

Time for Promotion?



An Important Question

It's the million dollar question: how do I let my boss know that I want to be promoted? This is such a huge issue that it can bring up hundreds of questions. Is there a single, sure-fire way? What is it dependent on? Who should initiate the promotion? Unfortunately with so many questions are even more possible answers. Given the diversity in today's organizational cultures, you might have guessed it, there isn't a single sure-fire way.

And that's not even half the story. The more important factor you have to consider is YOU. You have to make sure that a promotion is the right thing for you at the moment. Pursuing a promotion based on speculation regarding your organization's or boss's next moves is not productive and will lead to eventual disappointment.

Of course, this doesn't mean that you should ignore the environment when making such an important decision. However, truly understanding your own motivation for promotion will determine the way you go about achieving one. Because this is my belief, I have designed this e-book in a way that anyone seeking a promotion can use the most appropriate tools effectively to get noticed by relevant decision makers.

Communicating that it's time for you to be promoted can be achieved in two ways: directly and indirectly. The rest of this e-book will explain each of these in detail.

Indirect and Direct Approaches

What are the ways that you can let managers know that you're ready for promotion? The answer to this question is that there are basically two ways - which are interestingly enough flip sides of each other. The first one is the **direct approach** and the second one is the **indirect approach**. Let's have a look at what each one means.

Direct approaches are expressed explicitly and directly. Basically, you schedule a meeting with the relevant decision makers and you let them know exactly why you should be promoted, including what you'll "bring to the table" if promoted. Some examples include your values, motivation, and any specific skills that would be valued.

Indirect approaches are expressed implicitly and indirectly. The first step is to do a little background work to discover the key characteristics required for promotion. Next, learn the habits and practices that demonstrate these key characteristics. Once you've become a natural, it's time to get noticed. At this stage, your job is to ensure that decision makers take note of you because you're embodying the very characteristics that will make you a prime candidate for promotion.

Before you rush to choose one of these approaches, there's one thing that must be certain. From a skills point-of-view, you must be suitable for promotion. If you are not yet recognized by your managers as "good at what you do," then there's little sense in pursuing a promotion. Instead, go back and develop those skills that you need to improve. If this is not the case and you are recognized as having the skills needed for promotion, then deciding on an approach can be a little hairier - as it's basically up to you. Below are advantages and disadvantages to help you decide which approach to take.

Which Approach should You Take?

Before we delve into the process that will help us decide whether to take the direct or indirect approach, it's worth noting one common advantage and disadvantage of both approaches. The common advantage is that each approach places the responsibility of promotion on you - not your supervisor, not your boss - you. In this way, no matter which approach you choose, the initiative remains in your hands.

Now for the common disadvantage. This one hurts a little, because it basically means that you don't recognize that you're simply not good enough for promotion. You've initiated a process that should not have occurred and now the decision makers are "put on the spot" by having to tell you that you're not promotion material. Some people see the bright side of this experience because they finally find out what their bosses think of them. But let's say that's not the case and you really need to decide which approach is good for you. It's not just your dilemma - it's one that's faced in advertising every day. Read on to find out more.

Since the very first days of advertising, the effectiveness of direct and indirect approaches has been a subject of great debate. Just to give you a quick example, direct advertising is what we generally identify with the advertising world - ads in newspapers, billboards, and online. Indirect approaches include what's known as "product placement." For example, your favorite TV character might just happen to pop open a can of Pepsi. This isn't by accident and the goal is to advertise Pepsi just as much as an ad in a newspaper is. Neither method has been scientifically proven to be more successful. Proof of this is that we still witness both approaches being used successfully. So, at least for now, the jury's still out. But there's still something we can learn from all of this - the importance of branding.

So continuing our foray into the world of advertising, it's time to talk about a new brand: you. Yes, you. Effective self-branding in the world of career management works just like the creation of a strong brand in any other market. A strong brand attracts customers and effective self-branding will attract - you guessed it - promotion. Now, just like with other brands, it's important to decide whether to use direct or indirect advertising. We're now going to take a branding journey in order to brand - you guessed it again - you.

Answering the following three questions will help you decide on your advertising strategy:

1. What features can you offer? Professional? Personal? Managerial?
2. What benefits can these features bring to your organization?
3. In what ways can you be differentiated from others vying for promotion?

After conducting this little analysis, you've probably gathered a lot of insight about yourself as a brand. Now, what about that pesky little question again: direct or indirect?

If you've been taking all of this seriously so far, you've probably got a hunch regarding which approach would be more effective for your particular context. The conflict that many people face at this point is that while they know which approach is better, their personality just won't let them go down that road. This is a good sign because if deep down inside you know it's not for you, even your best effort will be doomed from the start. The way to overcome this is to try to understand why you find one approach easier than the other - so let's keep going.

Many people feel that the direct approach is the right path to take. If you're considering using the direct approach, do not - I repeat - do not do so if any of the following are true:

- you find it difficult to face rejection directly
- a "no" might force you into the premature dilemma of whether to stay in your current job
- you aren't the strongest with words when it comes to promoting yourself
- you aren't comfortable with the fact that others know that you're aiming for a particular position
- you know that there will be people who are against you
- you realize that someone else is probably better for the job
- you have found out about a promotion opportunity in a questionable manner.

So where does that leave us? With the indirect approach, of course. If you're considering this route, make sure that none of the following statements are true:

- you have little trouble facing failure face-to-face
- you are good at expressing your strengths
- you are pretty sure that the promotion is already "in the bag"
- you want to let the decision makers know that this opportunity might be the last straw before you...
- you want to make it clear that you've been offered other opportunities.

Wrap-up

When it comes to career management, the desire to advance is both natural and correct. The way to make this happen will impact your future and therefore should be approached with the same kind of strategic planning utilized in any important business decision. Here, there are a few areas that you have to cover. First, as I've emphasized before, make entirely sure that you are eligible for promotion. This means ensuring that your skill sets make you promotion material. One way of doing this is to follow a set course of management potential development. This will not only turn you into a better manager but also increase your visibility in the organization. The second thing is to keep your eyes and ears open for promotion opportunities. You might be well-qualified but falling asleep at the switch could result in someone less qualified getting the job that should have been yours. So finally, don't be afraid to take calculated risks. It's part of the building blocks that will help you develop into a confident, well-respected manager.

Good luck!

And one more final thought...

Don't ever forget that you're promoting yourself as a brand. And with branding comes a defined marketing strategy, which should take into account not only the positive "features" you offer but more importantly how these features translate into benefits valued by the organization. And like any product that's tested on the market, you'll have to make adjustments to how you communicate these benefits, thus ensuring that you'll be in demand.