



The Social Capitalist: Patty Azzarello

Patty Azzarello built her career as a successful Silicon Valley executive on a rich foundation of social capital. She was the youngest GM at Hewlett Packard at 33, the head of a \$1 bil software business at 35, and a CEO at 38. In her fantastic new book *Rise: 3 Practical Steps for Advancing Your Career, Standing Out as a Leader, and Liking Your Life*, she shares the many secrets that made this stratospheric rise not just possible, but deeply satisfying.

Patty's Skills Session is focused on the skills and tactics needed to "sell" yourself inside your organization – an important facet of building a strong internal network that supports you and propels you forward. Among other great takeaways, you'll learn: why "follow your passion" can be career- and soul-destroying advice, and what to do instead; the two-step personal branding secret that quickly established her husband as a superstar at his new company; and how the world's most respected executives make it seem like they know all the answers, even when they don't.

This is an edited transcript from a Social Capitalist Skills Session. The Social Capitalist is sponsored programming of myGreenlight, the only comprehensive online learning platform for critical relationship development skills.

Skills Sessions are 30-minute recorded chats focused on helping listeners master specific disciplines in the relational and social arts. You can also check out Social Capitalist Live Events, our interactive interview series dedicated to delivering in-depth discussion on relationship science with the best and brightest thought leaders in business and academia.

SARA: Hello, I'm Sara Grace, Co-Founder and Program Director of myGreenlight. Welcome to another Social Capitalist skill session. Today, I'm here with Patty Azzarello, the author of *Rise: Three*

Practical Steps for Advancing Your Career, Standing Out As a Leader, and Liking Your Life. Patty, Welcome.

PATTY: Hi. Thank you.

SARA: Thanks for joining us. So let me start by saying that I am a huge fan of the book, as is Keith Ferrazzi, who in fact, wrote the foreword. I think of Patty's book as a kind of *Never Eat Alone*, but specifically for future corporate leaders. Like *Never Eat Alone*, it's extraordinarily "how-to" and tactical around building relationships but more focused on—I would say—building internal relationships within a large organization, as opposed to the more expansive "go out in the world and connect" theme of *Never Eat Alone*.

As Keith writes in the foreword, "Patty never forgets that success is about more than incremental or even stratospheric gains in your career. It's about enjoying your work and nurturing the relationships you make along the way.

Now quickly, about Patty: She was the youngest GM at Hewlett-Packard at 33, the head of a \$1 billion software business at 35 and a CEO at 38. In other words, this is a hundred percent the book of a practitioner, not a theorist. And that's why I'm so looking forward to this conversation today.

So, coming to my first question. A little bit of a personal question before we shift more into the tactical, nitty-gritty. So Patty, you focus in the book quite a bit on how to create a kind of "high powered executive career." But to do so in a way that allows you "to still like your life," as it goes in the subhead. And you offer a lot of wise advice around that. So first of all, that's an interesting tension.

You do a really great job of addressing it and giving people tips to help ease it.

I get the sense from both your wisdom and from the book that you're someone who's really, truly, personally lived that question, how to like your life in the context of a high-stress career. So if you could start us off with some background on your own career trajectory—which was indeed, stratospheric—and talk about how that helped inform *Rise*, I think that would be a great starting place.

PATTY:

Sure. So I started my career as an electronic engineering major out of school in an entry-level engineering job, and ultimately worked my way into many kinds of jobs. I did sales and marketing. I ran a software development organization. And ultimately, worked my way up to becoming a CEO of a software company. I also, when I worked at Hewlett-Packard, ran a billion-dollar, global software business, and so got experience both in small companies and running large, global businesses.

As I went through that career, number one, I had a lot of help. I had mentors and I had a lot of smart people who cared about me, helping me. And I just felt like they were telling me secrets. They were telling me this stuff that not everybody was hearing. And it made all the difference in terms of me both being able to get ahead, and being able to enjoy my life along the way.

One of the things about me that is just part of who I am is that I hate wasting time and energy. It just really drives me crazy. So I'm always looking for the way to do things the most effectively and the most efficiently, and just taking the struggle and the waste out of the process of getting there. When I look at my career, I think it

was that need to kind of eliminate that struggle and that wasting time that was really the beginning of me figuring out how you can build a career and your life at the same time.

Because you still have to work hard. And if you read the book, you'll find I'm not telling you that you don't have to work hard. But what you have to figure out is a way to work that so that most of your energy is moving you forward, so that you're not just toiling away, doing lots of thankless work, with that feeling like you're not getting anywhere. Because that's what makes you unhappy. And if you can get on top of your work and manage your work in a way that it doesn't consume a hundred percent of you, that gives you an opportunity to still have energy to enjoy your life.

