

CHAPTER 25

HOW TO GET YOUR NEXT PROMOTION

Getting your next promotion is not as simple as just asking for a raise; it is accomplished with hard work and a plan. The reason it is more difficult is due to so many more factors that have to do with your skills, business, and the economy. In addition, the competition for promotions is more intense today than ever before. In order to get your next promotion you will have to control all factors. It is not an easy task to move up the corporate ladder and each successive promotion becomes harder and harder. In this chapter, proven successful guidelines are provided to make this clearer for you and significantly decrease the time to your next promotion.

UNDERSTANDING THE REASONS MANAGEMENT PROMOTES PEOPLE

The reasons why people get promoted are entirely different from the reasons why raises are given. When you get a raise it is because you are doing an excellent job and there is growth in your job level. When you get promoted it is because you have clearly demonstrated that you can perform successfully at a level above yours. Perhaps, for example, you took on the extra responsibility of a level above yours and successfully handled the challenges. Management wants a sure thing and the only way they feel comfortable about promoting you to the next level is when they see you can already handle the job before you are promoted. They do not promote people hoping the person will be able to do the job once they get there. With management it is “Show me first you can do the job then we’ll talk about promotions.”

Many people have just the opposite point of view and some real promotion killers are attitudes of “I wasn’t hired to do that,” or “when you start paying me more, I’ll start working more” [1]. These attitudes clearly signal to

management that you are not a promotable person. These people simply don't get it.

THE PROCESS TO ACHIEVE YOUR PROMOTION

The best way to approach this complex problem is first understanding the process to follow and then the actions and variables you have to control all through the process. The recommended process to follow for getting a promotion is shown in Figure 25-1. It is recommended because it works.

Step 1. Plant the Idea and Do Research. Most people do not realize under the best cases that it is going to take a minimum one year to demonstrate the type of performance you need to be promoted. In most cases promotions normally take much longer. Therefore, you need to plant the idea of a promotion in your boss' head early in the process. The way to do this is by meeting with your boss and having a career discussion where you identify that you are looking for a promotion in the near future.

The purpose of the career discussion is to identify what you need to improve upon to qualify for a promotion. Research the next level as well as what you have already demonstrated as promotable accomplishments? Ask your boss to list what they consider as the necessary skills for the next level and have them comment on how close you are to possessing these skills.

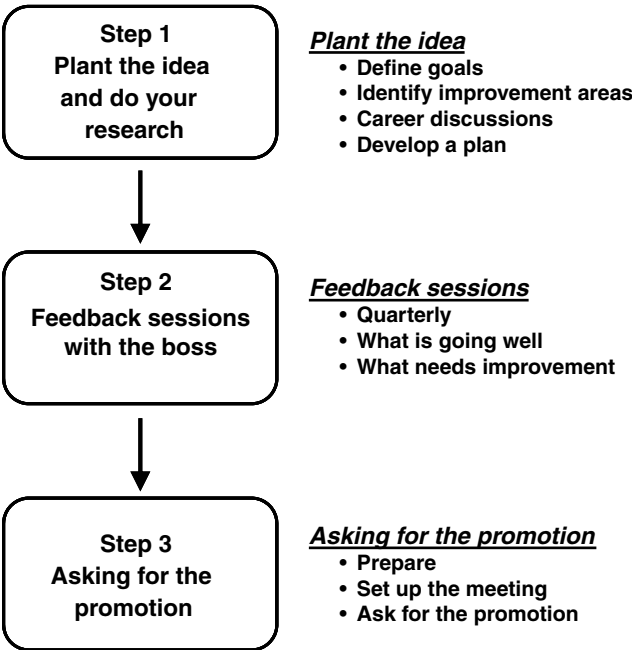


FIGURE 25-1 The process to achieve your promotion.

During the career discussion, record the actions you need to take and then outline a plan that leads to demonstrating these skills with the ultimate goal of being promoted [2].

Developing a plan creates two very positive things. First, it puts the boss at ease that you are not asking for a promotion immediately but are willing to work for it. And second, it plants the idea that you are going to work hard for a promotion, and it is only a matter of time before you demonstrate you deserve it. Once you and your boss agree this is a good plan, write up the plan and keep a copy in a place you can look at every day. Give your boss a copy.

