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Avoid those slips as you climb up the ladder...

by Linda
Whitney

MANY of us will have started the new year with the resolution to get promoted. However, there's a lot more to it than just keeping your nose clean and waiting for the call.

Here's what to do.

Check that you really want to be promoted. 'People in higher positions are generally happier, healthier and live longer,' says psychologist Professor Nigel Nicholson of the London Business School.

But promotion means more responsibility, bigger decisions and usually longer hours. Think about what you want — will promotion deliver it?

Are you ready? Audit your performance. 'Promotion is primarily about performance and results,' says John Ferguson, leader of the Right Management leadership and coaching practice. 'You need the right competencies, skills and values, but mainly you must demonstrate good results.'

Find out how promotion happens within your company. 'Over half of all employees feel that their organisation's approach to promotion is a mystery,' says June Williams of Investors in People.

Choose the job you want and get to know all about it, including the skills required and any training you will need, before targeting it.

Ensure everyone knows. 'Make it known throughout the company that you are keen to progress,' says Mr Ferguson.

Get the boss to help. 'Ask your boss what you need to do to be considered and ensure they understand your aims, so you can work together on a development plan,' says Mrs Williams.

Make yourself stand out. Do more than expected, ideally in measurable ways that benefit company performance. If you are in sales, beat your targets, if in marketing, get more customers.

GET A reputation for creative, innovative ideas, solving problems and suggesting new approaches. Use performance reviews to show you are achieving. Tell the boss what you have done successfully and how that will help you towards promotion.

'The good thing about reviews is that your results are recorded on paper for management to see,' says Mr Ferguson.

Keep your eyes and ears open for possible opportunities, in your department and others. Get to know people at all levels — secretaries often know about vacancies before they are announced.

Get yourself a mentor who can help: inside your own company if you plan to stay, outside if you plan to move. Get the skills you need for



BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

■ TRAINING helped Lorraine Prangnell (left) get promoted and start a new career. 'I was an assistant materials buyer for building contractors within housebuilder Foreman Homes, when a job arose in the company for a health and safety manager,' says Lorraine, 41, from Fareham, Hampshire. 'Someone put my name forward because I'd always been interested in health and safety, and I was keen to do the job, provided I got proper training and a promotion to match my new skills.'

She did a three-week course locally in general health and safety, followed by a certificate in construction health and safety by distance learning with RRC Training, which she passed with credit.

Now, she is Foreman Homes' health and safety manager, advising everyone on labourers on sites to the company chairman at head office on how to stick to safety rules. 'I had to sacrifice some of my own time to get the training I needed to get my new skills,' says Lorraine. 'I think it helps if you are in a smaller company because management can easily see how keen you are.'

'However, you also have to be tactful when it comes to promotion, because if you are moving up inside an organisation, you don't want to provoke resentment in your colleagues.'

■ MARION GOULD (right) started part-time work at Barclaycard in Northampton after becoming a mother in 1986.

'I'd previously been in a management job and was quite ambitious, but while my children were young my ambition was on hold.'

'Then in 1992 an internal vacancy came up and all my old ambition, confidence and can-do attitude flooded back,' says Marion, 48, from Northampton.

She got the job, in marketing, and within two years was promoted again, to a more senior job in customer services.

Five promotions later, she is now community manager, encouraging 11,000 UK and international staff to use their two days community service leave in practical ways such



as helping charities or working on local projects. 'You have to work out when you are ready for promotion. You must have the practical skills, but your heart must be in it, too,' says Marion.

your target job, and ask for training. If the company will not provide it, try to get it yourself. Take any opportunity to work with the person whose job you want.

Consider moving to a new company. 'My research shows you progress faster by changing jobs to get promotion than by staying in one company, as you broaden your knowledge,' says Prof. Nicholson.

However, don't change too quickly — about five years in each company gives you time to get to know them and make yourself more valuable to the next company.

Get help from recruiters. 'A recruitment consultant can draw on wide experience and give you advice on how to use a job to gain promotion in another company,' says Paul Smith from recruiter Harvey Nash.

But don't think you must always dump your present job in order to get promotion. If you are otherwise happy where you are, find out what your existing company can do to help you up the ladder first.



■ MARK NORMAN, 34, joined engineering projects company Mouchel Parkman as a graduate trainee in 1994. Twelve years and six promotions later, he is now divisional director of the highways division.

'Early on I was not sure what I wanted to do, but later I helped myself get promoted to head of the geotechnical team.'

'I spotted the skills the team was short of and went out to get them by, for instance, asking for more experience in project financial management. Once I had the skills, I asked for promotion and got it.'

'There's no point in wanting the next job up without letting managers know you want it and having the necessary skills,' says Mark (left), from Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire. 'You need a plan to get promoted,' he says. 'I have found it helps to be flexible about what you do, but try continuously to improve the way you do it. Don't coast — get out of your comfort zone and get the skills for the next job up the ladder.'

Now, Mark has done some management development training and is gathering the experience he needs to get his next promotion, to business unit manager.

'Soon I shall be telling the managing director of my division what I want, so if an opportunity comes up that might suit me, the company will know I am interested,' he says.