SARA: I instantly think of a passage in the book where you talk about having the same brand at work and at home. So that essentially, you don't have that horrible energy drain of trying to have two alternate personalities.

PATTY: Oh, absolutely. When you either hate your job or you feel like you have to have a personality lobotomy every Monday morning to go into the office, that consumes a tremendous amount of energy. It's just too hard. And so a big part of my philosophy that makes your work more enjoyable is to bring your whole self to work. To go to work in a way that is true to your natural strengths and your core values, where you actually get energy from the work that you do, versus draining all your energy as soon as you set foot in the door.

SARA: Exactly. You know, the early part of your answer, regarding mentors, brought to mind another question. You mentioned that your mentors shared with you their secrets, things that they

weren't sharing with others. Do you think there's something in your style of connecting with your peers, bosses, whoever these mentors were, that made them more apt to open up to you? Is that something that you can pass on to others?

PATTY:

No one has ever asked me that before, and I'm fascinated by that question. I think there's kind of a "yes" and "no" to that. One of the things that I realized is that so many people try to do a career and never get mentors.

And I think, "Why on earth would you do that?" That's like saying, "I want to climb Mount Everest. But I'm going to do it without a guide and without a sherpa." Sure, you could try. But why on earth would you?

And so I think that the part of my personality that caused mentors to help me was that I was really open to it and I really appreciated it. And I made it fun for them. My experience is that people like to help, but they also like to know that their help has had an impact. If you go into a mentoring relationship and you show yourself as being very open, and then you actually try the stuff the mentor tells you to do, and then you go back them and say, "Hey, I did that and it worked!" - they like that! And that inclines them to give you more help.

I've mentored a number of people throughout my career. Some of the people are like that, and other people just seem to be sitting in this relationship begrudgingly. Their ego is preventing them from being open to getting help. And that's a real problem.

SARA: Right. So be open and aware, and let them know that they've had an impact. Going back to the theme of liking your life, I love that in the book you basically take a bold stance against the de rigueur professional and development advice that everyone follow their passions. That chapter is called, "Do What You Love' Is Bad Advice." Can you tell us about that?

PATTY: Yeah. I do realize that I'm going up against some heavy hitters who go into the world telling everybody, "Do what you love and the money will follow." That advice never made any sense to me. And it seemed—it really seemed like bad advice.

I love my family. You know, I love my hobbies. I love the things I do with my leisure time. But nobody gives me money for that. And I see so many people – poets, musicians, artists – who love what they do. But then they try to make a living at it, and they just suffer and struggle. What they end up doing is ruining the thing they have passion for. Now, I'm not suggesting that instead of that, you sell your soul and you hate your job just to make money. That's not the right answer either.

But I like to focus on the concept of "Energy, Not Love." Instead of forcing yourself to think you're supposed to love your work, think instead about, "What gives you energy? What types of work give you energy? Is it working with large groups of people? Is it working on your own? Is it solving problems? Is it communicating? What are your natural strengths?"

Where your natural strengths and your energy align, if you can work in that zone, the work is going to feel good. You're going to have energy for it and you're going to be really good at it. If you can

focus earning your money from work that you have a lot of energy for, then you've got time and energy to also enjoy your passions in life. *And* to have some money, and that helps you enjoy your passions in life as well.

The other part of that advice that just makes it feel like bad advice to me is that I see so many people who have good jobs. They actually have jobs that they have some energy for. They're not miserable. They're doing really well. But they're walking through life feeling like they're a failure because somebody told them they're supposed to love their job...and they don't love it enough. And I just think that's such a shame.

These people should feel like successes. And they should be enjoying their life and just breaking that rule that "If you don't love your work and it's completely fulfilling, you're failing." I just think that's a shame.

SARA: Oh, that's such good advice. Maybe you could postscript that with another story I loved in the book, which is about how you turned your frustration with technology into an opportunity to do something that gave you energy, which is essentially, to help with the frustration with technology.

PATTY: You know, I built my career as a technology business leader. And the secret throughout my career is, I hate technology. I was never fascinated by technology. And so many people around me were just, like, truly, truly fascinated with technology. And so for a while, that scared me. And I thought, "I could never be successful as a technology business leader. Because that's not one of my core strengths and values."