Step 2. Feedback Sessions with the Boss. About once a quarter meet with your boss to get feedback on how you are doing against the plan. Your objective in every quarter is to complete a few more actions and identify what is left to work on. Clearly identify what is going well and what is not. Get approval from your boss to close out actions on the list that you successfully completed and acknowledge which actions are remaining and which needs improvement.

After a couple of quarterly meetings, you should have your list down to one or two remaining items. At this point, the boss should be realizing you are getting very close to completing all the criteria and will probably be asking for a promotion shortly. You might emphasize this point by highlighting during your feedback session that you are on track to complete all the criteria in the next quarter. Once you get the list down to this point you are ready to move on to step 3.

Step 3. Asking for the Promotion. This step in the process is identical to when you ask for a raise. You prepare for the meeting by collecting your supporting data. In this case, it is the list with all actions completed. You set the meeting up and go prepared to ask for the promotion. More on this later in the chapter.

Now that we have reviewed the process, we need to change the focus and determine which items and factors you will need to control and monitor all during this process. These factors are related to your skills, the business, and the economy.

WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT FOR GETTING A PROMOTION

As I discussed earlier in the chapter, many more factors come into play for a promotion and these factors are related to your skills, business, and the economy. Controlling all these factors in your favor is required for getting the promotion. Let's look at these factors and what you can do to control them in your favor.

Your Performance. The first and most important factor in determining your readiness for a promotion is your performance [3]. This is your performance as your boss perceives it and measures it [4]. To get your promotion, you will need at least one, if not two, performance reviews where your boss

rated you at the top of the scale—either outstanding or excellent. You need consistently high ratings since this is the basic factor the company and Human Resources consider as evidence you are ready for promotion.

How have your ratings been? If they are just average or slightly above average, then during your feedback session you need to discuss how you can turn these average ratings into excellent ratings. During your feedback sessions detail out the tasks and results needed in order for you to receive a top rating. Once you have identified these actions work at them every day. Focus your time and energy on the tasks, determined by your boss, that are most going to help your ratings.

Now the real problem—in general you will need at least two consecutive ratings at excellent. If your company only does ratings once a year this means you are possibly two years away from your promotion. Get going now if you want a promotion soon.

The next is performing above and beyond your present level and successfully demonstrating that you have the skills to handle the next level up. This will only occur if that you take on more responsibility and do significantly more than your job calls for.

A Hint Here. During your feedback sessions talk about taking on more responsibility and tasks to perform at a level above yours. Stay away from the “promotion” word until you are at the end of your plan. If you are constantly putting everything in terms of a promotion your boss may get the wrong impression that “you’re only interested in the promotion and not the work.”

Skills and Education. As you move in the company each level brings more responsibilities and challenges. To successfully move to the next level and handle these additional responsibilities you may need further education or new skill development. For example, if you are moving to the level of a team leader you may need training in conducting meetings and handling difficult people. These may be new skills that you were never trained for in engineering. Or the next level up may require an advanced degree. The best thing you can do is, early on when you put your plan together, check the requirements for the next level up and make sure your plan includes learning these new skills or obtaining any education required.

Boss and Upper Management. In most cases, your boss, Human Resources, and upper level management, need to support your promotion. Your plan should address how you are going to convince all these people that you are ready for advancement. Showing up one day with all your actions completed will not result in a promotion. You will need to socialize and network your plan with everyone involved in the decision. This is a good discussion topic at your feedback sessions with your boss. Together, you will be able to work this process.

Economy and Budget. The next factors that come into play are the economy and the budget. You may have successfully completed everything on your plan but if the economy is bad and your company is losing money and laying people off, then the chances of getting a promotion are very slim. As you work toward your next advancement, monitor the economy and the company’s

situation to see if they favor promotions. If they don't, you may have to wait until things turn around.

There must also be a budget for you to be promoted. The reason is that when you are promoted most companies give a raise that costs the company more. Is there enough budget for your additional salary once promoted or do you have to wait for another fiscal year when there will be sufficient funds available.

