



Career Tips

Not Getting Promotions?

By Bill Gaffney

Q: I have been with my current employer for nine years now. Until three years ago, I had regular promotions and increasing responsibilities. At that time I received a promotion and started to work for my current boss. I now feel stuck in my current position.



I like my boss and work well with him. He also leaves me alone and lets me do my job. In my opinion, he is okay at his job but not outstanding. I had a reputation within the company of being an achiever and someone who could get things done. I am just wondering if this is keeping him

from recommending me for promotions. Could he feel like I am helping him too much to let me go for a promotion?

A final note: There are other people who were promoted into comparable level positions in the same time frame as me. Several of them have been promoted or have moved to other firms at a higher level. I don't want to sound like a complainer, but I feel like I have accomplished everything I set out to do in this position and I like my company.

What suggestions do you have?

A: My first comment is addressed to managers. One of your primary functions is to develop those under you and promote them. If part of your review and compensation is not based on that, then your firm is missing something. If it is supposedly based on that, then you are missing something if you are not actually promoting individuals on a regular basis. I know it is tough to promote a good worker because many times he or she makes your job easier, and you also avoid having to struggle with everything around a replacement, including selection, training, additional supervision, etc.

My second comment is to HR people. I hope your firm has a component in management reviews and compensation based on development and "subordinate promotion." If not, why not? And if you do have this component, are you watching for those managers that fall below the percentages?

Now I want to address the question directly. The easiest way to potentially get some action (towards promotion)

is the review process. If you work for a company that does reviews, this is the perfect place to work on career development and promotion. Typically, a review will have five or six rating levels ranging from outstanding to poor (or something similar) with average or acceptable being in the middle. I am assuming that if your company does reviews and you are regarded as an achiever that you received higher ratings on those reviews in the past. Are you still receiving high ratings, and if not, why not?

Either way the review should be a mutual process. (I have discussed reviews in the past, so I don't want to get into the details of them here.) It should be a place to set goals, benchmarks, etc. I have been with companies where the review was not complete and accepted until this was done. If your boss is not doing this, you should be. It is your career, not his or hers. Take charge! Part of these goals, especially after this length of time, should be steps you can take towards your next position. Once both parties have signed this review (and it is also typically signed by your boss's boss and/or HR), you have a document that holds people accountable.

At the agreed upon benchmarks, review your progress toward the goals and against the benchmarks. If it were me, I would even record this and have both parties sign it.

Once everything is accomplished, you now have something you can use to leverage your position. My guess is that your manager probably won't fight the promotion anymore and will realize he can't keep you forever.



Another thing to do, whether you have a review process or not, is to sit down and have a heart-to-heart with your boss. It sounds like you have a good relationship. It also sounds like, if you are being realistic about your performance, that you are probably right about your boss. You make his/



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her job easier and also make him/her look better, at least temporarily. Both of those are natural human desires. When you have the heart-to-heart, do it as non-threateningly as possible. Be on the lookout for ways you can help and reassure him or her. When you help someone else, they are more prone to help you.

Once you do the things above, ask for your boss's permission to speak to his/her boss. Again, don't do this in a threatening way. Instead, suggest that he/she join you. Say that all you are seeking is another person's input on how you can improve yourself and your job performance. Many times the type of person I think you are describing won't object if you present the idea in this way. When you do talk to the boss's boss, make sure you speak of your boss very highly and give him/her compliments. Also mention the suggestions for improvements the boss has made. All of this will do several things:

1. It will make your boss's boss aware so that he/she will be watching what you do.
2. It will make your boss more secure and confident in his/her job.
3. It will demonstrate good political astuteness, which is a desirable quality as you move up the ladder.

If any readers are in a position where the real problem is that the boss is a control freak, micro-manager, totally self-absorbed, etc., I would still recommend you start with the suggestions above. You are building a case for yourself. Keep in mind, as I have said in the past, that if this boss has been around for a while and has been allowed to continue this pattern, the problem probably starts higher up, which

means that you are probably going to have limited success.

Once you have done these things, then it is time to go around your boss. If your boss's boss has already been involved, your only recourse is probably HR. If this is a department or a division problem, chances are HR is already aware of the situation anyway.

If the problem exists beyond your boss, be aware that your steps might be career limiting. Be prepared for the fallout, which may mean harsh treatment, loss of responsibility, etc. — everything up to and including termination. But in this kind of situation, termination is probably better than the status quo.

I am limited by column space on my comments and suggestions, but there are many other things you can do in this situation. Read a book and/or online articles on the subject, for example. The most important things to remember, though, are don't be threatening and be very politically astute.

Here's Wishing You Terrific Hunting,

Bill

About the Author

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