

*A Professional's Guide to*  
**MAINTAINING  
YOUR EDGE**



**12 essential tips for staying  
ahead of the competition**

**Chris Kenber**

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## Introduction

The world of the professional is changing rapidly. It's true that there is more legislation, but this goes hand in hand with there being more solutions outside the traditional framework. As a result of this, 'traditional' services are finding themselves undercut and thus struggle to maintain their bottom line. In the corporate world, many global organisations are outsourcing and automating many of their key functions, making the idea of a job for life a thing of the past.

Add the recession into the mix, and many professionals are finding their carefully laid plans falling apart around them, forcing them to work longer hours and postpone retirement as long as possible. And as a result, they become tired, jaded and disillusioned – resenting their work rather than taking pride in it.

Does any of this sound familiar?

Surely it isn't what you envisaged when you began your career?

That's why it's important that you do everything you can to maintain your edge – those subtle but powerful elements that separate you from your competitors and help you maintain your position as a leader in your field, while genuinely enjoying every minute of your career.

As a professional business coach, I meet numerous professionals who have become so wrapped up in their work that they have developed a selective blindness – they are unable to step away from their work and remember *why* they are working.

That's why I wrote this guide. In the pages that follow, you'll discover my most essential lessons for maintaining your edge. Whether you're chasing that next crucial promotion or growing your own business or practice, these lessons will help you recapture that drive and enthusiasm that originally spurred you on in your career.

By requesting a copy, you've taken your first step towards a new level of success and happiness, so let's dive straight in...

Chris Kenber  
Business Coach

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Edited by Tom Stevenson

Cover design and page layout by NABO

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## #1) Why you must work on your business (and not just in it)

I meet many professionals who're visibly tired at the end of their working day, yet when asked what they've spent it doing, reveal that they've spent much of the time in meetings or on routine tasks. They're certainly working hard, but none of it is going to make a difference to the business in the long term. They haven't spoken to any prospects, talked to their clients, or done any of the other things that lead to actual business growth.

Many of us are very good at answering email and posting on social media, but not so good at focusing on our really important tasks (such as developing our marketing or a customer contact programme), particularly when there aren't any deadlines involved.

Put simply, activity is not the same as progress.

A big part of my work as a professional business coach is taking clients out of the day-to-day running of their business to help them think more broadly about how it's doing, where it's going, and how it's meeting its target. It's all about learning to think strategically rather than tactically; being able to take an objective look at the state of your business and prepare for whatever the future holds. More importantly, a coach will hold you accountable and ensure you do not allow yourself to start procrastinating and preoccupying yourself with trivial tasks that anybody could handle, by agreeing on clear, meaningful goals that you need to complete between sessions.

This is common amongst professionals who have risen to a position of leadership due to outstanding technical skills. They are so used to focusing on facts and details that they are unable to step back and set clear goals for their team. A coach can be incredibly helpful in helping you develop this mindset and these skills, so seriously consider working with one if you aren't doing so already.

Remember, as the owner of your business or practice, your role is to take care of the big things that will grow the business, not the minutiae of your administration and management. Your role is to provide the vision and let others focus on the implementation.

## #2) How to work smarter, not just longer hours

At the time of writing, professionals in the UK work longer hours than any other country in Western Europe. But consider this – no-one ever lay on their deathbed wishing they'd spent more hours at the office.

If you're to avoid falling into this trap, you need to learn better time management skills. I often meet professionals who've attended time management courses, but complain that it's made no difference to the quality of their working lives. After a little probing, it almost always turns out that they haven't been properly applying anything they learnt! Fortunately, if you're consistent about it, time management needn't be complicated.

One of the first things you should do is start delegating responsibility. Unless you absolutely have to undertake a task yourself, let one of your staff handle it and concentrate on what you're good at, particularly if it's something they can do better than you.

Second is outsourcing. If you are earning, say, £200 per hour, then paying a specialist £25 an hour to handle something you don't have the knowledge or skills for is a very good investment.

The third element of effective time management is automation – establish systems within your business or practice so your staff can handle things without you having to micromanage them every step of the way. This will dramatically lower the amount of time you have to spend at your office.

This can be difficult if you're the sort of person who likes to be in control of every single aspect of their business or practice, but ask yourself (and be honest!), how well is that working out for you? Then ask yourself how well the business would function without you in the unfortunate event that you were incapacitated, or when you eventually retire? It's unlikely that every single task is so urgent that it needs your personal input, so don't treat them as such.

Surely it's worth absolving yourself of some of your non-essential responsibilities in order to allow yourself a little more time to enjoy yourself outside the business or practice, safe in the knowledge that it will still run properly without you?

