

The 10 Behaviours of Effective Employees

By Rob Lambert
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Disclaimer

This book is based on personal experience and observation.

Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, but no responsibility is taken for errors or omissions. Use this information at your own judgment and risk.

Your situation will differ from the examples given. Adjust the ideas to fit your context.

About the Author

Hi, welcome, my name is Rob Lambert, founder of [Cultivated](http://www.cultivatedmanagement.com) →
<http://www.cultivatedmanagement.com>

I didn't set out to be a business coach, consultant, or speaker. I began as a journalist and publisher, chasing stories about people and ideas — and trained as a media communication scientist, learning how to cut through complexity and share ideas in ways people understand.

That curiosity eventually pulled me into the world of business — building products, leading teams, and riding the full start-up → scale-up → sale journey.

Along the way I discovered what really makes organisations succeed: not just talent, but clarity, creativity, communication, behaviours and continuous learning.

I went on to hold senior roles; VP of Software Engineering (twice), VP of HR, Head of Communication and Head of Agility — and those experiences now shape the work I do with leaders and teams.

Through **Cultivated Management**, my books, workshops, and keynotes, I help organisations and people cut through complexity, align around value, and create cultures where people thrive.

I'm also the co-host of [Stationery Freaks](#), a podcast for those who love notebooks, pens, and the analogue tools of creativity.

I live in Winchester, England with my wife and three sons. Outside of work, I'm a keen photographer, film maker, and car enthusiast.

I'm the founder and director of [Cultivated Management Ltd.](#)

I'm the founder of [Creative Soul Projects](#).

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Introduction

Why do some employees add more value than others?

Why do some get things done while others stall?

It rarely comes down to education, certifications, or years of experience – especially if those years are just the same year repeated. It goes deeper than that.

Over the years, I've observed what makes some people effective. Some create momentum. Others drain it. Some achieve in a day what others take weeks to finish. Some work long hours and move little forward.

I've seen teams succeed because of one or two people. I've seen effective employees change the fortunes of a company almost overnight.

The pattern is clear: some people deliver more value, earn respect, and achieve results. Some make noise but little impact.

This book distils fifteen years of observation into **ten core behaviours**.

Why ten? It could have been more. But ten is clear and memorable. No one I've met has mastered them all. Each behaviour is a deep subject, but I've reduced them to their essence.

Some people master just two or three and still excel. Others use five or six. What I've never seen is someone effective with only one.

One more point: qualifications alone do not make you effective. Some had none. Others had a wall of certificates. It never made the difference.

What matters is **relentless learning** – from experience, from others, and through teaching. And always treating people with respect, building teams you'd want to work in yourself.

When you finish this book, don't try to adopt all ten behaviours at once. Choose one. Focus on it. Improve. Then move to the next.

*The companion **workbook** is designed to help you reflect, practice, and embed these behaviours in your own work. <http://www.cultivatedmanagement.com/ten/>*

Better is a Beautiful Word

Effective employees believe there is always a **better way**.

Better is powerful. Better is possible. Work can be better. Teams can be better. Companies can be better.

The ten behaviours in this book are about one thing: becoming better.

Why Behaviours?

This book is about **behaviours** – the actions, words, and outcomes that effective employees show.

They matter more than job titles, CVs, or skill matrices.

Effective employees prove themselves in the workplace. They lead by example. They get results. Their day-to-day behaviours create momentum, improve teams, and add value to the business.

Start noticing your own behaviours – what you say, what you do, and the outcomes you create. Notice when you show a behaviour you don't like. Notice how others respond. If it's a pattern, replace it with a better one. Over time, the good behaviours take root and the poor behaviours fade.

Change takes time. It requires patience and persistence. Keep notes, ask for feedback, and practise positive behaviours. Eventually, they become your default. Improvement becomes your habit.

You will also discover weaknesses. Don't obsess over fixing all of them. Focus on your strengths. Amplify what you do well. Minimise the impact of what you don't. Work on weaknesses only if they hold you back.

Everyone has weaknesses. The most effective employees know where to spend their energy.

This Book

I didn't want to write a long book. This topic is deep, and I wanted to give you enough to start making meaningful change in your work.

Though short, this book contains lessons I've learned from years of doing real work inside teams — and watching what separates “busy” from genuinely effective.

