kinds. This is why male chimpanzees and other apes traditionally buy dinner, flowers, and open doors for female chimpanzees they are sexually interested in.

As other example, President Lyndon Johnson was incredibly effective: he got members of Congress, even those strongly opposed to various bills, to vote for and ratify them. How did he do this? He had done many favors for members of Congress during his many years in powerful positions in the house and senate!

Even something unwanted or uninvited can trigger the power of reciprocation.

Those return address labels you do not want that come in the mail from people requesting donations definitely increase the amount of donations for example – trust me, direct mail practitioners (i.e. junk mail pros) test these things extensively. They have metrics up the wazoo!

Is there something we can learn from this that might help us be effective in our jobs?

Are there ways you or your security program can add value to people and help them out?

Maybe you can even experiment with giving them things they may or may not want like mouse pads with security slogans, posters on security awareness, or free beer?

Social Proof

Ever notice that some people are popular just because they are popular (think back to high school if you have to), and some things are popular just because they are?

- If you have a beautiful boyfriend, girlfriend, etc. people are more likely to think you are attractive.
- If a place is popular, it must be good?
- And if McDonalds has sold 77 gazillion hamburgers they must be good.

These are all examples of social proof.

And if people seem to be complying with your security program, those that aren't or aren't sure about it are more likely to in the future.

Seeing others doing certain activities or using certain products can greatly influence others.

Consider making good examples of people doing the right things with respect to security!

Authority

In ISO 27002 the ISMS (Information Security Management System) statement is very effective.

It is a statement by senior executives (the CEO works very very well) basically saying security is important, or more formally that security is important to business operations and senior management supports a culture of security.

Why? An authority, hopefully the CEO (*the* authority) is suggesting you comply!

Get buy in for security and your programs and initiatives from someone with authority if you can.

It can be positional authority (e.g. the boss, the program manager) or personal authority (e.g. the person really in charge, the very likable and influential person in no formal position of authority, the popular person everyone follows, etc.).

The point is, people follow authority, even those who consider themselves somewhat anti-authoritarian.

Liking

If people like you, they are more likely to do what you want them to.

Be nice. Be likeable.

One participant in my Infosec Rock Star class remarked, “I’ve been yelling at people to do things for years and it hasn’t worked particularly well. Maybe I should try something else?”

Although there are certainly times that yelling *is* warranted, it doesn’t make you likable.

Scarcity

- Order before midnight tonight.
- Supplies are limited!
- The restaurant that is difficult to get a reservation at must be better than the one you can easily get into.

Really? No, but that’s how the human mind works.

When I was selling an educational program online, sometimes after a tele-seminar or other presentation, I’d bundle an hour of “free” coaching for the first few people to buy my program.

Obviously, my time is limited – it is reasonable I only offer a free hour to a limited number of people.

It increased sales significantly.

And people are always signing up for my classes right before the deadline, right before the ability to sign up goes away as the class is starting soon. This is another example of scarcity at work.

Part IV: Rock Star Image

Is this the image I really want to project?

Professional, well dressed, and with groupies?

Probably not, but I like the picture and my friend Henricke doesn't mind me using it.



Yup, that's me, signing a guest book at a Christening somewhere south of Paris.

I could say, "Not quite sure what that Au Pair is looking at though..."

In fact the picture is entirely innocent.

Most of the Christening party was up partying like Rock Stars until dawn, and we, as the Godparents, were up very late and are exhausted!

She is staring off into space trying to stay awake no doubt. It is a funny picture, but certainly can be misinterpreted, especially if I am making silly comments, like: "I look pretty good in a suit, eh? Well at least someone thinks so."

So, as I said before, Is this the image I really want to project?

That is something serious to consider and it leads us exactly into our next topic...

Positioning

From the highly recommended classic, *Positioning, The Battle for your Mind* by Al Ries and Jack Trout (a fun and easy read, despite being a slightly but amusingly dated book), **positioning is the position something or someone holds in people's minds.**

In particular, Chapters 1-8 and 23-25 are most applicable to this discussion (but the entire book is fascinating, fun, and easy to read).

So, let's say Volvo came out with an absolutely kick butt sports car. People are not going to abandon their Ferraris or Lamborghinis for a Volvo. It may perform better, but it just ain't happening. Okay, maybe in a couple of generations, but I doubt it. Volvo means "safe family car" in our minds.

