

# 25 Ways to Distinguish Yourself



by Rajesh Setty

## WHY SHOULD YOU DISTINGUISH YOURSELF?

**Short answer:** Being part of the commodity crowd erodes your value.

**Long answer:** Technology professionals worldwide are getting caught in a tsunami of massive commoditization. Technologies are changing very fast. What seemed hot today is not hot anymore. There is a constant pressure to give more, be more effective, be more efficient and be more productive. This forces most technology professionals to go after “short-term skills”. Of course, going after “short-term skills” will provide “short-term results” but will hurt them in the “long-run”. Competency in technical skills is necessary to succeed in this world but they are not sufficient to thrive. The question is *what can one do differently so that he or she can distinguish and move above the commodity crowd?* The goal of this manifesto is to provide 25 ways to do just that.

**Bonus:** You have reached where you are by doing whatever you have done so far. If you need to leapfrog and succeed beyond dreams, continuing to do whatever you have done in the past may not be the answer. You need to **think** and **be** different. In other words, you need to distinguish yourself!

## #1 CARE AS IF IT'S YOUR OWN

Late last year we were looking to move into a bigger office space and I was asking my friends for some referrals to good commercial real estate brokers. One of them asked me to contact Jeff . I asked “So who is Jeff with?” This person interestingly did not know where Jeff was working and almost didn’t care about the company Jeff was associated with. He said “I have no clue there. But I am confident that he will take good care of you” and handed Jeff’s number.

Long story short. We met Jeff (who is with Cornish and Carry) and from day one, we had a pleasant experience. We could see that he really cared. He asked a lot of questions about our business and for what we were looking in the new office space. After a couple of meetings, we could feel that Jeff almost had a complete understanding of our business and our needs. In the next couple of weeks, he showed us three office spaces and not surprisingly, our management team liked all the three of them. Talk about hit rate — he had 100%. This wouldn't have been possible if he didn't care!!

Jeff is now a good friend I will have no hesitation to do business with him again or to refer him to someone else that is looking for office space.

Thanks Jeff — By caring and taking care of us, you have distinguished yourself and set an example for others.

## #2 DO YOUR DAILY WORK WITH PASSION!

Tim Carter is an expert on home building, remodeling and repair. There are millions that are out there who know this stuff. But Tim is different. He has taken his trade to the extreme and built an empire at [Askthebuilder.com](http://Askthebuilder.com). Tim's eBooks on these topics are sold like hot cakes. His radio shows are popular and his columns appear in 42 newspapers. Tim gets in excess of 350,000 visitors per month on his site. Talk about passion for his work!

In a completely different setting, take the case of Denise Meyers who carves Native American icons on gourds. Denise sells them for \$6k or more a piece. Each [masterpiece](#) is a demonstration of passion at work!

Can we do anything similar in the technology business?

It's hard work if we are one among the millions of Java programmers that are out there in the world. The question to ask is not how many Java programmers are there in the world but to find out how many of these Java programmers are going about their jobs with true passion. How many of them really are determined to make a difference to this world via their jobs?

Our work will never be the same once we bring PASSION into the equation!

### #3 BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

*What is one thing that takes a long time to build but can be destroyed in no time?*

There are many answers to the above question. My favorite answer is **Trust**. Trust is the bedrock of solid relationships. As you have observed, it takes a while for you to trust someone 100%. For almost the same reasons, there is no *overnight solution* for building strong relationships. It just takes a long time of sustained efforts where each party is cautiously building trust one-step-at-a-time.

In my opinion, there are only two types of relationships (1) long-term and (2) very long-term. The rest are casual transactions. Very long-term relationships provide an unfair advantage but not without an investment (*long-term* explains it all.)

Relationships will sustain only when there is mutual value. One-sided relationships will end sooner or later. Why is this important? Here is one reason: Our tendency is to go and find people that are more powerful than us and try and build a long-term relationship with them. The value to us from such relationships is clear and direct. The key questions are: What about the reciprocal value to the other party? What's in it for them (WIIFT) in this relationship?