Some lessons came from things that went well. Some came from mistakes. Some were simply patterns I couldn't ignore.

This book is for anyone determined to become more effective at work — by practising behaviours that build trust, momentum, and value.

This isn't a quick fix. Becoming better takes practice, learning, and persistence.

If you want support applying these behaviours, the companion workbook includes reflection prompts and exercises to help you embed them in your own work:

<http://www.cultivatedmanagement.com/ten/>

Why Become Effective?

Someone once asked me why they should bother becoming effective.

They believed they were doing fine. And maybe they were. But is “fine” enough?

Do you want to survive your career doing the bare minimum? I don’t.

A CEO friend had a team of ten people he called “indispensable.” During a tough year, he had to make four redundant. The business survived. It even performed better with six people than it had with ten. The point: very few of us are truly indispensable. Hard times come to every company.

If you don’t own the company, you are an employee. Your future is largely in someone else’s hands. Being effective gives you influence but not control.

Effective employees have fewer worries. They are usually the last to be let go. And if the worst happens, they stand out on the job market.

Effective employees are rare. That rarity makes you in demand. Companies, recruiters, and colleagues notice. Opportunities come your way. You get to do meaningful, impactful work. Good companies value talented, effective people.

Being effective benefits the business – but it benefits you even more.

Every strength has a shadow. A sociable person may be less productive. Someone improving systems may move too fast. A self-learner may demand too much from others. A great strategist may miss details. We all have weaknesses.

This book focuses on behaviours that make employees effective. Your task is simple: acknowledge weaknesses, minimise them, and invest your energy in your strengths.

The companion [workbook](http://www.cultivatedmanagement.com/ten/) is designed to help you reflect, practice, and embed these behaviours in your own work. <http://www.cultivatedmanagement.com/ten/>

The 10 Behaviours

Effective employees demonstrate the following behaviours.

1. They are visibly passionate
2. They are open minded
3. They are not constrained by their job title
4. They become company smart
5. They focus on the customer
6. They relentlessly improve the process and system they work in
7. They do what they say they will
8. They are good communicators
9. They add skills and skills and skills
10. They are brave.

We will explore each of these in the following chapters.

01 - Visibly Passionate

Effective employees are a joy to work with.

They inspire confidence because they are visibly passionate about their role, their work, and the success of the business. They show that success is attainable, desirable, and inevitable. They choose to believe that the universe is friendly, supportive, and welcoming.

They are positive about themselves, their work, the future, and their colleagues – even those who try to drag them down.

Far too many employees are passionate in a negative way. They tear ideas apart without constructive purpose. They argue, complain, and drain energy. They see the bad in people and work.

It is easier to tear down than to build up. Effective employees build others and encourage growth. Ineffective employees tear down and make it personal.

Everyone has bad days. But for effective employees, the good days outweigh the bad. If negativity dominates, they fix it or move on.

People notice effective employees. They see someone who inspires change, drives momentum, and encourages enthusiasm. They see someone they want to work with.

Ask yourself:

- Are you inspiring to be around or overly critical?
- Do people flock to you or avoid you?

Start showing positivity and enthusiasm to signal effectiveness.

Focus on why

A simple way to stay positive is to focus on the “why” in your work:

- What is the end goal?
- Why are you doing this work?
- Why are you at work?

Understanding your “why” keeps you centred, even when the work is hard or unpleasant. Bad work always exists. Effective employees see it as an opportunity for learning, growth, or improvement. Ineffective employees avoid it or complain.

If you lack personal, departmental, or business goals, set some. Goals give direction and a positive focus.

Challenge negativity in the workplace

Effective employees don't let others drag them down. They challenge bad thinking and turn criticism into solutions. They identify real problems and focus on solving them.

They ignore the "haters" and don't let negativity derail their goals. They avoid negative thinkers and ensure the team stays positive.

Be yourself

Authenticity matters. Pretending to be someone else is exhausting and unsustainable.

You can change and improve over time but always stay true to yourself. Authenticity builds trust and shows people who you really are.

Be more Zen-like

Remember: nothing is inherently good or bad. Everything just happens. The story you tell yourself makes it positive or negative.