But what I realized is that technology was indeed really annoying to use. It's getting better in the last five years or so, but 15, 20 years ago, technology was really, really annoying to use. It didn't work the way it said it was supposed to work. Most user interfaces were confusing. It with hard to get it installed and get it going. And it was just really aggravating. And so that's what I had passion around. I had passion around how aggravating it was. And so in every role—I did this in product management roles, I did it in sales roles and I did it in engineering leadership and general management roles—I focused my organization on making technology less annoying.

I got my teams very focused on the end-user and what their experience was going to be when they interacted with our technology. And wouldn't you know it? Making it easier to use was a good business proposition. All of the businesses where I did that ended up growing ahead of market, because we took into account the fact that humans have to use this stuff. And I was insisting that it had to be less annoying.

SARA: So you solved your own problem, which then made you more successful and solved everyone else's problem too.

PATTY: Yes. That worked out well.

SARA: All right. So let's shift now into the tactical. In the book, you divide your advice, your tactics, your how-to, into three sections: Do Better, Look Better, and Connect Better. And here in this interview, I'm going to focus on sort of a subset of Look Better—although actually, the questions come from all of the sections—that I would

loosely call “How to sell yourself within your organization.” So the first thing that popped out for me was this “brand building exercise” that’s meant to help in bringing your brand to life so that you’re consciously shaping your reputation in your company. Can you take us through that?

PATTY:

“Brand” is a really misunderstood concept in business. Even marketing people sometimes misunderstand brand. They think “brand” is about your colors or your logo or how you promote yourself. And that’s just not the point. Your brand is about who you are and what you stand for.

And you can’t just make something up and tell people, “This is what my brand is.” The way your brand comes to life is by being granted to you by others. Others will tell you what your brand is, based on their experience with you, and the things that they see and hear you doing. The way they see you behaving most consistently and frequently. That’s what your brand is. So it’s kind of scary when you realize in the moment that, “I have a personal brand today, whether I know it or not. It’s there. I’m projecting something.”

And once you realize that you are being seen in a particular way, then developing your personal brand is really about understanding how you are perceived, and then doing some things in a thoughtful, purposeful way— creating some behaviors in a thoughtful, purposeful way—that show the world the kinds of things that you want to be known for.

In the book, I go through some steps of how to decide what you want to be known for. Then I have you come up with two examples

of different behaviors that would be good ways to show that. And then you come up with two other behaviors that would degrade that impression of you. It's a really powerful thing to figure out what you want to be known for, and then give yourself an opportunity to do some of those behaviors on purpose.

SARA: That calls up another question. What that really means is that once you've been really conscious about what behaviors you want to adopt, you have to really consistently start to change them over time. Do you have tips for how people can have a sort of daily vigilance over these new behaviors that they're trying to take on? Or at least pivot a little bit toward?

PATTY: So, I always use my husband as an example when I talk about brand, because I think it's a really good one. He was starting a new job as a CIO. My husband is a really, really smart guy, but he gets bored really easily. And the thought of his brand of being known as "that's the smart man over there," just seemed far too boring for him. So we decided that "clever" was a better way to describe him than "smart."

But also in this new job, he didn't want to just be "the CIO, the technology guy who was clever about technology." He's also a very action-oriented businessperson. And so what he decided to do was to partner those two concepts, before he walked in the door, to start this new job. He was going to partner the concept of being really clever and then being a really action-oriented businessperson. And so he gave himself a reminder – a mental trick. A trigger, like you were asking about, of "applied clever." He wanted his brand to be "applied clever."

And so what that meant is that in every single meeting, in every single presentation, in every single phone call, in every single interaction he had with his new peers and team, if he was in danger of saying something clever as a standalone thing, he had that reminder. He had that trigger to say, “I need to partner that with an action statement”: “I think we should move in this direction with technology. And here’s what it’ll do in the business. And here’s how we will take action on that.”

From the very beginning, making sure in every interaction he tuned that behavior, he was able to present himself in a very powerful and consistent way, immediately, and make a very strong, positive impression right away. Versus it taking weeks or months for people to get to know what his value was to the organization.

And so what I always tell people when they think about brand is, you know you’re done with the exercise when you have that reminder. You have that mental reminder that’s in your head. And you’re using it. Everyday, day in, day out, in every situation. You’re thinking, *How am I being perceived? And do I need to tune what I’m doing so I’m perceived the way I want to be perceived?*

SARA:

My brain is spinning in thinking about how to apply that. In a very similar vein, you stress the need to consciously shape the impression and the impact you’re making on others. And that would be one example. Another thing you talk about is “Presenting Versus Performing,” with a kind of funny origin story of how you got there. Can you tell us about that?