One trap that most of us fall into is **entitlement**. Relationships don't happen by entitlement, hierarchy or position. It happens by *design of healthy value exchange*. There are no accidents here.

## #4 DREAM BIG!

Whenever I ask the question — “What is your dream?” I get a variety of answers from people. Some dreams are grand, some are funny, some lack logic and some are unreasonable and so on. This is expected. However, what is interesting is most people have vague dreams such as “I want to be more happy” or “I want to be financially independent” or something of that sort. More interestingly, most dreams are very small — they could almost be goals two or three years out. That is so sad.

Here's my \$.02: *If it is already a dream, why not dream BIG?*

Why do we have to put a limitation on our dreams. It's not real life, it's dream world. There are limitations in the real world but we don't have to extend these limitations to our imagination. Let our imagination be imaginative and let our dreams be unreasonable and seem unrealistic. Watch people who have achieved significant milestones; their dreams were not reasonable when first conceived.

*How do we see it in reality if it's not vividly imagined in our dreams first?*

Go dream BIG and good luck with your dreams!!

PS: Once you dream, if you need help to make them come true, read my friend Marcia's book on that topic — [Make your dreams come true.](#)

## #5 SET THE RIGHT EXPECTATIONS

### “Underpromise and overdeliver”

Easier said than done. Most projects fail even after the team puts in a lot of hard work. Many times the project’s success is not even dependent on the amount of effort that is put into the project. If wrong or unrealistic expectations are set, even the smartest teams can fail. The #1 requirement to succeed in a project is to **set the right expectations for all parties involved**.

Organizations are systems. Very rarely are projects executed in silos. Every project is connected to one or more other projects; a delay in one project has a cascading effect and the impact will be felt in more places than you might have imagined. Understanding these relationships is the foundation of Systems Thinking (take a look at Peter Senge’s [The Fifth Discipline](#) to learn more about this topic). The more you understand Systems thinking, the better you will be at setting expectations as you will be aware of the overall impact of missing a deadline on your project.

Also, remember that expectations keep rising without your knowledge. My friends Michael Weissman and Dave Mosby of [Fresh Perspectives](#) have authored a phenomenal book on this topic called *Paradox of Excellence* in the form of a business fable. It’s a MUST read for anyone who is engaged with a client in some form or fashion.

## #6 ASK FOR HELP

I was thinking of a title like “Leverage” for this post but decided to be more direct, hence the title “Ask for help.”

Most of us know that in some cultures, asking for help has a negative connotation (as it may show a sense of incapability). Most of us don't ask for help and beat ourselves to death trying to figure out everything by ourselves. This is not required. Life can be simpler than that. In fact, I feel that there is more help than you may need out there. The pre-requisite, though, is that you should be *ready to give* when it is your turn. It is a two-way street.

There are so many people out there who have the right knowledge and resources that might solve your problems or open up new opportunities for you. That's why they say that *it's not what you know but who you know that matters*.

Whenever I teach, I always start by saying that since I have not learnt mind reading, it is up to the students to talk and ask for help.

The same is true in business and life. You have to ask and only then shall you receive. *Please make it a point to ask for help from someone this week*. Watch the miracles unfold!!

**Bonus:** You might get a side benefit from asking — **humility** (which I think is a great virtue to have).

## #7 CELEBRATE SMALL VICTORIES

Most of us need a big victory to celebrate but a very small failure to get upset. In other words *we need* really strong reasons to celebrate but not a lot of justification to get upset. In fact, sometimes we are upset for no reason. :)

We are smart people. We know that:

- Ⓐ Failure is the stepping stone of success.
- Ⓑ It's NOT not falling down but standing up every time we fall down that matters.
- Ⓒ A bend in the road is not the end of the road.

and all those cool things. This should make it easy for us to handle small failures. Apparently not! We have trouble facing failures. On the other hand, when we have small victories, we don't have time to celebrate them. We postpone celebrating small victories as most people around us don't celebrate such events. The benchmarks set by the society (in general) for celebrations is very high. We want to be "normal" — so we follow the crowd.