Another example of positioning: Keith Richards is one of the best rock and roll guitar players ever and hasn't had a drug arrest since the 70s (1970s, not 1870s, although he does look like perhaps he may have been around in the 1800s). Still, he is stuck with the "drug" moniker. Think Keith Richards, think drugs and rock and roll. Maybe he's been clean since the late 70s? I doubt it, but it doesn't matter.

"I've never had a problem with drugs. I've had problems with the police" – Keith Richards.

What people think about you (and security) matters.

If people think you suck, well, “perception is reality” – or at least limited reality.

Similarly, the company you work for matters, the boss you work for matters, your peers matter, if you’re in management, the people you hire matter, and your friends matter.

They all reflect upon you and give off a specific image of you to others.

If you have already developed an amazing personal brand, like much less than 0.1% of the population ever will, these issues do not matter. But for most of us they do.

For example, I saw the less than great movie “Men Who Stare at Goats” with George Clooney. George Clooney has such a strong brand, people went to the movie despite the horrible reviews and knowing it was a silly movie.



If Clooney wasn’t already a Rock Star, he would have been some guy who was in a bad movie.

Critics would have declared his career on the skids. But instead, it’s “George Clooney decided to do a silly movie.”

Long term, most of us are in part defined by what we do, who we do it for, and who we do it with.

- Is your company (and industry) on the upward curve or downward curve?
- Is it respected or considered a laughing stock?
- Do you work for an idiot who makes the pointy haired boss in Dilbert seem profound?
- If you hire people, do you have the guts to hire people smarter than you? Many bosses do not.

I like to be the stupidest person in the room.

That's why I love working with SANS.

Yes, I know things and have skills that perhaps no one else at SANS does, but everyone I've worked with at SANS has skills I can barely comprehend.

I learn from them. I'm inspired by them. I do not want to be surrounded by bozos, even if I'm highly paid.

Surrounding yourself with Rock Stars or people that are darn close is one of the best things you can do.

Action Step Four:

1. Email several people who know you asking, “What do you think my top personality quirks or traits are?” or similar and prepare to be surprised.

I emailed a few people who have known me a while, both professionally and personally, by sending an email asking “What do you think my top personality quirks or traits are?” Yes, some asked why together with answering and I simply answered “Branding exercise.”

Here is what I got:

- Old grad school friend: eccentric, brilliant, genuine, ridiculous, kind
- Old friend who I briefly worked for: generous, humorous, devoted, intelligent, excessive
- Female friend from college: whimsical, hilarious, whacky, charming, brilliant
- Old girlfriend: humorous, smart, extroverted, quirky, daring
- Previous boss: hard working, educator, fun, technical, interesting

Looking at commonalities, **apparently I am an intelligent, outgoing, and fun eccentric.**

I did think I would get more “hard working” and “technical” type responses, but I was prepared to be surprised.

Fortunately, as a technical person you are given a lot of latitude as we are expected to be somewhat strange or “eccentric” by society, just as we expect Rock Stars to be “out there.”

Changing your positioning and what people think of you or security, or anything else, may be possible in your organization, but it requires consistency and time.

You need patience, but not too much patience. It sometimes is impossible to change the position something or someone holds in people’s minds.

Just like a baby duck may imprint on a dog and decide it is its mother, a position in one’s mind may be near impossible to change.

For example, I’m a consultant and I know if I go into a company working for human resources or training, I will never work directly with executives.

It’s just not going to practically happen.

If, however, I start working at the higher levels of an organization, my position in the executives minds is that I’m a smart guy on par with them.

If I start as a “training guy” or with HR (everyone hates HR, especially executives in my experience), I stay there in their minds.

Sometimes it may be time to move on to where you can form a new “first opinion” or perhaps where security is respected or maybe just hated less.

People get what they expect.

For that reason alone, positioning can be so hard to change.

There are organizations I consulted with where I could “do no wrong.” If anything went wrong, it was assumed to be because of the conditions or someone else, never me.

There was also an organization where I was originally associated with a “very troubled project,” and that troubled project haunted me well after it was over. If a project had problems, people thought, “Well, Ted’s projects always screw up.”

Forget logic here: I was thrown at failing projects, that was my role, so of course some projects had failures (as well as successes).

These types of preconceived ideas, whether they are true or not, can be very difficult to change.

Imagine taking a piece of art from a famous artist, and slapping a “Smith” or “Jones” on it. Most people won’t like it as much if “Smith or “Jones” painted it than if a famous artist like Picasso or Monet did.

People do get what they expect – this makes positioning so hard to change.

Trust

Rock Stars are trustworthy.