PATTY:

This is one of those secrets, really, that one of my mentors shared with me at one point, when I was getting ready to do a presentation

for a group of high-level executives. He said, “Patty, remember...half of their brain is judging your content. The other half is making a really harsh judgment of you, and if they think you're any good or not. And you are making an impression in that moment.” And it was sort of a wakeup call: “Don’t waste your 15 minutes of fame.”

That advice really kind of crystallized for me while watching an episode of *American Idol* many years ago. Simon Cowell, who was the industry person, said to one of the contestants their first time on the big stage, “You missed an opportunity to perform. You sang fine. But you sang like you were still trying out for the judges. You have the national television audience and this large stadium full of people. And you didn’t perform.”

And I thought, you know, there really is a difference. I started watching people and thinking about it. You have an opportunity when you're speaking to go that extra notch, to really perform instead of just “running through your data.” And some people get concerned about this, because they think I’m talking about a particularly showy type of personality. And it’s really not that.

It’s not about having a big personality. It’s not about being loud and dramatic and waving your hands around...and doing that sort of performance. What I find the crux of the issue here is, is the people who are just presenting data—and “I’m obligated to go through these slides,” that’s presenting. The people who take that and make that transformation into a performance, it’s because they make it clear that they’ve taken ownership for what the outcome of that communication needs to be.

Their focus and their involvement is not just on the data in the moment. They're making it clear that, "Something's supposed to happen as a result of this communication. And during this communication, I'm taking ownership to make sure that the right actions happen when I'm done with this communication." And if you can make that jump from just presenting to really taking more ownership for what that communication is supposed to do, you're going to come across as more authentic, as more engaged, as caring and more powerful. And that's what turns it into a performance.

SARA: That's great. The other thing I tell people when they worry about being too performative, is that it's not about being showy, as you say. But it's about more about extending generosity toward the listener. Having thought through, *What could they need to hear, to get engaged, and to actually hear as opposed to listen?*

PATTY: Absolutely. And that's another concept in the book that I talk about, as well, being more relevant to your audience. Another harsh reality is that if you don't do the homework that you just suggested of figuring out what your audience cares about ahead of time, and you just start explaining and trying to educate them about what you do, you're not relevant. Because you're not talking about something they care about.

Here's another trick: Learn not only what people care about, but learn the words they use to describe it. Create a new dictionary. Leave your dictionary at home. And then when you talk to them, talk about the things they care about. And only use their dictionary. And then you're showing that generosity to the audience, as you've talked about. You're showing that you care what they care about. And you've made that move to make it more relevant for them.

SARA: Excellent. So let's, lightning-quick, move to the next tactic on our list, "Getting On The List." Talk about what the List is, and maybe give everyone one suggestion for how to get on it.

PATTY: This is a big deal. If you are going for any kind of big job—you know, promotion, big interview opportunity—there is a list of people that the hiring manager will consider for that role. And if you're not on that list, you're not getting the job. I remember, I said this to someone who was not my mentor but became my mentor, in that moment, when he said, "What do you want to do?"

I said, "I want to be a general manager." And he said, "Well, what are you doing about it?" And I said, "Well, first and foremost, I'm trying to figure out what you need to do to get on the list of people who are considered for general management jobs." And he said, "Who told you that?" And I said, "You know, no one. But I kind of figured that's the way it worked." And he got a big smile on his face and said, "You're absolutely right."

Then he said, "So what are you doing about it?" And I said, "Well, you know..." And I gave him a list, "Working hard and doing this and that..." And he's going, "Do you have a mentor?" And I said, "Well, I consider my boss my mentor. But I'm actually looking for a mentor. And by the way, would you be my mentor?"

He just cracked up. He said, "Did you come here to ask me that?" And I said, "Well, no. But you brought it up! So why wouldn't I?" And so he became my mentor. And he actually still tells that story, because it amuses him as well.

But this is really the crux of getting on the List. Number one, you have to understand that the hiring manager will create a list of people. The way they create that list—here's the important part—is, you have to know who the hiring manager listens to. They will say, "Who should I consider?"

You have to figure out who is that small circle of people that the hiring manager listens to, and then you have to develop a relationship with one of those people. And you have to get them to put you on The List. If you can get a mentor who is in the circle that the hiring manager listens to, that's the magic formula. That's the best that you can do. But basically, you can ask their assistant, their assistants know a lot. You can ask HR people, you can just fish around. It's not that hard to learn who an executive listens to. Then you've got your goal sheet and you figure out, "What are my best chances for creating a relationship with one of these people?" And that's how you get on The List.