Position Open. The next factor to consider is whether there are positions open that you can be promoted into [5,6]. If there is no position open, then it becomes an obstacle. If you and your boss work together, then the boss should be able to identify the need for the position you want to get promoted into. Upper management has checks and balance to make sure first-line supervisors are not just promoting without true cause. It is very helpful if your boss opens a new job requisition for the level above you just prior to completing your plan. However, opening a new job requisition opens the door to competition that gets us to the final factor.

Your Ability to Convince People You Are the Best Person. If you have successfully completed everything on your plan as defined by your boss during the feedback sessions, then you should be the best candidate. Of course, you will still need to convince others in the decision chain that you are the best person. At this point you are interviewing like everyone else for the new position, so having great interviewing skills and the ability to market yourself now becomes key. Think of it as interviewing for a job and prepare for it. Update your resume, develop a 30-second commercial, and update your portfolio. It helps to have personally networked, well in advance, with all the people involved in the decision.

Following these guidelines will significantly enhance your chances of getting that promotion; by taking control and shaping these factors in your favor you are maximizing your chances for success.

Networking is another key activity that should be occurring all during the execution of your plan. Networking with other employees, your mentors, or engineers in the industry who might have recently been promoted or involved in a promotion process can reveal many helpful hints. Inquire how they prepared and solicit any recommendations.

ASKING FOR THE PROMOTION

This is the final stage in the process. During all the feedback sessions watch and listen to your boss' reactions to the discussions. Their reactions are going to clearly indicate how things are going. If your boss is positive and acknowledging your progress during the feedback session you are on the right track. However, anything less than this is indication that something is not up to par. If this is the case then you have to use the career tools and skills

I discussed in Chapters 6 and 14 on career discussions and barriers to discover the reasons.

Preparing and Planning Your Presentation. In the final months of your plan is when everything has to come together perfectly. Schedule your last feedback session about three months in advance of the next cycle of promotions. It is the best timing to ask for the promotion. This gives the boss time to forecast your promotion in the next cycle of performance reviews.

Here are some good actions to take when you start preparing and planning your presentation.

Practice. Practice and rehearse your pitch at least five times before you meet with the boss. Practicing will help you appear confident and firm about your request.

Set Up a Meeting. Set up a meeting a couple of days in advance with your immediate supervisor to discuss progress on your plan. It is good to explain that the purpose of the meeting is to discuss how you are at the end of the plan and you feel confident that you have demonstrated everything to qualify for advancement. Plan together the next steps. Don't discuss your advancement progress in the hallway between meetings or by telephone. See the boss in person for this.

Give your supervisor time to prepare. Your boss will also want time to do their own research into company policies and consult with Human Resources. It is best to pick a neutral meeting place like a conference room with a door instead of the boss' office or your office.

Asking for the Promotion. Start the meeting on a pleasant note and make some small talk to begin with, then after a few minutes transition to the promotion discussion. Start with reviewing the plan to show how you have met all the criteria and deserve a promotion. State the reasons slowly and directly at the boss while making eye contact. It is alright to have a note sheet to talk from. Let the boss respond to your reasons and try to have a two-way conversation.

Keep it strictly professional with even voice tone and discuss everything confidently. Make it perfectly clear, as you summarize, that you feel you have completed everything successfully in the plan and you qualify for a promotion.

Then let the boss respond. Listen closely to the reasons being given. Is the boss saying no, maybe, or yes? If yes, then you want to tell him that you are glad to hear it, and appreciate how your boss agrees with you, and how you are looking forward to the promotion. If the boss is saying anything other than yes, then you need to listen carefully and be prepared to discuss further. Move the conversation toward determining what specific actions are needed to get the promotion approved. If the boss is saying anything other than yes, then you are on to the rejection scenario.

Don't Use the Ultimatums Plan. Some people feel the right thing to do is give their boss an ultimatum. Give me the promotion—I deserve it or I am

going to quit. Many managers faced with this situation will simply call your bluff. Considering the employment situation and job competition today, this approach is not recommended.

Anticipate Objections. If your boss gives you objections you better be prepared to have answers that overcome these objections. Here are some objections you might encounter along with good answers.