It is hard to stay positive all the time. But if you want to be effective, return to positivity as often as possible. People want to work with happy, positive colleagues.

Document when negativity strikes

Notice when negativity occurs – whether from yourself or others. Observing these moments helps you counter the behaviour. Over time, you can "turn it off," even if that means avoiding negative people.

Show your passion in a positive fashion, and your effectiveness will grow.

02 - Be Open-Minded

Many employees value stability and predictability. They seek secure jobs and a steady life. If they don't rock the boat, they survive until retirement. Some achieve this. But very few companies can thrive with that mindset alone.

Markets change rapidly. Some industries are already disrupted. Someone, somewhere, is building the next product or service that could challenge your company – even if you think you're the disruptor.

Companies need people who can react, embrace change, think creatively, and move quickly. Agility matters more than rigidity.

Effective employees are less concerned with the status quo.

They are open to change. They know they, their company, and their work can always improve. They accept change, embrace it, and work with it – even if it's uncomfortable.

Change is easier when it doesn't require people to change. But when change affects others, resistance is natural. Effective employees embrace valuable, thoughtful change and help others navigate it.

Open-minded employees:

- Listen actively
- Reason well
- Don't resist without thinking
- Discuss ideas openly
- Learn continuously
- Observe industry trends

They balance change for improvement with resisting random, unnecessary change. They embrace thoughtful, deliberate change.

What's the industry doing?

Study your industry. See what others are doing. Experiment with their ideas in your context. Read widely. Combine concepts.

Don't blindly copy. Adapt what works to your own situation. Understand your problems and learn from how others solved similar challenges.

Stop saying “No” to everything

Notice when you resist new ideas. Pause. Ask yourself: does this idea have merit? What makes me uncomfortable?

Sometimes “No” is right. Other times, valuable change is being pushed away. Understand the commercial reasoning. Ask questions. Seek clarity.

Build new habits

Change often requires new habits. If you want to start reading more, you’ll need to make time. Replace an old habit with a new one.

Example: if you watch 1.5 hours of TV each evening, replace 30 minutes with reading. Or read for 15 minutes in the morning with coffee instead of checking social media.

It’s not easy – but worthwhile.

Think

Schedule quiet time to generate ideas. Jot them down without editing. Let your mind explore freely. Later, filter and experiment.

This helps you realise there are multiple ways to improve your work. Some will be better than your current approach.

Some thoughts

Reading about your industry exposes you to different ways of working. You may uncover why you resist certain ideas and learn to be more open-minded.

Take it step by step. Seek out people and ideas that challenge you. Embrace change as part of growth. Critical thinking still matters, but your inner sceptic will make fewer impulsive judgments.

03 - Step Outside of the Job Role

Effective employees don't confine themselves to a job description.

They don't ask, "Is this mine or someone else's?" They solve problems. They get work done. They offer help without imposing it. They don't let issues escalate just because "it's not in my job description."

These employees are hard to define. By the time you document their role, they've already solved something else or taken on a new responsibility. They deliver results, even if you can't describe exactly what they do.

They understand the value they add, even if they can't articulate it. They work within a flexible frame – and break boundaries when needed – redefining themselves along the way.

Most organisational problems exist in the gaps between roles and job descriptions. Work doesn't respect rigid structures. Functional boundaries often block progress, and customers suffer. Effective employees navigate, liaise, negotiate, and confront these boundaries. They keep work flowing. Sometimes they ruffle feathers. That's part of the job.

Conflict happens. Some people guard boundaries closely. Effective employees focus on results, not egos.

They move quickly through the hierarchy. They lead, manage, and achieve. Their reach expands because they don't let a job description limit them. Not everyone wants this. Some prefer structure. Some want an easy path.

If you want to be effective, treat your job description as a soft boundary. Never say, "It's not my job." Expect challenges. Expect pushback. Expect conflict. Take on problems. Overstep your comfort zone. Deliver results. That's what effective employees do.

04 - Become Company Smart

Effective employees quickly become smart about the company they work for.

They learn who is helpful and who is not. They identify decision-makers and those they have little influence with. They learn how decisions get made, who influences outcomes, and how work really moves through the business

They do this to be more effective. They study how the business functions and how it communicates. Their goal: align with the company vision, stack the environment in their favour, and get results.