Trust is essential, especially in security.

People will forgive you for making mistakes, but not for ethical lapses (i.e. trust issues).

Why do people trust (or not trust) you?

I asked a few friends and colleagues and you may want to do the same.

Apparently I'm trusted because I'm a very blunt fellow.

Knowing why you're trustable (or not) allows you to leverage what you're good at, and alter your shortcomings to further yourself in this field, or life for that matter.

This Professional Thing

Except for trust which is essential, as technical "professionals" we are given wide latitude when it comes to this "professional thing," certainly far more than accountants or lawyers.

Although this is certainly a good thing, we should act *and* look professional, as much as I like working in ratty old jeans and worn out t shirts.



When in front of people, I dress far more professionally. No, you do not need to wear a suit many places today.

I never used to until a few years ago, and was surprised how much of a difference being decently groomed and dressed makes, whether at the office, at Starbucks, or the grocery store.

You'll get better service for example!

People initially have very little to judge you on, and your appearance is an enormous factor.

Also, whether someone sees you for the first time or they are someone you regularly see or interact with:

Being decently dressed and groomed sends a subconscious message that “you are worth it,” that you are a valuable person.

That you are worth taking great care of.

Ignore this at your own peril!

Also it is also extremely important to be reliable, be prompt/punctual, and deliver when you say you will.

And trying to fit in or “walking the line,” and least initially, helps to get things done. Once people know you better you can let more of your (perhaps outrageous) personality out!

Letting the World know You Rock

If you are just hiding in your parents basement or your cubicle, well, you are not going to have much influence, make much of a difference, or be anything other than a cog in the machine.

Cogs are invisible. Rock Stars are not.

If people don't know you exist and that you rock, you can't help many of them.

You want to be visible online and off.

People WILL Google you, even within your own company or organization. And outside of your company, people will Google you too.

If you Google someone and can't find them, there is an excellent chance something is wrong! And if you google someone and can't find them, you might rightfully be suspicious.

What are some ideas and platforms to kickstart or increase your online visibility?

- LinkedIn – Search engines love LinkedIn, and your LinkedIn profile will likely be one of the top results when someone searches your name.
- Facebook pages and groups allow you to increase your visibility too. Although I think LinkedIn is almost essential for professionals, Facebook and other social media is certainly optional.

- Targeted comments on industry blogs.
- Reviews of professional books on Amazon and elsewhere.
- And of course writing articles, blogs, or creating web sites makes you more accessible and highlights your expertise.

I suggest that you Google/Yahoo!/Bing yourself regularly to see what others see when they look you up.

Offline events are important, too.

And most offline events are now also online.

You give a local talk for a group (we all have info to share, even if we are a newbie and present a case study: “this is what I did and what worked and what didn’t” – people love case studies) and it will be online and Google-able.

Whatever it is, it’s important to get involved in the infosec community. You can give talks, maybe at your company, or at a conference, wherever. You could write a book; it’s easier than you think, and even short ebooks can pack a punch, too. Even getting quoted in mainstream media can help you get a leg up, whether it’s in *USA Today*, *The Wallstreet Journal* or *People Magazine*.

I’ve gotten lots of press using an inexpensive service that connects reporters and “Rock Stars” like you, called PrLeads.com run by Dan Janal, who has become a personal friend. I’ve been featured or quoted in hundreds of articles including in *The Wall Street Journal*, *CNN Money*, *Investors Business Daily*, *USA*

Today, United Press International, The Chicago Tribune, The Los Angeles Times, The Boston Globe, The Boston Herald, The Sacramento Bee, CIO Today, Information Week, and even Pizza Marketplace News!

This doesn't mean I'm smart, but it impresses potential clients and employers for sure. Cute women not so much... There is also the free but very competitive HARO, help a reporter out, at HelpAReporter.com. It's not rocket science.

Part V: Own Your Rock Star Lifestyle



Look, you do not want my lifestyle and I don't want yours. A lifestyle, which needs to focus on what is important to you, is personal.

When I first wrote this I was perfectly happy sitting as I typed in the Dubai airport first class lounge, a wee bit jet-lagged, waiting for a connecting flight to somewhere I've never been where allegedly some dude was supposed to pick me up at an airport around 2am (he wasn't there, so I haggled with cab drivers for a fair price).

I was absolutely fine and happy, and it might sound exotic, but most people would have rather been home!

Of course travel has mostly stopped with the pandemic.

