

TOP 18 TIPS TO GET AHEAD AT WORK



Going nowhere fast in your job? It doesn't have to be that way. Here are 18 tips to propel you to the next level.

When you first landed that corporate job, you thought your career path was set. You'd shine in your assignments, the Powers That Be would applaud your brilliance, and in no time flat, you'd sashay into the executive suite. That was a couple of long years ago, and things don't look so rosy now. Your job title hasn't changed. Neither has your level of responsibility, your salary—or even your desk.

If you don't want to stagnate, you'd better do some serious strategizing. You need a change of pace, a sense of career motion. That next job isn't going to come bouncing along unbidden, wagging its tail and slobbering all over your face: You have to go out and grab it by the collar. Getting to the next step demands clever maneuvering, a sense of readiness, and some good old-fashioned elbow grease. Put in a concerted effort, and it can make the difference between getting ahead and staying stuck. Here's what the experts advise.

01 Get Ready

Decide where it is you want to go and figure out the steps it takes to get there. If you don't yet have to [skills for that dream job](#), acquire them. "Say you're a finance director, and you want to be VP," a director of EMBA and Alumni Career Services at UCLA's Anderson School of Management. "You should ask yourself 'What are the projects that a VP of finance should be doing?' Begin to assume some of those responsibilities, and position yourself so that you're asking for the right projects."

02 Get Set

No matter how good you are at your job, it won't do that much for you if it's the wrong job. You want a position that's in an area central to the company's operations. At a company like Pillsbury, for instance, the action is in marketing; if you're in accounting, the parade will likely pass you by. One way to vet a department: Examine the level of resources that it commands—a sure gauge of its importance within the organization. "You have to understand the web of power in the corporation, and develop more access to company resources," says an associate professor at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota. "Your power accrues when you're positioned well."

03 TO GET SOMETHING, GIVE SOMETHING

If you want the lowdown on that [perfect job opening](#), you've got to put yourself in the loop. You need information, and there's no better tool for acquiring it than sharing your own company reconnaissance with others. Establish yourself as a source. If word gets out that you're not just taking information but giving it, people will come to you on a regular basis. Then when the job you want comes up, they'll remember your name."

04 KNOW YOUR BOSS

In corporate life, if you fail to please your supervisor, you're unlikely to get a chance to please anyone else. It's not just a matter of doing the tasks he assigns; it's getting into his head, understanding his goals and his style. You have to do due diligence. You ask, you watch, you listen. You talk to his secretary. Some bosses will make an assignment and say, 'Just let me know when it's done'; others will want you to keep them up-to-date along the way. You have to get that information. The person who's going to have the most electoral votes on your career is your boss. You gotta kill for bosses. You have to demonstrate that you want to make them look good.

05 KNOW THYSELF

Your mama doesn't hang around the office to brag about your accomplishments (at least we hope not); you've got to do it yourself. Keep a log of your workplace achievements, so that when a potential employer wants to know what you've done, you can tell him. Once a quarter, once a month, pull out a pad of paper and jot down what you've done. Otherwise, you won't remember that stuff. You don't want to leave it to others.

06 SERVE MANY MASTERS

You may only be reporting to a single person, but lots of senior people are looking at you and assessing yourself. Deliver against your commitments. To think that you only have to please one person in corporate life is very naïve.

07 PUT DEMOCRACY INTO ACTION

Workplace snobbery is never a good thing, but it's especially toxic at this point in your career. Nobody is too low on the totem poll to be unworthy of your attention. It doesn't matter if it's the CEO, her secretary, or the guy in the mailroom—give everybody your help and keep an open ear. "Every person you come in contact with is a potential information source," says one recruiting manager.

08 FIND A MENTOR

It may be someone assigned by the company. Or it may be a relationship that develops organically. It doesn't have to be someone very senior. Just someone who can offer you support, sponsorship, and guidance. Sometimes it's just a matter of telling you about the organization's tribal rituals, or how to handle your boss differently. Whoever it is, a mentor can help you navigate the corporate currents, work with you to sharpen your skills—and potentially point you toward that next great job.