Nobody is surprised when a small failure causes a major upset but everyone will raise their eyebrows if a small victory is celebrated in a big way. Both are extremes but each one gets a different treatment. Happy people do things the other way around. It's fun to be around people who celebrate small victories. They are full of life and they bring life to people around them.

When was the last time you celebrated a small victory? Maybe it's time for a small celebration of a small victory...

## #8 SET HIGHER STANDARDS

When describing why he is so successful, Michael Jordan once mentioned that his secret was to demand more from himself than anybody else would or ever will. Michael Jordan obviously sets higher standards for himself.



In order to have good results, we need to set the right expectations and exceed them consistently. However, if we want outstanding results, we need to operate at higher personal standards than what others expect of us.

Let's take an Olympic event. We remember the gold, silver and bronze winners but not the person in fourth place. The difference may be very small but the person in the fourth place is rarely talked about. Again, the difference between good and outstanding.

When you send your next email, stop for a minute and think about what the recipient will think about your standards from the style and content of the email. What could you do to raise your standards in a simple act of sending an email? It may take you a few more minutes but it may be worth spending that extra time.

## #9 KNOW YOUR VALUES

We all know that values are important. Whether we want to believe it or not, we all have a set of values. Guaranteed! Values, in basic terms are deeply held set of beliefs about what is important to us. Values state what matters most in our lives. Values may change over time but it's important that we know what they are at this point in time. Interestingly, very few people spend their time trying to identify their values. Whenever we make any significant decisions, it will be based on our values so it's important that we know what they are.

There are so many resources available on the Internet to help you identify your core values. Do a search on [Google](#) for "personal values" and you will see a few websites popping up.

Follow whatever model you like, but please do come up with your own list. There is no "right" set of values. They are your values and not knowing what they are may put you at a disadvantage.

One of my close friends has “Family” on the top of the charts and another close friend has “Wealth” on the top. It’s very easy to guess their decision-making patterns.

What are yours?

## #10 PURSUE RIGHT MEMBERSHIPS

What we know is important. Of course, we all know that who we know is more important than what we know. What is also important is how we know who we know. This is where the membership comes in.

We are not revisiting the MBA discussion. But the MBA alumni networks are quite powerful. That is one example. There are many such membership opportunities available. The right place can be, well, a golf club where the people that we want to meet hang out.

Some of these memberships cost a ton of money but I think they are more of investments than expenses. The ROI for the right membership can be huge.

My personal example — membership with [TEC](#), a network of CEOs worldwide, the largest of its kind. When I became a member in 2003, I never imagined the impact it would have on our business. It has been phenomenal.

Each one of us is unique. For me, TEC was great and the timing couldn’t have been better. You have to figure out what the right memberships are at this point in time in your life. What “clubs” should you belong to take your life to the next level? It may take a while to research and find out or you may already know it but have not yet taken the time to pursue the membership seriously.

The right memberships can payoff big time.

## #11 HELP PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES

It is interesting how many of us hoard information and knowledge. Knowledge used to provide competitive advantages, but not anymore!

I have seen it time and again in the IT services industry where if you ask for help, rather than providing the source and explaining how to solve the problem, the tendency for a fellow developer is to actually go and solve the problem. That helps but remember the old adage, “Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” People are happy when their problem is solved but they will be delighted when they learn how to solve it themselves.

One doubt you may have is that if you share everything (including the source) why would anyone come to you again? Would sharing make you dispensable?

My point is that with all the resources that are available, most often, people can find the information all by themselves. By helping people help themselves, you are taking the road less traveled. Next time, when people ask for help, see if you can provide enough information so that the person can solve the problem himself or herself. He or she will thank you for that. You will have the satisfaction of helping someone grow rather than just solving a tactical problem.

## #12 BE A READER

They say *all leaders are readers*. From what I have seen so far, it's true that most successful people read a lot. Most people don't read. My friend and mentor [Tim Sanders](#) tells me

that from the statistics he has, *a manager reads about 0.75 business book in five years*. That's dismal.