They deeply understand the company vision and commit to it. They ensure they work on the right things at the right time. They support the business goals. They learn as much as possible about the business and how it operates. They learn what generates value (external to the business) and they understand they are a cost – they work out how to generate more value than they cost. They become company smart.

Being company smart reduces surprises. Unseen problems will still arise, but day-to-day operations are predictable. Connection to internal networks brings noise – but it also brings knowledge.

Effective employees spot potential disasters before they happen. They see the bigger picture while others are lost in detail. They empathise with other departments yet ask tough questions about processes and quality.

They understand the business as a system. They see how a small change in one area can ripple across departments. When the system works well, it's a thing of beauty. Being company smart gives these insights.

They recognise when the system is breaking down. They know who to talk to and have the relationships to fix it.

Company-smart employees influence and persuade because they understand the system. They see the vision, understand the purpose, and can guide people to achieve goals. This comes from understanding each part of the system and its constraints.

Knowledge takes time. It comes from studying. Effective employees study constantly, using many approaches.

There are two simple ways to study the system:

Staple yourself to work

Follow work as it moves through the system. Track its journey. Draw it out. Observe boundaries, bottlenecks, and delays. Identify tasks to stop doing.

This reveals how workflows – or doesn't. Understanding this allows improvements others will never see.

Stand and observe

You can learn a lot by watching and noticing. Watch and learn. Study behaviours and interactions. Observe how work moves and where problems occur. Listen to conversations and take notes.

You'll be surprised how much you can learn by simply observing. Focus on meetings, rework, and team interactions. Small process changes can make a big difference. You may spot coaching opportunities, highly effective people in broken processes, or those who are simply ineffective.

05 - Customer Focused

Effective employees always focus on the customer.

They understand who the customer is, who uses the product or service, and who interacts with them on the front line. Their work revolves around making the customer's life easier.

Customers are the lifeblood of any business. Without them, the company has little. High customer satisfaction should be the goal for everyone, regardless of department. Effective employees gather themselves and their colleagues to keep the customer front of mind.

All work should create value for the customer, including internal processes. Almost every task in a business should benefit the customer in some way.

Effective employees repeatedly ask:

- “Why are we doing this work?”
- “How does this benefit the customer?”
- “How do we go from idea to value for the customer quickly and smoothly?”

Who is your customer?

A simple exercise:

1. Draw a person on a large whiteboard or wall. Label them “customer.”
2. Draw your product or service just to the left of the customer. It doesn't matter how well you draw.
3. Draw a vertical line to the left of the product/service. Map the last stage of the process that interacts with the customer (e.g., cash register, deployment process). Write down all actions, interactions, transactions, and communications at this stage.
4. Repeat step 3, working backwards through the process until you reach the start of your business journey.

For example, a sandwich shop might map:

Draw up Menus → Order Food → Food Delivery & Collection → Pay Invoice → Clean Shop → Set Up Counter → Prepare Kitchen → Make Sandwiches → Open Shop → Customer Arrives → Greet Customer → Customer Places Order → Make Sandwich → Hand Over Sandwich → Customer Pays → Customer Leaves

This stream shows the work required to deliver value. It is a model, not the process itself. Change the model, then action the changes to improve the real process.

Effective employees complete this exercise. They understand what it takes to deliver excellent service. They likely know more about the process than many colleagues. Most of this work has never been formally documented.

They focus on tasks that add value to the customer. Anything outside the customer satisfaction stream is questioned critically. Valuable work may be added to the stream.

Multiple streams leading to the customer are common. Mapping them and focusing on delivery improves the customer experience.

Share the process with colleagues. Invite them to participate. Refine the workflow while keeping the customer central.

Once customers are happy, optimise processes further: better IT, improved auditing, automation, and backend support.

Effective employees prioritise the customer. They never optimise a process at the expense of the customer. Remember, customers may also be internal stakeholders.

06 - Relentlessly Improve the Process

Effective employees are relentless in improving processes. While some blindly follow rules, even when flawed, effective employees question and refine them.

All processes can be optimised over time. Even near-perfect processes can become less effective as context changes. There is no “best practice,” only relative judgement.

Improving processes is simple in theory but hard in practice.