"I can't give you a promotion, I don't have the budget and I need upper management approval." Getting a "no" from the boss does not have to be the final word [7,8]. If your boss is not able or willing to move forward and recommend you for a promotion, then have a plan B. Plan B is to ask what you can do in the next six months to make this conversation successful the next time. Ask the boss to be as specific as possible.

"It's not promotion time, therefore I cannot do anything." For this objection you can focus on what you can do. First, the response indicates the boss is not arguing with your reasons and must believe they are good. State this obvious fact and get agreement this is the case. Next, set the stage for the next promotion time by asking when this occurs and what do we need to do to get ready for it. If the answer is still no, then probe further and ask what other things are stopping it.

Handling Rejection. Do not respond with anger or by a threatening reaction. You will need to continue to interface with your boss on daily assignments and putting up walls around you is never going to help your cause. Another natural reaction is to cut back on your work in retaliation for the rejection. Some people think if they are not going to get promoted then I am going to do less. Keep your performance up, continue to show them you deserve it, and get ready for the next feedback session.

SUMMARY

Getting your next promotion is not as simple as asking for a raise, but with hard work and a plan you can make it happen. The reason it is more difficult is due to so many more factors entering into the mix. Some of these factors have to do with your skills and others are related to the business and economy. In addition, the competition for promotions is more intense today than ever before.

The reasons why people get promoted are because they have clearly demonstrated performance at a level above theirs. Management wants a sure thing and feels comfortable about promoting you to the next level when they see you can already handle the job before you are promoted.

There is a three-step process to getting your next promotion. These steps are (1) plant the idea and develop a plan, (2) conduct feedback sessions, and (3) asking for the promotion.

The key factors you have to control during the process are

Your Performance
Skills and Education

Boss and Upper Management
Economy and Budget
Position Open
Your Ability to Convince People You Are the Best Person

Preparing and planning your presentation to ask for the promotion has to occur at the end, after you have already successfully demonstrated all the actions required to be recommended for a promotion. When asking for the promotion be firm, speak confidently, and state your case in a positive tone. If the answer is yes, then move to the next step of helping your boss get the approval. If the answer is no, go to plan B and ask what else is needed in the next six months to make this happen. Don't use ultimatums. You can get the promotion you want but it takes planning and controlling all the factors to the best of your ability.

Have you identified any career actions you want to take as a result of reading this chapter? If so, please make sure to capture these ideas before you forget by recording them in the notes section at the back of the book.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1 Identify the three steps in the process.
- 2 What are the factors involved in getting a promotion?
- 3 Why are feedback sessions good? How often should they occur?
- 4 Is it important to document your plan?

REFERENCES

1. Lenihan, Rob, "Promote Yourself at Work," http://money.cnn.com/2000/02/15/career/q_promotion/, February 15, 2000.
2. Jenkins, Linda, "Raises and Promotions," Web site Salary.com, http://www.salary.com/personal/layoutscripts/psnl_articles.asp?tab=psn&cat=cat011&ser=ser031&part=par173.
3. Chambers, Harry E., *Getting Promoted: Real Strategies for Advancing Your Career*, Perseus Books, 1999.
4. "Asking for a Promotion: Never Done It Before? Here's What You Need to Know," Web site <http://www.hundredsofheads.com/37-241-1.Article/Asking-for-a-Promotion>.
5. "Time to Advance Your Career? What You Need to Know About Asking for Promotion," Web site <http://www.articlesbase.com/careers-articles/time-to-advance-your-career-what-you-need-to-know-about-asking-for-promotion-263641.html>.
6. Agarwal, Abhishek, "Asking for a Promotion—Tips to Get It Easily," <http://ezinearticles.com/?Asking-For-a-Promotion—Tips-To-Get-It-Easily&id=1659934>.

7. Weiss, Tara, "How to Ask for a Promotion in a Recession," http://www.forbes.com/2009/01/07/job-career-promotion-leadership-careers-cx_tw_0107basics.html.
8. Thompson, Steve, "How to Ask for a Promotion," November 22, 2006, http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/87279/how_to_ask_for_a_promotion.html?cat=3.