My goal is to read about a book a week and this practice has served me well. I have seen people reading a lot more than that. Each person is different. You can set your own goals based on your priorities and needs. What would definitely work is to have a reading plan for the year. Whatever the case — 1 book a quarter, 1 book a month, 3 books in a year – is your choice but have a plan. Most people that I have an opportunity to mentor start with the one book a month plan; together, we come up with a list of 12 books for the year. The choices are based on a variety of factors but the underlying theme is that these books should help take them to the next level. Every month they may not fulfill their promise of reading a book but the idea is to read all 12 books in a year.

If we choose the right books, there will be enough that we can take and apply in our lives. Once we start seeing results, no other motivation is required.

Although the temptation may be to look at the bestseller lists and create your reading list, what might be better is to ask some of your role models about the books that helped them in their journey. You will be amazed at what you will learn.

Happy reading!

## #13 PLAN BY OUTCOMES

Everyday there is so much to do. But if we look back at the end of the week, most of us have a problem identifying a few things that were accomplished. The culprit: planning by activities and not focusing on outcomes.

Granted, an activity or a set of activities will produce outcomes. However, during a week we may perform a number of activities and not produce any outcomes. This by design, may be OK but most often, it's NOT! We get carried away by a number of activities (planned and unplanned) and a week passes by with no outcomes.

What we should all be aware of is that we get rewarded for producing outcomes and not for participating in activities. *If all the activities in which we are participating are leading to no outcomes, there is a problem — a serious problem!* That needs to be fixed asap.

The solution may be as simple as planning our week by outcomes — *what do we want to accomplish this week?* It can be only one outcome or a few outcomes but the deal is to know what results do we want to produce this week. At the end of the week, we can do a quick analysis to see where we are and design the next week accordingly.

## #14 THINK LONG-TERM

If we ask a kid, “What are you doing?” the response you will get is something like “playing”, “reading”, “watching TV”, etc. The time horizon for kids is very short. If we ask “What do you do in school?” again the response will be about what they will do on that particular day in the school.

When we grow up, unfortunately (for most of us) the time horizons don't extend very far. When we ask, “What do you do?” to someone, most often the response will be related to their job and their role in the company. Very rarely, will you hear a passionate answer about how someone is going to change the world. Very rarely will you hear an answer that will cover the time horizon of a lifetime.

I continue to believe that we are becoming a world of “short-term thinkers.” My good friend [Valla](#) told me a few months ago that “*we overestimate what we can achieve in a day and we underestimate what we can achieve in a year.*” This is so true. Take a look at some of your daily “to-do” lists. Very rarely will you check off everything you planned to do that day. Now, take a look at your annual plan (if you don’t have one, please create one right away) and see if that’s the best you can do in a year. You will be amazed at what all you can pack in a year with some discipline and commitment.

We can distinguish ourselves just by refusing to give in to the temptation of “short-term results.” Next time, when someone asks “What do you do?” think of your lifetime as the time horizon and try to answer the question. Again, if you have not thought this through, please don’t try to answer this question in the next few minutes (short-term) as it may take awhile to figure this out (long-term)

## #15 EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY WITH EASE

Come to think about it — life would be pretty boring if there was certainty every step of the way. Unfortunately life is not boring and we have uncertainty in several things in our life. However, most of us can’t handle uncertainty very well. In fact, many of us *panic* when there is uncertainty although, the same people are smart enough to know that there is no way to be certain on everything. *There are no guarantees.* Life presents us with a series of situations and challenges almost on a daily basis. If there is a problem that will affect us (in other words, the solution to the problem is of interest to us), we are eager to respond to it quickly (most of the time) and we want to be certain that we come up with the best response to the problem. None of us are interested in giving a mediocre response to a problem whose solution matters to us deeply. Let us think about this for a minute. I am sure that in many cases

we don't know what the right response is. The right question therefore is, "*Do we have the courage to admit that we don't know the answer?*"

Most often, we are self-conscious and may make up something or provide a diplomatic response. What's really going on in our mind is something like "Maybe I should know the answer", "This is part of my job and I know I am good at this" or "What would others think if I say I don't know" and so on. I urge you to take the challenge and next time you are presented with such a problem or situation respond with "I am not certain about how to handle this." Then watch how new ideas will flow in. Maybe you will decide to call someone and discuss the situation or you will go to the library and pick up a book on a particular topic or you will go to the web and research. You may decide to respond totally different this time around.