Many fall into the trap of improving processes to make their own lives easier. Sometimes this also helps the customer, but the focus must always start with the customer.

I’ve seen people optimise their own work while adding barriers for customers. Forms with 30+ fields, unnecessary hoops to buy a product, and complicated steps all make life harder for the customer.

Mapping the stream of work for your customers, as discussed in the previous chapter, is a great first step. This reveals opportunities for improvement and sparks ideas.

For a live example of process optimisation, watch a mainstream fast-food chain. Every step – from order to delivery – is choreographed for efficiency. Customers move quickly, revenue is realised, and the system hums. But efficiency alone isn’t enough. Quality and service must also be maintained.

Before optimising any process, gain knowledge. Knowledge comes from studying the system, not jumping straight to technology.

John Seddon offers excellent advice:

1. Observe the process
2. Fix the process
3. Introduce IT

Too often, companies rush to technology first, automating problems they don’t understand. This only pushes problems deeper into the system.

Effective employees first understand the problem. They then improve the process while testing results. Only once the process works and serves the customer do they introduce technology to automate or assist.

Technology is not a solution by itself. One cafe in Winchester, UK, still uses a simple cash register and spreadsheet inventory. Service is excellent, repeat business is high. A nearby shop has modern POS systems and automation – but poor service. Customers vote with their feet. Service first, technology second.

Effective employees improve the process relentlessly – but only if it benefits the customer.

Study your work. Gain knowledge. Improve the system from the customer's perspective. Then, use technology to amplify results.

In short: **spot problems, fix them, and focus on the customer.**

07 - Do What You Say You Will

Recently, I called my local car garage. They said someone would phone me that day. Five weeks later, still no call.

An employee promised a report by Friday. Friday came and went – no report.

Automated emails from support desks claim your query is important and someone will respond within two days. Weeks later, nothing.

Yet, some organisations get it right:

- My energy supplier said they'd fix my meter on Wednesday at 10am – they did.
- A parcel delivery company promised a 10–11am slot – they delivered.
- My bank promised a call at 10am on a Saturday – they phoned, on time, with a good deal.

Why are we amazed when someone simply does what they said they would?

Effective employees **do what they say they will**.

They deliver on promises. No excuses. No blame. They take accountability for their work. If they make a mistake, they admit it and fix it.

They deliver with precision. They ensure quality within existing constraints. If more time, money, or resources are needed, they negotiate – but never compromise the outcome. Customers and colleagues deserve reliability, accuracy, and excellence.

How to apply this

Time speak

If you say you'll phone someone at 11am, phone them at 11am – whether you have news, or not. Consistency builds trust.

Stop committing to the impossible

Never promise what you cannot realistically deliver. Push yourself, yes – but ensure the task is achievable. Blind faith is not enough.

Understand what you're delivering

Clarify exactly what is expected. Don't accept vague challenges with unclear scope. The more you understand, the more confident you are in delivering. If unsure, ask questions or seek help – better than failing silently.

In short: **if you say you'll do something, do it. No excuses. No drama. Just action.**

08 - Communicate Effectively

Look around your workplace. The most effective and high-achieving people usually share one skill: effective communication.

It's rare to succeed without being able to listen, talk, empathise, and connect with others. Sure, there are exceptions, but good communication accelerates effectiveness.

Whenever I deliver my "10 Behaviours of an Effective Employee" keynote or workshop, I'm often asked which behaviour I would choose if I could only pick one. My answer is always the same: **effective communication**.

Communication is a skill most of us never formally learn. Not at school, not at home, and rarely at work – despite most workplace problems arising from poor communication.

Watching an effective communicator is enlightening. They speak clearly, listen actively, and connect with others.

People trust and follow those who communicate well — because their intent is clear, their tone is grounded, and their ideas travel.

Effective communicators listen. They create space for honest discussion. They handle difficult topics with confidence and respect. They include quieter voices. They can hold the room without dominating it.

Bad communicators talk over others, focus on themselves, and struggle to build rapport. Good communicators are a pleasure to be around.

Actively listen

Don't interrupt. Wait for the speaker to finish. The main point could come at any moment.

Listen to understand

Don't just prepare a reply. Strive to truly understand. Constructive conversation requires effort from both parties.

