



By JUSTIN DRAEGER

# Getting that promotion before it's time

**O**NWARD AND UPWARD! That's the way we may feel about our career as we work toward the rewards that come from steady promotions. But what happens when the yellow brick road to stardom is replaced by a bridge to nowhere?

If your career has hit an unexpected roadblock, you might be tempted to jump ship and move on to another organization. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, today's college grad will hold three full-time jobs before turning 25. Baby Boomers fare no better, having had an average of 11 different jobs before the age of 40. Job hopping might be expected of those beginning a career, but it is discouraged for a seasoned professional because it signals instability at a time when you should be contributing the most.

Before jumping ship, experts say there are things employees can do to speed the promotion process along.

## Be the boss, just without the title

One way to speed along a promotion is to move into that position before it's officially bestowed. For every official organizational chart there's another, unpublished version that shows who really has power and influence, and they are not always the people with the conferred titles.

Getting that power requires political competence, says Samuel Bacharach, director of the Institute for Workplace Studies at Cornell University and author of *Get Them On Your Side*.

"Political competence is the single most important type of competence for success in an organization," says Bacharach. "If you're not politically competent you'll never achieve your mission."

Does that mean that to get ahead one must adhere to Machiavellian principles? Will you be operating only on your behalf, at the expense of everyone else? Bacharach argues to the contrary. Political competence means acquiring the skills

to correctly assess one's organizational landscape to be able to mobilize coworkers and managers to your way of thinking. "So you'll be seen as the next logical choice for a promotion," says Bacharach.

Many may sneer at the idea of improving your skills at office politicking. "It's the one skill we keep in the closet," says Bacharach. He points out that Mother Theresa was especially politically competent. And who would accuse her of being underhanded?

Meanwhile, Bacharach adds, "Organizations are run by staff who have successfully advocated and accomplished their agenda and mission." What moves a person ahead is a demonstrated ability to mobilize a team toward a common goal. Organizations—especially in higher education—don't want one-person teams. They want individuals who work well with others. Your upward mobility will depend on how well you can do three things: convert people to your side, mobilize them to advocate and carry out an idea (preferably your idea), and keep them on your side after the work is finished.

## When your boss isn't leaving

What happens when the roadblock to your promotion is the very person you report to? Lingering managers often spell trouble for ambitious workers. No need to resort to cloak and dagger tactics, there's still hope. The best thing to do is let your intentions be known.

"I don't want my workers to work for me forever," explains Penelope Trunk, author of *Brazen Careerist: The New Rules for Success*. "I care about my employees' careers. Managers should own their employees' goals and that will make them loyal to you."

The best way to loyally help your manager out of your way is to get him or her promoted, leaving the position open for you. Our managers can be our closest friends or our most bitter enemies, but it never pays to undercut them. Higher ups

could view disloyalty as a precursor to what you will do to them. It's always better to be on the up and up.

"There's a difference between wanting to replace someone and wanting to knock them off," jokes Bacharach. "We're talking about ethical people who are going after a promotion, while at the same time helping both the manager and organization."

## Mentoring 360 degrees

A mentoring network provides an excellent way to build coalitions and garner support from coworkers and managers. Employees shouldn't get stuck in a vertical tunnel that looks only upward, ignoring people on the left and right. Coworkers can make or break your promotional aspirations, says Kathy E. Kram professor of organizational behavior at the Boston School of Management.

Kram says that organizations—especially in higher education—are becoming flatter. That means mentoring should come from coworkers just as much from managers. "It makes a lot more sense to develop a network which is comprised of a handful of people interested in your development," says Kram. "This could include your boss or your peers or even people in other professions."

Meaningful mentoring relationships are reciprocal. One person should not be dispensing all the advice. Both managers and employees should be contributing to the conversation. A smart manager will remember a thoughtful discussion and may view a participating employee in a new light... maybe even as a successor. If your mentoring network is complete, a promotion will be fully supported by coworkers and managers alike. ■



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