Rocking Long Term

To “rock” long term, you *need* to take care of yourself! Try to eat healthily, exercise, and get enough sleep.

Peak performance, certainly long term, depends on it.

The Million Dollar Racehorse Analogy

If you had a million dollar racehorse, you would make sure it ate healthily, exercised, got adequate rest, etc.

Do the same for yourself, as **you are *more* important than a racehorse.**

I try, which is much better than not trying at all. I exercise, usually eat healthily, and am a pretty fit and healthy for a slightly fat dude who gets slightly older every year!

None of us are perfect. I run half marathons and more, lift weights, ski, bike, surf. I can almost guarantee there is some form of exercise you’ll enjoy.

Society has advanced to where we can be damn unhealthy and survive.

Medicine and social services, among other things, keep people alive that would have certainly perished in the wild, and mostly perished in earlier societies.

There was no blood pressure medicine, high cholesterol medicine, heart bypasses, antibiotics, and social services

depended on friends and family – you pretty much had to take care of yourself.

Not that long ago, for example when my father was in medical school, we didn't even have antibiotics! My father remembered that well.

I propose that people who are relatively healthy and productive are happier people. I know I certainly am.

And Rock Stars absolutely tend to be relatively healthy and productive!

Also to Rock Long Term you need to be Happy!

What things in life make you happy? This is fairly personal and individual.

You might not like visiting foreign lands, learning new languages, lifting weights, fly fishing, fine wines, public speaking, cooking, noisy children, cycling, or the beach like I do. These make me happy.

What makes you happy is no doubt not exactly the same and may be very different.

Certainly, a positive attitude can make a *big* difference.

Of course, life always has its ups and downs – it's supposed to.

And two things that can make people very happy OR very unhappy are:

Sex and Drugs

The most common questions I get in my live events are always on “Sex and Drugs” – maybe that shouldn’t be a surprise but it has been to me.

Certainly sex and drugs are mentally associated with Rock and Roll, and can also make people very happy or very unhappy, so read on...

Most of us end up with a long-term partner, and **this is possibly *the most important choice you make in your life.***



If you are with someone that drags you constantly down, that is a total mismatch, or even worse, it is going to be next to impossible to do great things in your life.

Most humans are monogamous or at least mostly monogamous. Most of us end up with a long term mate, whether we use the term partner, significant other, spouse, husband, wife, or whatever

(Note: The following is from a Western viewpoint. There are many different cultures in the world).

Yet most of us do not choose. We might think we do, but at some point in our lives our brains decide we should settle down, and we end up stuck with whoever we happened to be with at the time.

And they end up stuck with us. That's what seems to happen most likely (in my far less than expert opinion).

This isn't necessarily bad, but it isn't necessarily great.

Dating skills are important. No one probably ever taught you how.

It is not hard to learn. Most of us need to sort through a lot of people to find someone suitable.

Not everyone is as lucky as a couple of my friends who are still happily married to their first ever boyfriend/girlfriend.

And similarly, being in a relationship, even the best possible one, requires work.

Amazing how humans will put lots of time into hobbies and interests but close to zero into their relationships after the beginning...

To rock long term, to use the vernacular, you need to "have your shit together!" And I mean that on all fronts, including consumption.

Bad Consumption Habits Kill People

We will focus on drugs here, although there are other issues certainly like horrific eating habits (Ted raises his hand as occasionally guilty) and associated conditions like heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and more.

Here's a list of musical Rock Stars that are alive and clean, and by that we mean "drug free." May they continue to make great music for a long time!

Alive and Clean: Elton John, Eric Clapton, Ringo Starr, Tom Waits, Alice Cooper, Ted Nugent, James Hetfield, Eminem, Anthony Kiedis, Shania Twain, Mike Ness, 50 Cent, Fatboy Slim, Ozzy Osborne, Steven Tyler (maybe).

And unfortunately a longer list of musical Rock Stars that didn't make it, that are no longer bringing their gift of music to the world due to substance abuse issues.

Permanently Dead: Jimi Hendrix, Amy Winehouse, John Bonham, Ron "Pigpen" McKernan, Jim Morrison, Bon Scott, Elvis Presley, Keith Moon, Sid Vicious, Janis Joplin, Brian Jones, Hank Williams, Sr., Tommy Dorsey, John Entwistle, Kurt Cobain, Michael Jackson, Billie Holiday, John Kahn, Dee Dee Ramone, Prince

By the way, the first part of the "dead" list, Jimi Hendrix to Bon Scott, is from alcohol. Yes, my second favorite drug can kill if not handled with care and respect (caffeine/coffee is my clear favorite!).

