



Topgrading Tips

March 2008

Resources

- **New 1-Hour Video on Interviewing and Hiring**
- **Topgrading Shop**
- **Consulting Services**
- **Workshops and Speeches**
- **Topgrading Articles**
- **Contact Us**

New Website!

- **For the latest topgrading news, articles, tools, and services, click here or go to:**
www.SmartTopgrading.com

New Blog!

- **For frequent short commentary plus library of Topgrading Tips, click here or go to:**
www.BlogSmartTopgrading.com

Topgrading Tips Archives!

How A Players Can Fail

We're featured as the cover article in the current issue of *Workforce Management*. The article quotes leading executives (including Jack Welch) who say Topgrading methods are the best for picking the top talent available at every comp level. But, you know that! (We'll post the article when they release the pdf in a week.)

This week people have read the article and I've gotten a bunch of emails asking if A players *always* succeed, and the answer is *no!* There are no guarantees that come with embracing Topgrading (other than our money-back guarantee on the accuracy of our "second opinion" assessments of candidates; no one has ever requested their money back, incidentally). But here are a couple of the most common ways an A player can fail:

1. Bad luck

As you know, business involves taking risk. A

- [To view some of our Topgrading Tips Newsletters, click here](#)

players can do all the due diligence in the world to mitigate risk, but they can still fail. There are plenty of A players at Bear Stearns, UBS, Citi, and Merrill Lynch who got terrible results and were tossed out onto the streets because of the sub-prime crisis. Hey, they *all* didn't cause the mess!

Bad luck comes in the form of new competitors, economic blips, terrorist acts, some country overprotecting competitors in your industry, Congress withdrawing subsidies, Supreme Court vagaries, your coming down with a nasty disease. Hey, ca-ca happens.

ADVICE: Hang in there. A players are resourceful and persistent. They don't give up easily. Curt Clawson became CEO of what he thought would be a Good to Great company, but a day after joining Hayes Lemmerz he discovered accounting irregularities. The company soon went into Chapter 11. It took a couple of years and major change, but today the company has a 1:1 debt-to-equity ratio, a strong balance sheet, and a solid future, Clawson persevered, Topgraded, and succeeded, after experiencing some bad luck.

There is someone you might have thought of as an A player, who last week said something like, "The glory in mankind is rising from the ashes." Elliot Spitzer. No A player status for this guy, he's going to have to rise a lot, and avoid those hot ashes (ahem)! 2. Bad boss(es)

I've assessed/coached 6,500 executives, each with an average of 10 jobs, and so I've asked all the Topgrading questions about all their jobs - how they succeeded/failed/made decisions/etc. I've accumulated 65,000 of

those case studies. Since a high percentage of executives I interview are A players, I've heard a zillion examples in which really sharp executives were hindered because the boss imposed a futile strategy, refused to listen to good ideas, failed to Topgrade the rest of the team (so peers were C players), or felt threatened and actively undermined the A player.

ADVICE: If you're the A player with a C player boss - hit the pause button; don't hastily quit. I've seen plenty of C player bosses who eventually performed as A players because they Topgraded and assembled a team of A players whom they could trust. Good for them! Hey, stick around when that boss says, "Pat, I'm putting together an A team and I'll be relying on you and others to help us all succeed; my job is to Topgrade and empower the team so you all have fun, learn a lot, and achieve huge success."

A final suggestion - perform solid due diligence on bosses before changing jobs. I have a thousand examples in my files of confident A players NOT checking out the boss enough, and failing because of that boss. Do reference checking - ask present and past subordinates of the executive you might work for what he/she was like, the good and the bad.

But, if you find yourself reporting to a chronic C player, look for an exit strategy, either within the company or with another company. 'Tis better to slow your career a bit, succeeding in a lesser job, than fail in a bigger job with an excuse that sounds like, and is, an excuse - "I failed because I went to work for the wrong boss." Best,

Brad

Brad Smart
President
Smart & Associates, Inc.
847-244-5544
847-265-7416 (fax)
www.SmartTopgrading.com

Forward This Topgrading Tips
Article to All Your Managers,
so They Can Receive a Short
Monthly Tip or Free
Download, Reminding Them
of Ways to Boost Talent

**Sign Up for FREE Monthly Topgrading
Tips by Entering Your Email Address
Below**

[Sign Up](#)

email: brad.smart@topgrading.com
phone: 847-244-5544
web: <http://www.SmartTopgrading.com>