One thing that I have realized is that there is more help than you will ever need but only if you are *humble enough to ask*. For that, you need to develop an attitude to embrace uncertainty with ease.

## #16 ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Questions have great power. One right question asked at the right time can change the direction of our lives. Hence, the quality of the questions that we ask ourselves is VERY important. It is for the same reason that we need to choose our company very carefully. If we are surrounded with the right people and for some reason miss asking the right questions, someone in our group might ask the right question for us.

If we are not going in the direction that will ultimately lead us to our goals, one of the problems may be the questions that we ask ourselves. It may be time to reframe some of the questions. Here are a few examples:

- ① Original question: What am I getting?  
Reframed question: **What am I becoming?**
- ② Original question: Why is this happening to me?  
Reframed question: **What can I learn from this?**
- ③ Original question: Why can't he/she understand me?  
Reframed question: **How can I communicate so that he/she can understand me?**

I urge you to look at some of the common questions that you ask yourself and see how you can reframe them to make them more effective. I have a few more examples and will post them in the next few days. You are welcome to comment with your set of original and re-framed questions.

## #17 ENGAGE WITH A COACH

Let me see. What I really mean is we should seriously engage with one or more mentors or coaches for our life and business. Sports people have had this figured out for a long time. It works and we just have to experience it to believe it.

In my last post, I talked about needing to ask the right questions. The right coaches are great at doing this. I have three mentors/coaches and am fortunate to have been associated with them for years. Every interaction I have had with a coach has been fascinating, to say the least. *Many times the issue that started the discussion is not even the real issue that I was supposed to address.* Coaches are great at getting to the bottom of things by asking the right questions.



The beauty of a good coaching relationship is that coaches have no agenda of their own in this relationship except to make us more effective. If you observe any other relationship, there are multiple agendas at play.

Many of my friends who were former skeptics and cynical about what a coach could do to their life now say that their relationship with a coach has made a significant impact on their lives.

Once again, this is one of the [long-term](#) projects that you should undertake. Although possible, don't expect to see [instant results](#) the day you have a meeting with your new coach. It takes a long time, but the rewards are sweet and substantial.

## #18 BE RELEVANT

Seth had an [interesting post](#) about brainless PR folks trying to get his attention by sending him irrelevant press releases. That brings me to the next post in the [“Distinguish yourself”](#) series.

A few months ago, I received an unsolicited email from my (now) good friend [Bob Thomas](#). It was an announcement about a brand new magazine called [Enterprise Open Source Journal](#), the first magazine dealing with open source in the enterprise. Being in the open source business for the last four years, I did not consider this spam and, in fact, thanked Bob for sending this to me, albeit unsolicited. Why? One key reason was that this information was very relevant to my [business](#) and myself.

Relevancy is key to move ahead. If you remember some of your interactions where you “tuned out”, one of the reasons may have been that the other person continued to say things that

were not “relevant” to you. Now the key question: *How many times did you continue to talk with someone about something that was not relevant to them?*

If we are not relevant, people will tune out and our messages won’t get through. Relevancy is a key factor to increase your likeability says my friend and mentor [Tim Sanders](#) in his new book [The Likeability Factor](#). Striving for relevance in every key interaction (with your clients, co-workers, family members, etc.) can make a big difference in your life and in the lives of people around you. This may sound obvious but let me say it anyway — if you want to increase relevance, start by truly [caring](#) for people with whom you interact. Once you care, you will start taking notice of what is relevant to them rather than focusing on what is relevant to you.

## #19 GET BACK ON YOUR FEET FAST!

One rule that has been time tested in life is, *“sometimes you win and sometimes you lose”*. However smart you are there are times when you will goof up or fail. *How fast you recover from a goof up or failure will be a key factor in determining whether you are part of the statistics or stand out*. One of my friends used to say “either you succeed or you LEARN”. Actually, failure is not the problem in most cases. What you do about the failure is. How quickly do you recover from a failure and start marching again. In other words, *it’s not the falling down but getting up quickly every time you fall down* that’s important. History is filled with lessons (i.e. Abraham Lincoln, Colonel Sanders, etc.) where people did not accept failure and ultimately succeeded.