09 DEVELOP LATERAL VISION

Strategic movement doesn't always go forward. Sometimes you can boost your career by staying at the same level—as long as the [job offers opportunities for learning new skills](#) and meeting new people. In most cases, it's better to choose a job that will enrich your skill set and provide a rewarding work experience than one that simply will fatten your wallet. The money can come later. Never rule out lateral moves to broaden your experience base and exposure across the company.

10 HOP STRATEGICALLY

Ambition is one thing; ants in the pants is another. Jumping from company to company raises a red flag with potential employers: It says you aren't willing to commit or see a project through to its end. Hopping within the company, though, has the opposite effect: You're showing you're a resource in demand. Meanwhile, you're amassing more information, which makes you an even scarcer resource."

11 BE A GOOD SAMARITAN

When employers say they're looking for a "team player," they aren't just blowing hot air—they're really looking for a person who knows how to get along with others. It's one reason you should treat everybody at the workplace with civility and dignity. Yeah, it's a competitive environment, but you need to be cooperative, dependable, and helpful. One caution: When you offer to help someone, be sure to back up your good intentions with deeds. People are going to watch your feet, not what you say.

12 PLAY THE GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

You've got to put yourself in the path of the people who influence job decisions. Do your homework. Find out as many points of connection as you can. Maybe you have a like interest in swimming. Maybe you're both into curling or rock climbing. Now you've got something to talk about.

13 PUT A LID ON IT

Executives want you to be bright, energetic, and ambitious. But that's not a license for unhindered aggression. If the brass think you're more interested in your own career than corporate goals, they'll drop you like a hot potato. To paraphrase John F. Kennedy: Ask not what the company can do for you, but what you can do for the company. Senior executives select managers who are focused on business objectives. An image of disproportionate focus on yourself and your career advancement will detract from your success.

14 FIT TO SUCCEED

That jailhouse pallor and those bags under the eyes aren't helping your image—even if they're the result of long nights spent breaking your back and other body parts for the company. Build some time into your schedule for the gym. You'll look better, sleep better, and, most important of all, work better. Management will notice. Every major corporation has a fitness center or a health-club reimbursement plan, and it's not because they're boy scouts—they know it's important to have people who are fit. Executives are athletes. They've got **demanding jobs**; they work long hours; they're under high stress. It may not be Yankees' pinstripes that they're wearing, but they're pinstripes nonetheless.

15 KEEP IT IN YOUR BRIEFCASE

Resumés are like kisses: You shouldn't hand them out indiscriminately. Don't blanket the town with your resumé. Very few hires are made by someone picking up an over-the-transom resumé. All you're doing is alerting potential enemies that you're weak."

16 STEP IN TO THE SPOTLIGHT

You can be the world's best data analyst, but it won't do you a bit of good if the brass don't know you exist. Do what you can to get not just your work but your face in front of the right people. Even if the person presenting the report to the committee didn't do any work on it she's the one they'll remember.

17 DON'T LOOK FOR WORK

It's almost a piece of Zen wisdom: The **best way to get a job** is not to look for one. You're more valuable when you aren't looking for work and somebody taps you on the shoulder. Make the hiring manager that you want to work with say 'You'd be great in this role.' Say the controller is having trouble putting a financial-control process in place. Get in front of him and let him know you have that kind of experience in your background. Don't come out and say 'I'm looking for a job.' Let him ask you if there's interest."

18 DON'T STOP LOOKING FOR WORK

No matter how comfortably ensconced you are in a position, don't abandon job-hunt mode. Keep your resumé current; keep your skills up to date, and keep networking. It will prevent you from missing out on a chance for real career advancement – and from being broadsided by corporate disaster. It's not our parents' workplace anymore. None of us can afford to fall asleep at the wheel.

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