## #3) Why nothing is more important than marketing

There is a balance between delivering a service and acquiring new clients. The more senior you become, the bigger your target is and thus the more important marketing becomes. The trouble with that is that most professionals have little, if any, training or experience in marketing. They're just given a target – usually quite an ambitious one – and told to get on with it. As a result, many business owners rely almost exclusively on referrals for new work – a reactive rather than proactive approach.

Referrals are certainly important, but they're not the only element of growing a business. After all, what happens if the referrals stop? That's why it's important to have other channels for business growth in place – such as networking and PR – so if one source of revenue dries up, you'll still have others to fall back on.

Incorporate multiple methods for acquiring new clients into your marketing and be sure to test and measure everything to see what gets results and what doesn't. This way you'll only be spending money on activities that get results, helping you make more efficient use of your time and budget. This should be an ongoing process, as markets are constantly changing, so something that works brilliantly early on may not produce the same results in a year's time.

## #4) How to find your ideal clients

Many business and practice owners are happy to take any business that comes their way, but it's a far more intelligent approach to identify who your ideal clients are and focus your efforts on them. This will vary from business to business and industry to industry, but once you have it clear, your networking and marketing will become much more focused and productive.

The identification process includes such factors as who pays on time, who offers you plenty of referrals, who is happy to provide testimonials... You need to be focusing on the clients who consistently bring money into your business, not the ones who arrive once, make excessive demands, pay late and then disappear. It's more about the value they bring to your business rather than the money they spend.

Once you understand your criteria for an ideal client, it's important to establish rapport with your prospects as early as possible, so you can pinpoint the ones you really want to keep doing business with. Take the time to speak to them and see whether they're the kind of person who'll be a pleasure to work with. Rapport is the key to any great working relationship – it's tough having a high-paying client if they constantly make you miserable!

One of the benefits of having your own business is choosing who you want to work with, so don't be afraid to be selective.

## #5) How to stand out in a crowded marketplace

There are an awful lot of professionals around these days offering relatively similar services. That's why it's important to make sure you stand out from the crowd if you are to attract new customers, particularly if you're working in a field where many people don't see any great differences between the various service providers. Anything you can do to highlight what separates you from your competitors can be extremely powerful, even if it's only a difference in the way you market yourself.

To find a real differentiator, you need to start looking at things from the customer's perspective. This will help you identify a different way of doing business that none of your competitors are exploring, whether that's running or marketing your business or practice in a different way, or simply recognising the importance of networking and making personal connections (because people like to buy things from people they like!).

It's all about developing a niche, where you become the go-to person for whatever it is you do. This can be challenging at first if you've never really had to market yourself. If you're already a good few years into your career, you may well have an established way of doing things, which has served you well in the past, but is no longer working as effectively as it could. Although it can be hard to make such drastic changes to the way you do things, it's vital if you don't want to be left behind by a rapidly changing market.

An objective pair of eyes can be invaluable here, as they may well be able to identify something about your business that could be developed into a unique selling point, which you may have missed due to being so wrapped up in your day-to-day work.

## #6) How to get your team to make you look good

The key to good management is hiring good people – people who are better than you in many cases.

In many different areas, your performance will be judged based on the quality of your team's delivery, not your own, so do not make the mistake of attempting to cut corners by doing everything yourself with a little assistance from some cheap hired help. If you have sub-par staff, then you will leave nothing behind when you either move on or retire, but if you have a first-rate team, you'll soon find your presence is required less and less – something that should be the goal for any manager.

Look at your staff as an investment – in the long run, it will pay off on multiple levels if you hire great people and put the necessary effort into their development.

A great team allows you to focus your efforts on the aspects of your business that really interest you, allowing you to develop an even better work/life balance. You could even develop them to the point where you can start working part time! This is when you start developing a profitable business that other people will be seriously interested in buying, allowing you to eventually sell it, whether that's to retire, or to get started on your next business venture.

## #7) What to do when nobody says “Thank you”

Everyone likes to feel acknowledged and appreciated, particularly when they've been working especially hard at something. In survey after survey on job satisfaction, it is never money that ranks as the most important factor in people's happiness. The key factor that determines people's happiness in their jobs is appreciation. Even if someone is on a relatively low salary, their job satisfaction will be very high if they get on well with their colleagues and are regularly acknowledged by their managers.

This is just as true for executives and business owners as for lower ranking staff. I've worked with many high-ranking people who feel unappreciated because their staff never thank them for their efforts. They've risen up through the ranks through their hard work and are used to their successes being acknowledged, but now they're in a leadership role, that element is gone.

