

HFMA Career Center

What does it take to get that promotion?!

Perhaps the most distressing career experience is having stellar work results, glowing performance reviews, strong support from management and be continually passed over for promotion. This distress may be compounded by the reality that when seeking feedback on where you fall short, you receive vague, nebulous feedback along these lines: “develop your leadership”; “improve communications”; “demonstrate executive presence.” You are left to your own devices to decipher the feedback... because you don’t know the unwritten rules that govern promotion into the executive level.

John Beeson, Principal, Beeson Consulting created a framework to assist in understanding and interpreting unwritten executive promotion rules. Beeson contends that executive placement decisions hinge on three categories of skills:

1. “Non –negotiables” –without these you will not be considered for promotion
2. “Deselection factors” – these eliminate you as a candidate even if you are otherwise qualified
3. “Core selection factors” - which ultimately determines who gets the position

The tricky part of the unwritten selection rules is that they have little to do with business results or technical skills and lot to do with “soft” skills. The unwritten rules give decision makers an intuitive sense of your potential for success.

Beeson’s Key Factors in executive career advancement:

Non-negotiables

Factors that are absolutely necessary to make you a contender for promotion:

- Demonstrating consistently strong performance
- Displaying ethics, integrity and character
- Being driven to lead and to assume higher levels of responsibility

Deselection Factors

Characteristics that prevent you from being considered as a serious candidate:

- Having weak interpersonal skills
- Treating others with insensitivity or abrasiveness
- Putting self-interest above the company good
- Holding a narrow, parochial perspective on the business and the organization

Core Selection Factors

Capabilities that breed others confidence in your ability to succeed at the executive level

- Setting direction and thinking strategically; spotting marketplace trends and developing a winning strategy that differentiates the company
- Building and continually upgrading a strong team; having a “nose for talent”; establishing an adequate level of team cohesion
- Managing implementation without getting too involved at too low a level of detail; defining a set of roles, processes, and measures to ensure that things get done reliably

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- Building the capacity for innovation and change; knowing when new ways of doing business are required; having the courage, tolerance for risk, and change-management skills to bring new ideas to fruition
- Getting things done across internal boundaries (lateral management); demonstrating organizational savvy; influencing and persuading colleagues; dealing well with conflict
- Growing and developing as an executive; soliciting and responding to feedback; adjusting leadership style in light of experience

Developing these capacities takes trust and some digging. Trust is exercised by seeking out others who will give honest and specific answers to one question: “what one or two things –above all others – would most build confidence in my ability to succeed at higher levels in the organization?” The digging is to be understood in terms of “digging in” to act on the feedback.

Beeson notes that you must be aware that changing deep seated perceptions about you, formed over the years, requires visible and consistent effort. This is why it is best to focus on one or two items per year. This type of career development isn’t easy but the payoff can be big for both you and the organization. You can learn and manage what is really holding you back and your organization will develop a deeper talent.