Respond, don't react

Pause before speaking. Consider others' emotions. Choose your words carefully. Digest first, respond second.

Learn non-verbal communication

Non-verbal skills are a superpower. Adjust body language, eye contact, and gestures to influence the situation. Small changes can transform interactions. More on this in the [Cultivated Communication Superpower Workbook](https://www.cultivatedmanagement.com/online-communication-course) →
<https://www.cultivatedmanagement.com/online-communication-course>

Don't overcomplicate it

Communication is a vast field. Start by observing good communicators. Copy their behaviours. Notice when your communication resolves conflict or improves a situation. Record these wins – they reinforce your skill.

Effective communication isn't just a behaviour – it's the engine that drives all others.

09 - Continually Learn

Effective employees are self-learners. They are curious about the world and how things work. They seek understanding across many topics but know they cannot learn everything. They focus, improve daily, and take self-education seriously.

They rarely need prompting to learn. Often, they struggle to find enough time because their curiosity leads them to more than they can consume. They know their skills gaps and work deliberately to fill them, creating a unique and valuable offering.

Effective employees read widely, watch videos, listen to podcasts, and attend seminars. They don't just follow industry norms – they reach beyond them. They combine deep expertise in core areas with a broad awareness of other domains, making them versatile problem-solvers and strong collaborators.

I know companies where two employees do the work one could handle, and small businesses that outperform regional competitors thanks to their team's diverse skills. In startups, this versatility is essential. Effective employees can transfer between teams, departments, or even industries, up-skilling as they go. The faster the world changes, the more learners can keep pace.

Carve out time

You'll need to dedicate time to learning. Even 15 minutes a day – reading a book in the morning or listening to a podcast on your commute – makes a difference. Frequent, short bursts of learning are better than infrequent, long sessions.

Copy others

Identify successful people in your field. Observe what they read, watch, or listen to. Learn what they learn.

Put learning into practice

Information only becomes valuable when applied. Experiment with new ideas, methods, or ways of working. Teaching others what you've learned deepens your understanding. You'll discover gaps in your knowledge, refine your skills, and reinforce what you know.

Continual learning is a habit, not a task. Effective employees are always growing, always curious, and always ready for the next challenge.

10 - Bravery

Effective employees are brave. They challenge norms, question poor decisions, and speak up when things aren't working – no matter the level of the business.

Bravery may not come naturally. It can be uncomfortable or even scary. But if you want to make things better, you must act.

Effective employees don't blindly follow processes that fail to deliver results. They resist conformity that harms outcomes. Sometimes they get it wrong – pick the wrong battles or upset influential people – but they learn and keep moving forward. Bravery is a journey.

Being brave starts with knowing yourself, your skills, and your commitment. Understanding your subject and having experience gives confidence. Even a simple question like “Why?” is a brave first step.

Bravery is not rudeness or recklessness. Effective employees know when to speak up publicly, when to challenge in smaller groups, and when to act privately. They don't call people out to embarrass them or destroy relationships. Brave employees conform when things are working and ask tough questions when they are not.

Tread carefully. Be sensible. Be brave.

Conclusion

Effective employees rarely demonstrate all 10 behaviours at once, though some do over time. Many show just a few at a high level and still excel. Life, career, and personal growth ebb and flow, shaping which behaviours are most prominent. Some people may never show all 10, **but you can deliberately cultivate them** to give yourself an edge.

We can't control every outcome in our lives, but we can plan, practise, and stack the odds in our favour. Focusing on these behaviours will set you apart in any organisation.

Remember, it's about behaviours – what you say, what you do, and the results you achieve – not just a CV, skills matrix, or LinkedIn profile. Show the behaviours you want to see more of. People notice — and they respond

In today's connected workplace, your results speak louder than words. Integrity, commitment, work ethic, values, communication, and reputation are all built daily through the behaviours and habits you demonstrate.

Pick positive behaviours and practise them until they become habits. This is the hard work: showing up every day, ignoring naysayers, learning new skills, being brave, and embracing personal growth. But the payoff is worth it.

For those who want to actively apply these behaviours, the [companion workbook and coaching plan](#) provides exercises, reflection prompts, and resources to help you cultivate effectiveness day by day.

Access it here → <http://cultivatedmanagement.com/ten/>