



Five Essentials *for* Career Advancement

Knowing what you need to do to manage your career and supercharge your “promote-ability” is fundamental to getting ahead. However, many managers and executives fail to understand how to create the opportunity for promotion and quick advancement and may never reach their full potential.

Look closely at those who rise quickly to the top of any organization to discover what the most successful managers do to get promoted. If you have been in the corporate or professional world for long, you probably have had a chance to observe the rising stars within the organization. Most people see the superficial reasons for the rapid rise but miss the fundamental skills and actions that drive their success. While you may detect a number of advancement factors, five significantly influence your success: self-knowledge, self-promotion, visibility, professional brand, and exceeding expectations.

1. Self-knowledge

You cannot build a career advancement plan without accurately assessing your current strengths and value adds. This is not some esoteric concept: If you know what you are good at, believe in your strengths, and solidify your belief in what you want to contribute to the organization, you will empower your attitude. You create an image, or perception, that you are someone unique because you have a belief about your strengths and your positive intentions to contribute to the company. This reinforces an element of your self-esteem that you can add value. You have this strong inner belief about your value. You believe you deserve to be recognized for your value, and are committed to earning increased responsibility and advancement. Once you have thought through your strengths and capabilities to add significant value to the organization and have the inner focus to believe that you will contribute and rise to the top, you have the foundation to move to the other fundamental factors.

2. Professional self-promotion

You must have a plan to promote yourself, which you execute at every opportunity. Professional self-promotion is the active management of your image, inside and outside the organization. No one else is consistently going to make sure you are visible to the people that count — this is your responsibility. Important people must recognize that you exist, so you must stand out to the right people. Demonstrate that you are working hard. Excelling at what you do and contribute is a given (or should be). You will fall short of being widely recognized if you think your contribution speaks for itself. Identify all those people who can make a difference. You need people of influence to know who you are and what you contribute to the organization. Be adroit and professional but seize every opportunity to share what you have achieved and accomplished that is a value add. If you are not getting important opportunities,

you need to pinpoint projects, committees, and other activities where you can add value — something you can have an impact on that will get people's attention. Volunteer some time to the project, find resources or information that might be of value to the project, and share it with the leader or manager of that project. Get involved in a community project sponsored by the organization.

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3. Visibility

You have to become known. People of influence need to have a clear image of you in their mind's eye. Being seen in the right places, with the right people, on a regular and consistent basis is visibility control. One workable technique is to be absolutely current and aware of what the company is engaged in, who is driving initiatives and what's happening. Being in the know and maintaining an active list that connects the top people with their projects, assignments, and challenges will put you in visibility control. Look for ideas and references that could add value to what the most influential people are dealing with at any time. Find opportunities to run into them, catch them after a meeting with a group of others so they will see you interact and say something like "I understand you are working on (dealing with, leading) such-and-such, and I ran across an (article, report, reference) that might be of value." Then, share it in public. Try to attend open meetings, press conferences, public and community meetings where an influential leader is speaking or participating, and then catch them at a break or on the way out and engage briefly or introduce yourself if you have not met formally. Take control and be creative. Get people talking about seeing you with so-and-so or at important events.

4. Professional branding

You are your most important asset in creating promote-ability. Those you work with and interact with inside and outside the organization will quickly create a perception of you and your skills and abilities. Your job is to package yourself and present your professional brand at every opportunity. You must create your brand image and then walk and talk your brand, and people will quickly develop a perception of you and your qualities. Will people's perceptions be the image you want of you and your value? You have to define yourself clearly and differentiate yourself from other aspiring employees. Whatever level or job position you have today, you must have a solid and evolving brand image as a rising star that you are capable of promoting. Every week, ask yourself how you can position yourself this week to gain visibility and display your professional brand in a quality way. Then set a plan that promotes your brand in some way and journal the activities and results as part of your self-management plan.

You must have a solid and evolving professional brand image that you are capable of promoting that supports you as a rising star.

5. Exceeding expectations

Consistently putting forth the extra effort and doing more than expected in every situation is critical and overlooked. Aspiring managers almost always say they are giving 100%, but that is not the case. We tend to judge others by their behaviour and judge ourselves by our intentions. Aspiring people may intend to go the extra mile and perform above expectations, but their behaviour often fails to match their intentions. Your work

effort and behaviour must be noticeable and stand out in every situation. Ask for more responsibility. Finish your assignment early and ask if you can help other members with their assignments. To advance, to create promote-ability, you must stand out in a positive way. Even when your current responsibilities do not offer new projects and assignments, find something that will enhance your job, help others, or add value to your manager or other influential people. It is not enough to do your job well; you must excel and stand out in the view of others. Look out for opportunities to add value and lead. Do not accept the current situation. There must be a way you can do things better, differently, and faster. Develop improvements with more impact on the company or customer. Put your mind to it and don't accept going through the motions as in any way a pattern for advancement.

The fundamental factors involve building and executing a plan to make yourself stand out and be recognized. This involves taking action. Be purposeful in everything you do to make yourself visible or recognized by people at all levels. Manage up with more senior influential people. Be your own career agent, responsible for managing every aspect of your professional brand, image, and awareness campaign. Never think that this is too much trouble or something that is unnecessary. The top performers — those who were perceived as rising stars and who advanced rapidly to important positions and leadership — exhibited these five key factors. These stars developed their strengths and promoted themselves at every opportunity. They became consistently visible to the right people, created their professional brand, and exceeded expectations.

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