They say that nobody can stop an idea whose time has come. However, just having an idea rarely makes anyone successful. One needs to execute it. *Execution is where the rubber meets the road*. Ask any successful person on their journey to success and you will see that the path

was never a straight line. There is no shortcut to success. One of my all time favorite books [The Innovation Paradox](#) deals with this concept in great detail. What I am saying will be very obvious if you look back at your own life and think through most of the failures. Imagine yourself and think about the feelings you had right when the failure occurred. What are your feelings now about the same failure? Very different, indeed! What looked like a huge failure a few years or months ago will seem insignificant after some time. If this is true, one way to trick your mind is to fast-forward your life whenever a failure occurs; then, observe what you will think of this failure a few years from now. This is a way of reframing that will help you to get back on your feet.

In summary, I want to say that failures happen and you will fail or fall down at times. *If you want to distinguish yourself, learn to get back on your feet fast every time you fall down.*

## #20 LEAD A VOLUNTEER EFFORT

All of us know that leadership is more than holding a title or a position. However, it is difficult for many people to start an initiative without positional power. Undertaking a lead role in a volunteer effort will solve that problem. Leading a volunteer can be hard work but the rewards are great.

If you are leading a team of volunteers you know that:

- Ⓐ almost all the team members are in this for the cause and not for the money.
- Ⓑ each team member has an option to quit at any time.
- Ⓒ each team member is already walking the extra mile.
- Ⓓ each team member has other choices for volunteering their time.

In other words, it takes a lot of effort to lead and succeed in a volunteer position. What it will make of you, however, is priceless.

Succeeding in leading a volunteer effort will provide several benefits:

- Ⓐ you will spend time for a great cause.
- Ⓑ very few people lead a volunteer effort so you are in a minority (a.k.a., distinguished yourself).
- Ⓒ great networking beyond your professional circles.
- Ⓓ short-cut to developing your leadership skills.

## #21 BALANCE INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

All of us know that if you we want to make sweeping changes, we need to innovate. If done incrementally (in small improvements), it won't attract much attention. [FedEx](#) became a success story as they changed people's expectations (absolutely, positively overnight) of delivery services, delivered on their promise and charged a premium for it. However, innovation projects are never "complete". Since then, FedEx has embarked on continuous improvement of their "absolutely, positively overnight" service. One such improvement is information sharing. Every shipper and receiver (or anyone with the tracking #) can find out exactly where the shipment is at a particular point in time. FedEx customers may not need all the information that they provide but making the information available will only enhance the credibility of the company.

One more point to note is that radical innovations are risky, too. Not all of them succeed. So, you should ensure that there is a "tolerance" for failure at your workplace. Second, you

should be willing to emotionally detach from this failure and embark on the next innovation project. Whenever an innovation project succeeds, the next immediate step would be to put that project on a “continuous improvement” roadmap. Because no project is really “complete”. So, in summary a good framework can be “**Innovation → Continuous Improvement → Innovation**”.

Take a look at all the projects that are taking place in your life and it’s easy to categorize each one of them under “Innovation” or “Continuous Improvement”. If there are no innovation projects, there is a serious problem. If there are past innovation projects that are not under a “Continuous improvement” plan, there is an issue too. *The beauty is in balancing the Innovation and Continuous Improvement initiatives.*

## #22 LEARN TO SELL

If you are not in sales, this might surprise you. Many of you may be thinking “*I don’t ever intend to be in sales. This does not apply to me!*”

Believe me, it DOES! Everyone of us is selling something almost on a daily basis. We may be selling our abilities to perform a job, our ideas or our point of view.

Unfortunately, the sales profession does not get a lot of respect from many quarters. Many of us won’t accept that everyone is a salesperson in some way or the other.

A key point to note is that “**selling**” does not always refer to the actual selling of a product or a service. However, the same principles of sales apply even if you want to “sell an idea” to your co-worker, boss or client. If you can master some of the basic principles of sales, your daily life will be simpler.