Coping with this is certainly tricky, but a coach can work with you to develop mechanisms and benchmarks against which you can judge yourself, so you can make your job seem much more satisfying. It's important to develop this sort of perspective when you move into a position of leadership, otherwise the role can seem very lonely and depressing.

## #8) Dealing with difficult people

This is inevitable, whatever the nature of your business or practice. Human beings are unpredictable creatures, so you can guarantee that you'll find yourself handling difficult people at some stage of your career. Even though many leaders are given next to no guidance from this point of view, it's essential that you develop an effective approach to defusing tension in the workplace, particularly if your business or practice doesn't have the luxury of an HR department.

If you've got two people who don't get along within a team, it will start to affect everybody, hindering your overall productivity. Even problems that seem trivial can quickly spiral out of control if someone is not willing to intervene. You need to bring them together by reminding them of the things they have in common before tackling the sources of tension. Discuss their problems with them individually and then bring them together to devise a mutually agreeable solution.

If you stay calm and collected, you may well find that serious interpersonal problems amongst your staff become relatively straightforward to sort out after a while.

Dealing with difficult clients is a bit more problematic, as you'd obviously want to avoid regularly losing business due to personality conflicts! Look at difficult clients in the same way you'd look at complaints – if you can turn the situation round it can be incredibly powerful. For example,

if a member of your staff and one particular client are really not getting along, possibly to the point where the client is demanding their money back, it will make a great impression on them if you, as the person in charge, call them personally to defuse the situation.

As with so many business-related problems, the most important thing is the way you handle the situation.

## #9) How to keep yourself motivated

Everyone's moods go up and down, but when you're leading a team, everyone will be looking to you to constantly be cheerful and inspiring, even if you don't feel it. Remember, staff will follow the example set by their leaders, so it's up to you to model the kind of behaviour you want to see. It's therefore important for your business, as well as your overall wellbeing, that you maintain your motivation and enthusiasm.

This is one of the most important tasks for a coach. Just as top athletes need someone to keep them motivated and focused on their goals, top professionals often need a little extra support to maintain their motivation and enthusiasm for their work. Furthermore, professionals often have patterns of thinking (frequently ones that were developed early on in life) that result in self-limiting behaviour that prevents them from achieving more than a certain level of success. As many of these patterns are unconscious, it can be very difficult to identify and change them yourself.

An experienced coach can help you develop perspective on both business and life and overcome any mental blocks that are holding you back. While it's impossible for anyone to be truly motivated 100% of the time, it's part of the job description once you rise to a senior position, as everyone in the levels below you will be looking to you to provide their motivation. Someone who is constantly depressed and indifferent won't inspire a very happy or productive workforce.

Look at coaching as time spent working on yourself, just as you work on your business.

## #10) How to achieve the perfect work/life balance

This is harder than ever nowadays.

Traditionally, people believe that the path to success involves putting in more hours than anyone else – being the first to arrive in the office and the one who switches off the lights in the evening, but that's not actually a particularly smart or healthy way to live your life. If you ask most people what they'd change about their lives, they seldom say “I'd like to work harder”.

You need to develop strategies to switch off your 'work mode' whenever necessary and be willing to spend a bit of time away from the business or practice. You should never feel guilty about scheduling regular leisure time, as this is a key part of performing at your best. No-one can be firing on all cylinders 100% of the time and nor should they try to, as it'll just affect their health and performance.

Running a business or practice is an extremely intense experience and if you're to continue to be successful and – more importantly – actually enjoy it, you need to be willing to occasionally recharge your batteries. If you have delegated, outsourced and automated as we discussed earlier, scheduling time for yourself should be no problem at all.

Bear in mind that this doesn't necessarily mean something huge – just taking up a new hobby that you attend classes in once a week might well be enough to improve your overall quality of life and your relationships with your friends and loved ones. It could be that there's an aspect of your life that you've neglected as you've built your business that you could start revisiting. An objective pair of eyes can be extremely helpful here. I often meet professionals who're completely unaware of how they've allowed their work to take over their lives, but are pleasantly surprised when our sessions reveal how to bring things back into balance.

## #11) Planning your next career move

As we mentioned early on in this guide, the idea of a job for life is now virtually obsolete. Even those of us in senior positions cannot rely on our jobs still being there in a year's time. Everyone is more accountable nowadays, so you need to consider carefully what you are really good at (being honest about it!) and what you would do in the unfortunate event that you were forced to consider a career change. For example, if you were fired from a partnership at one legal firm at the age of 40, it's far from automatic for you to be able to move into a similar role in a different firm, so you might have to consider where your skills and experience could be transferred to.

