

Work - getting a promotion - Q & A

This article lists a range of questions on promotion at work which were posted by visitors to the Better Health Channel. Our experts provide the answers.

Q. I'm working in an administrative job in the marketing department of a large organisation. My job is pretty boring, but I often help my boss with her work and come up with good ideas for campaigns and strategies for promoting our product. I'd like to do something like her job, but I don't know where to start. I don't want her to know I'm bored either, in case she holds it against me.

You sound like a dynamo who really puts in. You obviously think about the department's work and enjoy innovation. I assume you have good time management skills and self-discipline, as you continue to sign off on work that you have outgrown as well as eagerly put your hand up for more responsibility. Good managers would welcome your interest, and would like to support your career development.

Ask if you can take on more responsibility

To make sure that your boss doesn't feel you are too critical or being bad tempered, don't say: 'I'm bored. I should be doing the fun stuff you do and you should pay me more money because of all the marketing help I have provided'.

Instead, you could say something like: 'You are mentoring and coaching me so well. I am on top of my role responsibilities and I would love the challenge of additional assignments. Can I offer extra assistance? Are there any other jobs that I could take responsibility for? My medium term goal is to gain marketing qualifications and, eventually, I would like to work here (or whatever) in this capacity. How does this sit with your performance appraisal goals with me, and the direction of our department and company? Are there any particular short academic courses you would recommend I undertake that would be beneficial for our organisation?'

Do some study

Marketing is a popular career area. It would be smart to begin studying for a qualification part time. Contact the universities and ask for the Community Liaison person or Student Administration. They can send you out some information about their courses. Check with the marketing people you know. Which courses do they recommend? The administrative work experience you have acquired in a marketing department and on projects, coupled with a relevant qualification, should give you the edge in a competitive environment. Your proven track record of successfully combining innovation, industry knowledge and necessary (boring) maintenance administration will stand you in good stead. Make sure you keep a record of all the marketing projects you have contributed to.

If there are no opportunities in your current firm at the time you are ready to make the career transition, you may need to consider other companies or industries down the track. You obviously make things happen for yourself and can delay gratification for longer term satisfaction. These are tremendous qualities. Good luck.

Q. My boss has got a new job in our company and they've put his old job in the paper. I'm really cheesed off that I wasn't asked to apply. What should I do?

Does your organisation know you are interested in this role? Do you have the skills and experience to do the job? For example, do you currently supervise or manage others and consider yourself ready for more senior management, or would this be a significant role shift? I ask these questions because it's possible that no one else in your organisation has a clue that you see this role as the logical progression for your career path. Never assume people know, unless it has been discussed.

Progressive firms ensure they have a good human resource strategy in place. This may include performance reviews, succession planning, and managers who take an active interest in the career development of their staff. If the latter is the case, you are entitled to feel miffed that no one has spoken to you about the vacancy. While some organisations have a policy of not inviting internal applicants, others actively recruit from within. Regardless, if your manager is aware you are interested in his role, we could expect him to speak with you, even if he says they don't believe you are ready to throw your hat in the ring.

You could simply apply for the job

Remember, it is up to you to decide whether you wish to apply for a position. I am sure you could cope with being unsuccessful and be gracious to the new incumbent. You may also be the best applicant for the position and win it.

You might find there is an expectation that staff will be self-reliant about their careers and actively pursue promotion strategies and applications. If that is the case, you may be feeling excluded, while they are smug about not hand-holding or showing bias internally. Another possibility is that your manager did not want you to apply for his job because he's a control freak who devalues your competencies and potential.

Ask why you weren't approached

The point I wish to stress is that we don't know why. There could be hundreds of reasons - policy, oversight, ignorance, poor communication skills, malice or an accurate assessment of your capacity to meet the selection criteria. Put yourself out of this misery immediately, and ask. You cannot lose. You may discover they simply didn't think, didn't know you were keen, do not see you as replacement material because you lack the skills and ability, or are delighted to encourage an internal applicant who can ensure a seamless transition. If you don't ask, your hurt and anger may fester and harm your career satisfaction and development.

Whatever anyone says, I would advise you to apply. You will learn a lot from the preparation and post-interview reflection. For example, you may be able to obtain feedback about deficits, and about required competencies that you can acquire over the next year. There may be a more suitable candidate on the day, who fits the selection criteria perfectly. At least you have put your hand up. Keep putting it up. Get feedback. Do not throw a 'fit' and resign. Give them the benefit of the doubt, and be proactive. Research, practise, prepare. Make sure you submit a superlative application and interview brilliantly. Good luck.

Q. I want to approach my boss about a pay rise. I do a lot more now in this job than I did when I started and I've also been given more responsibility, including managing a couple of other staff. How should I bring it up with my boss?

What are the protocols already in place at your firm? Is there a yearly review connected to performance goals? Do people put their hand up when circumstances have changed because if they don't ask, they don't get? If the latter is the case, go armed with evidence of the changes to your duty statement and some figures for comparable roles elsewhere. Have a list of your achievements, the improvements made, the bottom line value of your impact and so on.

Do not threaten ('If you don't give me a pay rise, I'm quitting!') unless you are prepared to carry it out. If your boss says no to a rise, calmly ask your boss to please explain the decision so that you can understand. Then ask: 'Under what circumstances would I be eligible for the pay rise and how can we work together to expedite this?'

This allows you to check whether they have offered you an opportunity to demonstrate your potential and increase your skills in readiness for a more formal acknowledgement, or whether they are looking for slave labour. Take it from there. Remember when you raise the topic that this is a perfectly adult and reasonable action to take. You are not asking for a favour - this is an appropriate clarification.

Where to get help

- Your employer
- Your union
- Your human relations manager
- Psychologist
- Career counsellor
- Association of Careers Counsellors Tel. 1800 222 390
- Job Network Information Line Tel. 1300 363 365
- The Australian Psychological Society Tel. (03) 8662 3300
- Australian Psychological Society Referral Line Tel. 1800 333 497

Want to know more?

Go to More information for support groups, related links and references.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Australian Psychological Society

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