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What's your value?

How employees can position themselves as candidates for management positions

Question:

I have the desire to move into management with my company. How do I negotiate my value?

Answer:

Being promoted into management requires that you are viewed by the key decision-makers as management material. In your current position, that means you need to act, talk, and project the image that is consistent with the position you are seeking.

Ask yourself: If you were already in that position, how would you interact with co-workers, management and other employees? How would you carry yourself? How would you handle issues when time is short and there is a lot on the line?

Employers promote employees who demonstrate that they are "ready" to accept additional responsibilities. Do you project your capability to handle the responsibilities of the new position in how you interact in your current day-to-day activities?

How do successful managers in your company communicate? How do they interact with one another? How effective are they in delivering a presentation? Ask yourself how you can add value to that team.

I have been both the employee who was

on the fast-track, having been promoted 10 times in 12 years, as well as the manager who was responsible for promoting employees. From my management experience, the one quality I looked for in all promotional candidates was a positive "can-do" attitude. Even if an individual did not possess all the knowledge or technical skills, I would still promote him or her if the person demonstrated initiative, worked well with others, and had a strong sense of pride in his or her work.

You can gauge how well employees embrace such a "can-do" attitude by their response to assignments that may be distasteful to them. Those with managerial material within them will do a great job on such assignments, regardless of their personal feelings about the work. They look at the bigger picture — how the project benefits the company. From such a viewpoint, they take responsibility for their outcomes.

I remember when I was interviewing for a top management position, my potential boss pointedly asked me: "Christine, why should I hire you?" I paused for a moment. Then, leaning forward, in a matter-of-fact tone I said, "Because I will be your aspirin. You will never have to think twice about what I am focusing my efforts on. You will never need to call me to find out how things are going because you will already know. On a regular basis, I will keep you updated on my plans and progress. You can expect to hear from me when something stumps me, or if there's information I think you should know, or when I need direction. Otherwise, you can expect that I will be focused on the activity that drives your agenda forward. I am the person you need to hire so you can

sleep well at night."

I beat out 10 other candidates.

In your current position, you need to act, talk, look and project the image of the person who will be successful in the management position you are seeking. You need to demonstrate that you can be your supervisor's aspirin.

Negotiating your value is not a stand-alone event that gets you the position. Rather it is the combination of many ongoing activities that happen over time. Here are five steps to help you negotiate your next promotion:

1. Take responsibility for your career – Decide what position(s) you want to be considered for and ask the leaders in your business for counsel about what you need to do to position yourself not just as *a* player but as *the* player.

For example, if you are an account manager and have the desire to be the VP of sales, then it is important for the key decision-makers in your company to be aware of your desires. That may include your immediate supervisor, the human resource specialist, the CFO, the director of marketing and possibly even the president of the company.

Conduct informational interviews with each of those people. Ask them to share with you the skills, knowledge and expertise they believe is necessary for someone to be successful in that position. Prepare a list of questions so you make the most of your time together. This will give you well-rounded perspective about what it's going to take to position yourself as the player.

2. Track your success – No one

knows your successes like you do. Create a file to capture your accomplishments. Write the date, a description of the project and the outcomes you made happen. This will help you recall all the important things you did to contribute to the business's success when it comes time for your performance review.

3. Communicate your accomplishments –

Explain to your supervisor that you understand the many demands of his or her position. State that you would like to keep him or her updated on your progress by forwarding information about your successes throughout the year, and ask that those items be placed in your personnel file.

Such an approach alleviates your reliance on your supervisor to keep track of your progress. It also gives you control over the information that your supervisor reviews when completing your performance appraisal.

4. Ask for feedback – Be proactive. Do not wait for your supervisor to give you feedback. Initiate the conversation by scheduling regular meetings to discuss your progress. After you talk about your accomplishments and current challenges, review the areas you will be working on in the near future and ask for support/advice if needed.

5. Commit to CANI – Make a commitment to yourself. Embrace CANI — Constant And Never-

Ending Improvement. Take responsibility for your personal/professional development. Read books, listen to audio tapes/CDs, attend workshops, etc. Maximize your potential by staying on the cutting edge. If you are interested in moving into management, read the periodicals that people in those positions are reading.

Career negotiating begins by being deliberate in your planning, actions and performance. It's not a one-time face-to-face activity. Rather, it's the result of many efforts, communications and results. Employees who entrust their career to their supervisors to make the right decision on their behalf are selling themselves short.

Define what you want. Stay focused. See the result you want in your imagination as if it has already happened. Step into that role now in everything you do and watch how magnificently the opportunities unfold to your advantage.

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