

STRATEGIC THINKING

Don't Be 'Just' Anything

How can one simple word like 'just' hold you back?

■ By Jennifer Tursic & Kim M. Catania

How often have you heard people say these words:

- “I’m just ... a sales rep.”
- “I’m just ... a district manager.”
- “I’m just ... a trainer.”
- “I’m just ...”

How often have you said those words?



How can one simple word like “just” hold you back? Some definitions say “just” can be interchangeable with the word “only,” giving a negative slant about the person or situation.

In our work environment, what is often underneath the word “just” is the belief that our contributions or points of view are not nearly as powerful as someone with the title or experience.

Just Rewards

What if people stopped their progress because they felt they were “just”? What if Alexander Fleming felt “just” and didn’t do anything about the dirty petri dishes that grew mold, preventing bacteria from growing? If he was “just” a researcher, maybe things would not have spawned the invention of penicillin.

If you can relate to this notion of feeling “just,” know you are not alone. We would like to share a few snippets from our own paths.

When reflecting on her leadership journey, Jennifer had realized that being an underdog or being underestimated seemed to be a consistent theme. Her guidance counselor said she had a “snowball’s chance” of getting into her college of choice since her SATs were just not high enough.

Then, after she graduated from the college she was told she wouldn’t get into, she was told she just didn’t have experience to get into pharmaceuticals right out of college.

Kim’s experiences were similar — she was told she just wasn’t good or smart enough. All. The. Time.

She was told that she just wasn’t smart enough to make it in pharma sales. When she didn’t get promoted to institutional sales rep, she was told it just wasn’t for her. It was always — you just aren’t the right fit or are just not right for the role.

You see the pattern. It takes confidence and resilience to push through.

Just Do It

Throughout our careers, we have observed a similar pattern with many people who seem to feel they are “just,” often due to their current role or title. In fact, many wait until they have a certain role or title to have the confidence to express their opinions or share their insights. It takes resilience to push through the myth that you cannot be a leader until you have a people leadership role.

So, what is the step forward to being more than just your current role? Start by examining how your role supports the department, and how the department supports the overall organization’s goals. Evaluate activities you engage in during a typical week:

- Do your projects positively contribute to your direct team achieving a goal?
- Do your activities contribute to achieving a critical objective within your department?
- Do you have new ideas or insights that may benefit your team, department or the broader organization?

the broader organization?

If you answered yes to at least one of these questions, then you can feel confident to take active steps to prepare for that next opportunity for you to shine. Challenge yourself:

1. Check your calendar and select an upcoming meeting where you might typically just listen, then prepare two to three ideas or comments with a plan to offer just one to start.
2. Explore ways to increase your contributions and become more engaged in collaborating with your team and department.
3. Assess your current projects and determine how you can increase your impact beyond just the immediate or expected goal by sharing additional ideas.
4. Ask a coach or mentor to observe you during meetings, then ask them to share feedback on their perception after they have seen you in action.

Just Amazing

Organizations achieve their highest levels of success when everyone, regardless of title or role, contributes and demonstrates leadership behaviors. Breaking out of the “I’m just” mindset starts with you.

It never hurts to hear it again: You are more than “just.”



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