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The Art of Transitioning Up



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Are you one of the many talented, successful people who wonder why you are not tapped for a promotion into an upper level leadership position? Have you considered your options and thought about making some changes that might help you prepare to seek out a new job? If you are like many others, you may not know where to begin and at the same time feel overwhelmed; the process of change easily inhibits personal confidence and magnifies worries about the risks associated with a career transition. To help you make the career transitions you want, think about the process as an artistic endeavor: utilizing your creativity and flexibility will help you to you assess yourself -- past, present, and future -- with new eyes to build a foundation to achieve your goals.

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During a recent workshop on *THE ART OF TRANSITIONING UP*, a manager shared his concern with the group:

"I have worked here for ten years now in a challenging position managing 60 people. I'm good at my job but I am not done growing. I'm not offered any new opportunities. What can I do?"

Talented, successful people are often left wondering why they are not tapped for a new position or how they can best prepare to seek out a new job. At the same time, the often overwhelming process of change may inhibit confidence in their skills and magnify worries about the risks associated with a career transition. Career transitions are artistic endeavors: it will require all of your creativity and flexibility as you assess yourself -- past, present and future -- with new eyes.

If you are at this decision point in your career, you may recognize some of the barriers identified by anxious participants at the beginning of the workshop:

- ❖ Where do I go from here?
- ❖ Is taking on more responsibility worth the work?
- ❖ Will I lose friends or create jealousies?
- ❖ How can I be sure I won't fail?

Rather than fear risk, I encourage participants to accept the challenge with the reminder that our successes as well as our failures provide learning and open new doors for our futures.

When you are ready to make a move in your career, here are three essential first steps that will help you prepare for the climb to a new role.

1. Build relationships. Studies show that 40% of new leaders fail within one year of moving into their new position. The main reason for this failure is relationship issues. Leaders need followers (,) which begins with a strong support network.

To evaluate your support network, try this little exercise. First, draw a bull's eye on a large sheet of paper. Write your name in the center of the inner circle. The next steps will take some contemplation. As if the circles become larger when moving outward from the center, write the names of the people you trust to support you. Include those that you have a stronger and more open relationship with in the smaller circles closer to the center circle; those who you speak to infrequently, sharing less personal issues, should be in the outer rings. Evaluate each relationship in relation to their involvement and impact on your life and career decisions.

2. Introduce Yourself. We are all familiar of the ‘elevator speech’. The idea behind that brief statement is worth updating. How do you describe your perspective, knowledge and skills to others? Most importantly, how do you let others know what you have to offer without sounding like you are bragging or bore people by droning on about yourself? You need advocates to champion your next move. To prepare others to speak on your behalf, you must provide them with the specific and useful information that illustrates your dedication, talent, and experience.

One of the most difficult skills I work on with the Executives I coach is how to show self-confidence while revealing their strengths and perspectives. How do you present your achievements with humility and pride at the same time? It is not as difficult if you remember the basics: be honest, dig deep for the real truth, and be open. Take the time to do an inventory of your past successes and failures, choosing the events that are relevant to the individual and situation you are now addressing. Avoid too much information: select a few details that have impact on the discussion at-hand and briefly share the highlights of the activity. The important step in this process of self-presentation is to be certain that you end your statement by drawing an analogy or specific relationship between the person or current event.

3. Learn about others. Understanding the people you work with influences the approach and content of your interactions. Lacking knowledge of an individual’s perspective may cause you to inadvertently talk ‘past’ someone: to provide information relevant to you that is not understood or considered important to others.

What clues do you look for to gain an understanding of the person or people you intend to reach? To develop an awareness of what is important to those you want to engage in conversation, start with the obvious information: what terms do they use to describe their role in the company? People who use exclusive terms such as “my team, my department” tend to view themselves in a position of power. Power people typically prefer a more respectful tone from peers as well as lower-level employees, may enjoy the use of their titles or degrees in a greeting, and will limit the amount of personal information shared. On the other hand, people who use inclusive terms such as “our team, our project” indicate acceptance of the contribution of others and typically prefer a more personal relationship. These social people may immediately encourage the use of first-names, ask and answer questions that are not work related and have an interest in the achievements of others.

These three skills will position you to begin the transition process. Remember, the most important element of your transition is to maintain your self-confidence and willingness to experience new opportunities.

For more skill-building ideas and information on THE ART OF TRANSITIONING WORKSHOP, visit www.mtmanagement.net and www.mtmleadership.net.

Good luck in all your future endeavors! --Dr. L. Maddalena