If you are unfortunate enough to find yourself in this position, I'd advise you to do two things:

- 1) Consider the option of early retirement
- 2) Consider what transferable skills you possess

Although it may not be feasible to get another job in the same field at that age, you may well have acquired skills that are highly applicable to other industries. For example, solicitors often make excellent mediators.

This is less of an issue for young people, who're generally used to the idea of juggling a portfolio of careers, but it can be very challenging if you've based all your plans for the future on working in

the same company for the rest of your life. That's why it's important to have a proper career plan in place, to help you cope with the unexpected without losing sight of your overarching goals.

This doesn't mean formulating an ultra-specific set of career milestones that you never deviate from, as that will leave you unable to handle any unexpected bumps in the road – it's about starting with the end in mind, so whatever the future holds for you, you can handle change without being overwhelmed by it and make decisions that keep you on the path to where you really want to be in life, even if there are diversions along the way.

## #12) How to retire happy

It's impossible to keep working forever. You may even find yourself leaving the workplace earlier than you expected, due to health concerns or redundancy. That's why you need to plan for your retirement well in advance. Too many professionals leave work and find themselves bored by their new lifestyle, simply because they haven't considered their retirement and thought about what they would like to do with it.

As we touched on in the previous tip, it's too easy for professionals to neglect their friends and family and allow their interests and hobbies to slip away as they strive to achieve success, but this will eventually leave a big black hole in your life that you will struggle to fill.

A coach can provide invaluable help when it comes to preparing you for the transition out of your busy working life by helping you plan ahead and set goals for your retirement. The more clearly articulated goals you have in place, the better equipped you will be to stay on track and handle any unexpected changes life throws at you. And write them down! When you write a goal down it turns from something abstract into something concrete that you can really focus on.

Even if you find yourself facing early retirement, but don't feel quite ready to give up work, you may be able to keep working part-time in a slightly different capacity and make the transition a lot smoother. Be creative and flexible in your thinking and you could easily turn a disaster into an opportunity...

## Conclusion

We've covered a lot of ground in this guide and I hope it's provided a new perspective on your life and career. In closing, let me remind you that this is just the first step – it's time to start acting on everything you've learnt!

Success in business (and in life for that matter) is an ongoing process, so be willing to invest in yourself. Seek out whatever training and experience you need to take your career to the next level and get whatever professional help you need to identify your personal and career goals, so you can start moving towards them.

If you do, the future will be bright indeed!

## About Chris

I am an experienced professional business coach based in Bristol. I specialise in helping professionals overcome what's holding them back and then successfully make changes in their lives.

Having spent 30 years in sales and marketing myself and having run my own small businesses in such diverse fields as dating and healthcare, I am very familiar with the pressures and challenges faced by modern professionals. When you combine this with my coaching experience – having first trained at the renowned Coaching Academy in 2003 – and genuine passion for my work, I guarantee that our sessions together will prove life-changing.

If you'd like to find out more about how I can help you, just visit my website...

I look forward to working with you!

**[www.chriskenber.com](http://www.chriskenber.com)**

## What my clients say

*“Chris is an outstandingly diligent and intelligent business coach with great integrity and professionalism. He has a rare ability to think strategically whilst always paying attention to the detail. He also has a great handle on the way businesses work and can provide useful insight combined with down to earth common sense. He is also good at maintaining an impartial stance in his advice. I would highly recommend Chris to anyone looking for business coaching.”*

**Mark Mason, CEO of Mubaloo**

*“Chris is a pleasure to work with—experienced, well-informed, knowledgeable, creative, wise, full of ideas. He’s a supportive coach, but isn’t afraid to challenge where necessary. Best money I’ve spent on my business in years. Big thumbs up.”*

**Charlie Wilson, Director of The Book Specialist**

*“Chris very kindly offered to assist me in terms of planning the best route to market for a new venture that I am embarking on. His expertise at identifying the options and guiding me to making the most appropriate choice was obvious as were his interpersonal skills. A top man and I would recommend him to anyone.”*

**Phil Collard, Financial Planner at Old Mill Financial Services**

*“I have known and worked with Chris for literally decades. He is a brilliant ideas man. He is very intelligent and thus finds challenges that are tough for others remarkably straight forward to solve. As a coach he is a natural, full of positive energy and creative solutions. Chris is also a man of great integrity and I trust him completely. I am totally comfortable recommending him as someone who would work tirelessly to help people to improve their lives. He has helped me a lot.”*

