



Rocket to the top of your career

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By Mike Hammer

FROM THE PAGES OF **MEN'S LIFE TODAY**

Leroy Chiao has literally reached the absolute heights of his profession: He's one of the most accomplished and respected astronauts in NASA history.

During his stellar 15-year career, Leroy logged 229 days in space, flew three space shuttle missions and eventually earned the honor of commanding the International Space Station. He's also one of only 166 people to walk in space -- a feat he accomplished six times -- and was one of the few Americans to ever pilot a Russian Soyuz spacecraft.

We figured if this guy managed to overcome staggering odds (there aren't many spaceman openings on the job boards, you know) to succeed in one of the most elite professions on Earth and above it, he must know something about building a career. So we put on our jet packs to catch up with Leroy, asking him to share his flight plan for success. (That's right: We have jet packs in the office. Don't you?) Here are his inside tips to keep you soaring toward your goals.

Be Prepared

"This is important in any aspect of life. You need to be properly prepared mentally and/or physically for any task. Learn what's expected of you and make sure you familiarize yourself with all the requirements of any challenge. You *need* to walk yourself through them mentally to discover any possible gaps. Proper preparation will bring proper execution. Like we say, 'Train like you fly, and fly like you train.'

"We prepped endlessly when I was training to build the International Space Station. I would prepare in a water tank in my suit 10 hours for every hour I walked in space. With that level of preparation, everything becomes second nature. In reality, nothing goes as planned -- but preparation offers you options.

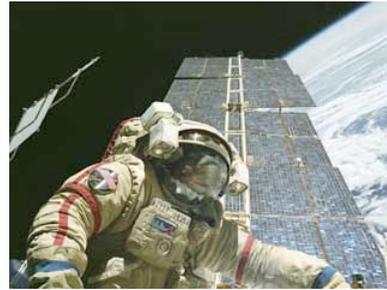
"Once, I was piloting the shuttle, and as we were about 1,000 meters from the space station, all the alarms went off. There was a failure in the auto [pilot] system. Our ship started speeding up instead of slowing down. But my training clicked in and we ran the emergency procedures I was taught. I took control and stopped the spacecraft only 50 meters from the station. If I hadn't gone to manual, we could've hit the station and killed everybody."

Never Lose Your Determination

"This is a quality you'll need to achieve any goal. In my case, it started way before I became an astronaut. NASA looks for persistence. The typical applicant goes through several interviews and rejections before they qualify.

"I put through my first application when I was still in grad school... and I was rejected. And while I was disappointed, I was determined to try again and make it. So I finished off my Ph.D. and put in another application... and I was accepted. I wasn't going to walk away from a challenge.

"Never let anyone deny you your dreams. Never let disappointment get you down. And keep your



Astronaut Leroy Chiao participating in the first of two sessions of extravehicular activities by the Expedition 10 crew during their six-month mission aboard the ISS.
(©NASA.gov)

focus on your goals. But remember: You need to work hard enough to achieve them."

Be Innovative

"At NASA, you receive very specific training, as in any job. But you need to be able to take that preparation and use it to respond to situations that you may not have expected. You need to be able to think on your feet and show your boss you can be innovative to find solutions.

"After a launch, something unexpected always happens: It's how you deal with it that separates you from the pack.

"Once, when I was on one of my space walks and working on the space station, I was using a foot restraint that allowed me to use both hands to unfold a giant antenna. But there was a piece of equipment in my way that wouldn't allow me to reach the antenna. I substituted a tether for the foot restraint. This gave me the flexibility to maneuver around the obstruction and do the work without being bound by the restraint. It was dangerous, but I was able to innovate because I knew the task so well. It saved the mission."

Remember: No Task Is Too Small

"As a kid, I worked at McDonald's, and even then there was a lot of detail. Even though I was just making burgers, I had to get the right number of burgers done and out on time. You're still learning to be a part of a team.

"This would carry over into my training sessions as an astronaut candidate when we had to go through systems checks over and over. We checked every last detail endlessly to see what the failures might be and how to deal with them. It was so tedious! But in flights, you have to recognize those failures when they occur and how to troubleshoot them. It could save your own life -- and those of your crew.

"Whether it's reading a boring book for homework or doing menial tasks at a job early in your career, the key is this: Do the best you can. This way, you'll learn how to be successful."

Mike Hammer is a writer and former editor of Maxim, Stuff and Shock. As a journalist, he's in an orbit way above the rest.

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