And since I'm always asked what my preferences are, here we go briefly:

I drink alcohol. Here I am drinking 3 vintages of Krug (perhaps the best Champagne in the world) on my 50th birthday in this picture.

I don't drink alcohol daily, sometimes not even weekly.

And when I drink, I want something awesome. I am more likely to take 15 minutes to make an artisanal cocktail or open a Champagne I've researched, tracked down, bought, and I am fascinated to try, then to open a cheap beer in a can. Nothing against cheap beer in cans!

I do drink coffee nearly daily: freshly roasted beans, ground immediately before brewing, usually in a French Press. I have coffee friend geeks who think a \$165 grinder is an entry level grinder; clearly I am not a coffee geek!

I've always been mostly monogamous and find intelligent women very attractive.

The woman I have ended up tend to be intelligent, not gaunt, with little to no makeup or piercings or tattoos, often foodies and heavy drinkers

I don't necessarily find heavy drinking attractive, but apparently women who drink heavily like me. Hmmmm...maybe that says something about me?



Also, perhaps unlike the “Rock Star” stereotype, I’m simply not promiscuous (or “slutty” in common parlance). Maybe if thousands of groupies were throwing themselves at me things would be different, but I doubt it.

I meet lots of fun, attractive, intelligent women, although I do wish we had more women in this currently male dominated field. It is changing!

Putting It All Together

Most successful Infosec Rock Stars also have great personal lives as well.

Yes, they probably have enormous ups and downs like just about everyone else worthwhile.

Additionally, technical knowledge is not enough; geek will only get you so far.

By understanding some fundamental concepts like change, influence, sociability, and more you can come closer to reaching your full Rock Star potential.

Hopefully you’ve been able to read this with an open mind!

Much if this would have seemed very strange to me just a few years ago, yet would have propelled me towards “Rock Star” status much faster.

**“Sometimes the light's all shining on me,
other times I can barely see” –Truckin, The Grateful Dead**

**“It don't come easy, You know it don't come easy. Got to
pay your dues...” – Ringo Starr**

The number one rule is consistency.

It takes years to become an overnight sensation!

Consistency is critical.

Or as author Kevin Hogan says,
“Concentrated Focus is a critical core factor in Real Success.”

This picture is of Doctor Jeffrey Stanton, Security Researcher (University of Syracuse), author, and pretty damn good musician. Jeff will be keeping his day job because he is passionate about it.



His guitar has come a very long way since high school though, because of concentrated long term focus!

Steve Martin is “an American comedian, actor, musician, author, screenwriter, film producer and voice over artist” (ref: Wikipedia). He is phenomenally successful in many areas, and has won and been nominated for awards in many categories, including comedy, acting, bluegrass (he plays a mean banjo!), writing, and more. These awards include Grammys, Emmys, Golden Globes, and the list goes on.

He's often been asked about the secret to his success, and he usually disappoints in his answer as there is no secret.

Be so good they can't ignore you.

"Be so good they can't ignore you," is what he says.

And yes, that takes lots of dedicated and hard work.

- You must continually strive to improve your skills.
- You must always keep learning.
- Being great at what you do is essential for a Rock Star. It alone is not enough, but it is absolutely required!

Action Step Five:

List three concrete positive things you are going to do extremely soon (professionally or personally).

We can all improve. We can all get better. Arguably if we are not moving forwards, we are moving backwards or at least stagnant.

This isn't to say that we cannot or should not "coast" or relax at times, because we should, but not for long.

I added "professionally or personally" to that step because you do not have a professional life and a personal life, you have (exactly one) life!

Here are some things people have mentioned as part of this exercise:

- Take a (perhaps free) class – Coursera.com, Cybrary.it, MIT Open Courseware (<http://ocw.mit.edu>) all have free or very low cost classes.

For example I've taken an absolutely kickbutt and free Crypto class from Stanford courtesy of Cousera.com.

I'm also very biased and partial to SANS classes and take them as often as I can.

- Go back & redoing or rereading the Action Steps in this guide.
- Start to exercise and eat a little healthier.
- Talk to your boss about what your most important activities are.
- Work on better “work-life balance.”
- Learn to speak better. Several participants in my Infosec Rock Star Classes for example have joined Toastmasters (which is incredibly inexpensive).

Thanks for reading!

And thanks to my daughter Amelia Demopoulos for her help writing this!

Ted Demopoulos