As a starter, take a look at Mahan Khalsa's book [Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play](#). One of the best sales books I have ever read. Whether or not you are a salesperson, you will enjoy this book.

## #23 LEARN SYSTEMS THINKING

If everyone in a company learns the basics of “systems thinking” life would be very simple. Here is a definition of a system from the late Austrian Biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy:

*A system is an entity which maintains its existence through the mutual interaction of its parts.*

Systems thinking, in essence, is an understanding of the system as a whole and the mutual interaction of the underlying parts of the system. The effect of changing one part needs to be understood.

You will find systems everywhere. An organization is a system, the project that you are working on is a system. Imagine a scenario where everyone on your project has a solid understanding of the goals of the project, players involved, inter-relationships between the components of the project and understanding of the overall impact of success (or failure) of the project across the organization. Automatically, team members would become more accountable as they have insight into how their piece affects every other piece of the project. They know exactly where their piece fits in the overall puzzle.

For starters, please read [The Fifth Discipline](#) by Peter Senge. This book provides an excellent introduction to systems thinking.

## #24 WALK AWAY FROM FREE

The general temptation for many of us is to receive things that are “free”. Think about that for a second and see if it is really worth receiving those things that are free. Here are some of my thoughts:

- ① I think there is nothing that is “free.” Everything has a price and it has to be paid. The price may not be money.
- ② Sometimes “free” things are “free” because of the value that they bring (i.e. close to nothing).
- ③ Once you receive something for “free” although you may not have paid anything, remember that there is a powerful force of reciprocation that is generated within you and you will feel compelled to give back. What are you planning to give back?
- ④ If the “free” stuff is really worth something, who is underwriting the “cost” associated with the “free” stuff and why are they doing it?

I can go on but here is the gist: walk away from “free”, it is not worth it. **If the offer is very compelling and you ought to take it, then please decide how you will contribute back to the source in exchange for what you received.**

**PS:** I urge you to not to take the above literally. I am referring only to those “free” offers that you know are not really “free”. When I posted this on my blog, I got so many mails talking about “free” knowledge that is available on the Net. Think about the many manifestos on ChangeThis.com for a second — all of them are free but the contributors have already received a lot (publicity, branding, etc.) by giving this away for “free”.

## #25 INFLUENCE THE INFLUENCERS

This post may seem like it is targeted at sales professionals but my guess is that it is equally applicable to professionals at all levels.

Whenever we are making a point, getting our ideas across, we tend to focus only on the decision makers. This may work but many times, the better approach is to look for the influencers in the group. There will always be one or two key influencers in the group. The group will typically look forward to the opinion of these key influencers before they make up their own opinion.

I learnt this concept from leadership guru — [John Maxwell](#). John has a great way of explaining how to identify the influencer within a group. When you are talking to the group and you make a statement on which the group has to take a stand observe what the members of the group typically do. Most often, they look for the non-verbal queues of the influencer. For example, if the influencer is nodding, many folks in the group will agree with what was said and if the influencer is shaking his head, many members in the group will disagree with what is being said.

I wish you the very best and hope you influence lots and lots of influencers!!

### LOOKING FOR MORE..

I have continued to blog on this topic and of course, there are more than 25 ways to distinguish yourself. Here is the link if you want to see what's latest on the same topic:

<http://blog.lifebeyondcode.com/DistinguishYourself>



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## BUY THE BOOK

For more details or to buy a copy of Rajesh Setty's book, *Beyond Code*, click here.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rajesh Setty is an entrepreneur, author and teacher.

Setty serves as the chairman of [CIGNEX Technologies, Inc](http://www.cignex.com), a company he co-founded in 2000. His role there is to evangelize the use of open source software in large and mid-size companies.

Setty wrote his first book when he was nine years old and got it published by the time he was thirteen. Six books were published by the time he was sixteen. His latest book, *Beyond Code: Learn to distinguish yourself in 9 simple steps*, (foreword by Tom Peters) is scheduled to be published in October 2005. You can read more about this upcoming book at the companion website <http://www.lifebeyondcode.com>.

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
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