**Andrew Moir, Managing Director of London Calling Arts**

*“I engaged Chris on the basis of his reputation as a coach who is practical and who gets things done... correction, who gets you to do things! As with most busy and stressed executives, no matter how much experience you have, it is important to be reminded of the basics: plan, focus, prioritise and do! This is where Chris excels: ensuring that agreed actions are completed... and that you stay on the track you’ve agreed.*

*“An early conversation with Chris will help any executive refocus and accelerate their personal ambitions.”*

**Peter Jewitt, Consulting Partner at Metathought**

*“I have been coached by Chris Kenber on a number of life and work issues. I am multi-disciplined and run several small businesses that rely solely on my qualifications and years of personal experience. Chris has helped me to focus on areas of organisation.*

*“Chris is personable, patient and encouraging, more than this, his questioning skills facilitate one to think deeply about the issue at hand – out loud – and to work out strategies for action that can then be achieved and realised. To have Chris as an active listener is a real bonus from a personal and a business perspective.*

*“I would highly recommend Chris Kenber as a coach to anyone who is serious about getting the most out of their business or life in general.”*

**Angie MacLachlan, Partner at Red Plait**

*“I had coaching with Chris when I was finding it hard to juggle the different aspects of my working life. I found he was a very supportive and enthusiastic sounding board for new ideas and he pushed me to turn those ideas into concrete actions.”*

**Victoria Earle, Co-founder of Lovely Drinks**

*“I have been working with Chris primarily on business processes to help free up time and make the most of my working day. Chris’s advice has been invaluable & beneficial & is producing excellent results. Highly recommended.”*

**Nick Elston, Divisional Head at KN Office Supplies**

*“I can honestly say that Chris has helped me focus on my strengths and this has helped enormously in my daily business activities. Our sessions are carried out in a relaxed informal manner and you feel a sense of achievement when you come away. I have no hesitation in recommending Chris. Take an hour out of your day and see what he can do for you. Thanks Chris!”*

**Martin Parfrey, Director at MKP Storage**

*“Chris was personable and friendly, but also challenged me to think more broadly about what I wanted and how to achieve it. I knew that in order for it to work for me, I needed to find the answers myself but needed some guidance and support in heading in the right direction and Chris was brilliant at providing this. He helped me generate plenty of ideas and took a creative and supportive approach to my business, encouraging me to look at avenues I’d not previously considered. I’m really excited about implementing the ideas we discussed and I am certain it*

*will benefit my business. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Chris as a business coach – using him has been a great investment for the future of my business."*

**Morwenna Tudor, Owner at Tudor Communication**

*"Chris is an excellent hands-on business coach who brings a vast amount of business experience to the table. He loves to challenge in a supportive way and is very effective in helping to get things done. He has a very good understanding of how to set up and run a successful business and is able to coach you through it. I would highly recommend his services if you want to make a success of your business."*

**Ulrike Nau-Debor, Coaching Psychologist**

*"Chris is a fabulous business coach. He is immensely supportive and gets you to focus on those areas that will grow your business quickly but with the correct foundations and knowledge. He is also brilliant at those curve balls life throws at you as well. I can't recommend Chris highly enough."*

**Helen Davies, Owner of Hurricane Telemarketing**

*"Chris seems to know what buttons to press. Whether you need help to tunnel into that channel of self belief and confidence you forgot you once had, or need a push in the right direction to help develop and grow your business, Chris is the guy to help you. Plus a genuinely nice man!"*

**Debbie George, Director at Key PA Solutions**



*A Professional's Guide to*

# MAINTAINING YOUR EDGE

12 essential tips for staying  
ahead of the competition

**Times are tough for professionals these days, with an increasingly competitive job market, customers who're more careful than ever with their money and precious little guidance and support available to those of us who are serious about achieving our goals.**

That's why you need to do everything you can to maintain your edge in order to stand out from the pack and maintain your enthusiasm for your work.

This special guide from professional business coach Chris Kenber will help put you back on the path to exactly where you want to be in life. Chris has helped hundreds of people achieve success and happiness in both their personal and professional lives and now shares his most important lessons on such subjects as...

- Making sure you stand head and shoulders above the competition
- Maintaining that drive and enthusiasm you felt when you set up your business
- Transforming yourself into an inspiring leader – even if you're managing a team for the very first time
- Achieving the perfect work/life balance
- Effortlessly coping with unexpected change

Whatever your personal and professional goals, Chris' objective yet compassionate approach to business performance will give you the inspiration and the tools you need to achieve them.