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Your Five-Month Guide To Getting A Promotion

If you want a bump in your title (and pay) you'll have to start laying the groundwork months in advance. Consider this your step-by-step guide.

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BY RICH BELLIS

Landing a promotion (and the raise that will likely come with it) are career goals that most of us aspire to sooner or later. But you can't just pop into your boss's office, declare yourself ready for a higher-level role, and expect to hear, "You're right, dammit! Promotion approved!"

In truth, actually *asking* for a promotion is the final step in a process you'll need to get underway months earlier. Here's a rough guide to getting started and the milestones you'll need to pass along the way.

MONTH #1: NAIL YOUR CURRENT JOB

"Before you can make the case that you're ready for more responsibility, it's important to make sure that your i's are dotted and t's are crossed," says career strategist [Adunola Adeshola](#). "The last thing you want is for your boss to tell you, 'Well, you still need to improve this before I can consider promoting you.'" So prior to laying out a strategy to move up, you need to assess your performance in your current job to make sure you're nailing it.

"Consider the informal and formal feedback you've received from your colleagues and focus on the recurring themes," Adeshola recommends. "Have you been hearing from different people that you need to be more detail-oriented? Have you heard in passing that you should take more initiative? If so, it may be time to work on that until it's something that you've not only improved but also can now do consistently."

She adds, "The goal obviously isn't to be perfect, because no one is perfect. But you definitely do not want to have glaring flaws standing in the way of your promotion."

MONTH #2: FIND A WAY TO HELP A HIGHER-UP

Freda Marver, an executive/career coach at [Begin Again Coaching](#) in Minneapolis, is skeptical of the very premise of this article. "It would be so nice if we could just have a step-by-step plan, and if we followed it, go, 'Voilà!' and get to where we want," she says. While it's never that simple in practice, Marver suggests that it's a mistake across the board to try and write your ideal job description and then pitch yourself for that all at once. Instead, you need to find small projects that can lend a hand to your superiors, then build up gradually from there.

One client of Marver's was struggling under a micromanaging boss, she recalls, and saw a promotion as a potential exit strategy. So he began cultivating a relationship with the head of their department. After several months, Marver says, "he actually talked with his boss's boss and said, 'You know, I see projects I could be doing out there, but I'm not in a position where I'm being given

those' . . . and she essentially said to him, 'If there are things you want to do, just go out and start doing them.'"

With that permission granted, her client was able to look for opportunities outside of his job description—things that his department head would notice even if his own boss didn't. Around six months later, the company had gone through a reorg, Marver says, and her client wound up reporting directly to the department head he'd been working to impress. "Rather than saying, 'I want a promotion, how can I get out of here?'" she explains, it's smarter to ask, "How can I contribute?"

It's also smart to start documenting all those contributions. "I would recommend keeping tabs on every praise and accomplishment you receive leading up to the moment you ask for a promotion," says Adeshola. "This could be done by creating a folder in your inbox or even keeping a printed version in a file on your desk." You'll need to draw on this later.

MONTH #3: MAKE YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS CONSISTENT

Your next step, Adeshola continues, is to turn those efforts into a routine. "Reach out to that team across the office to see if they need an extra hand on that project you've been eyeing," she suggests. "You could simply say, 'I love the work you all are doing on this project and would love to assist in any way. I'm pretty flexible on Tuesday and Wednesday, so if you need an extra hand before that deadline, I'd be more than happy to help.' Once, you've done that, look for ways to continue to do that more."

The month before, you'd been helping just one person with just one thing. This month, your goal is to help multiple people, showing you can make a sustained impact that's felt across the ranks. "Consistency is key when it comes to making the case for a promotion," Adeshola points out. "You want to show that you're not just a team player or a leader *sometimes*, but that it's just who you are no matter the circumstances."

MONTH #4: SAY THAT YOU WANT A PROMOTION (EVENTUALLY)

Marver says it's never too early to state your intentions. How and when to do this all depends on the situation, she cautions, but it could even be as soon as you move into a new role or get a new manager. Ideally, says Marver, you're having frequent meetings with your boss anyway, where you get feedback on your performance. But even if not, you may be able to find a chance to say something like this, to lay the groundwork for a discussion about your career path (in Marver's words):

At our next one-on-one, I'd like to talk to you about opportunities for my advancement. Here is a document that I've prepared that just bullet points some of the contributions I

feel I've made that have made me effective in this role. And here are some contributions I would like to have more opportunities to do, which I feel aren't necessarily part of this role but part of another role—and I'd eventually like to be considered for it.

During conversations like these, Marver continues, “it's important to say what type of promotion you want and why [as well as,] ‘Here is the plan I am laying out for my development or growth. Here are the types of projects I propose doing. What would you add to it?’ But you start the plan first. Then let them tweak it.”

MONTH #5: MAKE YOUR CASE, BACKED BY THE DATA

Since you've been tracking your accomplishments for a few months now, you should have plenty of hard evidence that you're ready to hit the ground running on that plan. “For example, this could be emails from colleagues praising your work, testimonials from clients raving about you in meetings, or hard data that shows your work has significantly impacted the team, revenue, or company,” Adeshola explains.

If you sift through those materials and it feels a little thin, you may need to spend another few weeks or months extending your impact *before* asking for a title change. The great thing about sharing your development plan with your boss before asking for a promotion is that you can get specific feedback along the way, rather than just doing what you think your boss wants to see (and potentially guessing wrong).

Then, “the week before, I would recommend creating a one-pager detailing your accomplishments and the results you've produced in your role. This may or may not be something you feel comfortable walking in with when you have your conversation,” Adeshola says, “but by doing this exercise, it'll remind you that you are ready for the promotion, and it'll give you the confidence to ask for what you deserve—knowing that you have evidence to back up *why* you deserve it.”

Of course, as both Marver and Adeshola recognize, this might not unfold neatly over a five-month period for everybody, leading inevitably to the same result. But the basic formula holds true: Nail your current job, find small ways to make an impact beyond it, multiply them as far as you can, state your ambitions clearly, ask for feedback, and make your pitch once you know the proof is in the pudding.

In that order, more or less.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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