SARA: Terrific. We have time for one more tactic: Bluffing, which you essentially suggest is the difference between the confident leader and the rest of us. It's not really necessarily that they know everything, but they're really experts at bluffing in the moments that they don't. So can you give the listeners a flash course on that?

PATTY: This really goes into the category of, "People who achieve success are willing to be scared and uncomfortable to do it." And if you try to build your career and be comfortable and confident that you know everything along the way, it just takes too long. You just cannot get there. What I realized is that all executives are bluffing. This actually came to me through an executive coach. I was confessing, "You know, I feel like I'm going to get found out,

because I don't know everything." And she just laughed at me. She said, "Patty, every executive in the world feels the same way." And I was like, "Really?" And then I realized, "Man, is that ever true."

It's impossible to know everything about everything that goes on in your organization. That's why you *have* an organization. So you can find that information, because people that work for you know it. But if you're in a presentation, if you're at a press conference, you know, if you're up at a podium somewhere, and something comes up and you don't know it, it's just not the end of the world. You just can't let yourself get scared and feel unworthy because somebody asked you a question you didn't know.

So you develop techniques to answer – for example, deferring it to answer at a later time. Or, one of my favorite, favorite things that I learned from somebody about this: When somebody asks you a question that you're having trouble answering, say, "Before I answer that, could I understand a little bit more your motivation for asking that question? What is the important part of that question to you? I want to make sure I answer the right question." Ninety percent of the time, when they explain why they're asking, they'll say something that makes you think, "Oh! I can answer that. I know what to say."

If you don't get scared, if you calm down, and you take that extra step to just really reach out—again, as you said with generosity to your audience—and understand a little bit more about why they care, you typically find you've got something you can say that's going to get you through that moment.

And then if they need more data, you can say, “You know what? That’s a little deep for the level that we’re talking at here today in this group. Contact me afterwards and I’ll make sure I follow up with that information.” And that’s all you need to do.

SARA: That’s it.

PATTY: And not worry about it. And realize that every executive on the planet is doing the same thing.

SARA: I think that linguistic parry is just a super, super great tip. All right, so we just have time for one more question. I want to wrap up on a high note, by shifting to the Making Connections section of the book, which is very, very myGreenlight-friendly as far as what we encourage others to do. It’s really about seeing your success as inherently connected to the success and to the happiness of everyone who you’re working with. It’s so clear in reading your books that the locomotive—and also, really, the light—of your career was your care for the people who you worked with. And so I’m wondering if you feel that this was a differentiator for you, or if it’s a common theme among those who really ascend to the heights of success in their company?

PATTY: You know, I think that it is an absolutely a necessary and a common theme. The most successful people are so successful because they get a lot of help. It’s not because they’re so good that they didn’t need help. As you said, really engaging others in a way that it’s clear that you care about them, you care about their career and their life, you are building loyalty by the fact that you care. And you’re spending the energy on helping others find reasons to care. That really is a locomotive force in someone’s career.

I see this happen at all levels. I see some salespeople who are slogging at deals all by themselves. And other salespeople come back to the company, and they've got the whole company working for them! They've got the graphic design people creating custom stuff for their clients, or a custom webpage. They've got the financing people, the technical support people, people at all levels, suddenly, are on their team. Involved in their deal. And helping them be successful.

That's really the model that I carry in my head. It's not about being a big, powerful executive that can order people around. It's more about being like that salesperson. The force of their personality and their generosity has built an extra team. If you go through your life and your career reaching out to people and giving them real reasons to help you, appreciating their help, and making genuine connections, you're building that extra team.

And then whatever you have to accomplish in life, you're never slogging at it all by yourself. There's always an army of people who are motivated to help you. And that is absolutely a trait of the most successful people. I have had a lot of help from wonderful people, throughout my whole career.

SARA:

Well, that's an excellent place to finish, and is regrettably all we have time for. So to everyone who's listening, I'd like to remind you this is only a tiny sliver of the wisdom and the how-to that you'll find in *Rise: Three Practical Steps for Advancing Your Career*, *Standing Out As A Leader*, and *Liking Your Life*, which is really a complete handbook for success in managing teams and your own career, in any organization.

Patty, thank you so much. Please accept my gratitude and the community's gratitude for sharing your time, your wisdom and your charisma with us today.

PATTY: It was my pleasure. Thank you, Sara.

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