

MENTOR MINUTE: QUICK CAREER ADVICE FROM EXPERT EILEEN CHADNICK

Ear to the ground, eye on a bigger job

EILEEN CHADNICK
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THE SCENARIO

Word has it that the vice-president is moving on, and reliable sources say that our manager will take over from him. How do I position myself to be in line for the manager's job? How do I go about discreetly starting a campaign for myself?

THE ADVICE

Smart companies are always on the lookout for high-potential talent to fill succession needs. Whether the rumour turns out to be true or not, you are smart to recognize the opportunity to position yourself as having leadership potential. In fact, anyone with career-advancement aspirations must take some personal responsibility for promoting themselves.

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Here are a few ideas to consider:

Start with a self-assessment: Before you pro-actively market yourself for this or any other promotion, take time to get very clear on your own story. What qualifies you for the position? What kind of leader would you be? What strengths, attributes and values would you bring to the role? What of your past successes substantiate your readiness for the next level? What about the gaps - how will you address those and further develop new competencies? Why do you want the role?

The more you know your own story, the better prepared you will be to present yourself with confidence and substance.

Speak up: This is not the time to be demure. This is the time to be appropriately assertive and convey your career aspirations and your worth. It's up to you to ensure the influencers (your current manager and human resources staff) know you are ready to step up to a bigger game.

Ask for meetings with HR and your boss to talk about your career path and let them know you are interested and ready to take on more responsibility.

Don't necessarily attach the request to the "rumoured" position. But do speak to your specific abilities and interests. Align these with the needs of the organization. Stay open to feedback and show a willingness to further develop yourself.

Walk the talk: Actions speak louder than words. Find ways to demonstrate your leadership ability and your readiness for a bigger role immediately. Often, people get formally promoted after they have proved themselves informally by already performing certain tasks and responsibilities associated with the job. Actions could include taking time to mentor others; offering to lead an initiative; identifying new opportunities for the company or team, or other tasks associated with the role.

Don't wait to be discovered: There are subtle yet powerful ways to pro-actively ensure others have the opportunity to recognize your efforts. For instance: speaking up appropriately at meetings can show what you have to offer, or celebrating and acknowledging the success of others

can signal that you are ready to lead others.

One of my favourite quotes is: "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity." Successful leaders create their luck by constantly preparing themselves to recognize and take advantage of opportunities.

Eileen Chadnick is principal of Big Cheese Coaching in Toronto.

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Phillip Crawley, Publisher