

6 Steps To Transition From Middle Management To Senior Leadership

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If you're working in middle management, becoming a senior executive is attainable but still requires a significant shift in attitudes, perspectives, and skills, in addition to the wider oversight of responsibilities. Beyond asking for a promotion or applying for the next role available on the internal vacancy board, there are other steps you need to take to ensure you are ready to successfully transition from your current role to a job within SLT (senior leadership team) also known as ELT (executive leadership team).

First, it's important to clarify the differences between SLT and C-suite roles, and those held at middle management level.

Middle managers are typically involved in managing departments, teams, and their associated daily operations. They might have less senior managers or supervisors reporting to them as well.

However, at SLT level, you would be responsible for strategizing and setting the direction and overall tone of the business, and introducing major changes and initiatives. Hence, this requires a broader, high-level skill set.

Here are six steps to transition from a middle manager to an executive leader:

Get Comfortable With Financials

"A senior leadership position likely implies ownership of a profit and loss (P&L) and is more entrepreneurial than individual contributor or middle management roles," shares Jamie Torchiana, M.S. President at [Exemplary Performance](#).

"Understanding how the business makes money, major expense items, budget cycles, and accrual-based accounting principles is necessary in an SLT role.

Spending time with the financial analyst aligned to your function, or taking free online courses are a great way to deepen your business acumen."

Be A Strategic Thinker

Torchiana continues, "Middle managers and senior executives play distinct roles when it comes to organizational strategy. Typically, middle managers are responsible for executing the strategy set by senior leadership, have limited decision-making authority, and are usually focused on more short-term goals within their department that contribute to organizational success.

"An SLT position, however, requires a broader scope of influence as they are required to make decisions that impact products, markets, and the overall direction of the business. SLT roles often drive innovation and take more calculated risks than their middle management counterparts. Mentors and cross-functional rotational assignments can help develop the breadth and depth of knowledge required to understand strategy more holistically."

Forge Strong Relationships

Relationship-building and networking opens doors of opportunities through increased exposure to business avenues, and also through mentorship, diversity of ideas and fresh perspectives, and training.

Skylar Christensen, a director of e-commerce at [Nature's Seed](#), advises middle managers to "forge strong relationships within and outside your organization, especially with senior leaders who can mentor and advocate for you."

Angel Mary, CEO of [Star Trak Investments LLC](#), agrees: "No leader can understand what they do not know without a corporate sponsor or mentor to help them. Whether it is someone in your own company, or in another, finding someone who already experienced what you are dealing with will give you more confidence in managing any type of situations."

Empower Others At All Levels

"Some middle management roles are still accountable for project work, and this certainly wanes as you climb the organizational ladder," shares Torchiana. "A senior executive deftly balances knowing enough about the workstreams reporting to them without fear of knowing and managing all the details. An SLT position requires comfort in both delegation and holding others

accountable, and has excellent communication skills that allow them to inform and inspire up, down, and across the organization."

Perhaps you could consider joining the board of directors at a non-profit organization. Torchiana believes this is a fantastic avenue to pursue if you are looking to refine your leadership and ability to influence without authority.

Understand The Big Picture

Mary explains that, although as a middle manager you are tasked with running one part of the company, you need to broaden and expand your knowledge beyond the ins and outs of your department, to be tapped into a more senior role.

"This requires networking with other leaders in other departments to fully grasp and understand their business needs, which in turn will allow you to communicate those needs effectively on behalf of others in the company, giving senior leaders a clue that you are more than one dimensional in your understanding of the organization," she says.

Set Your Ego Aside And Learn

One of the most essential aspects of progressing up the ladder is being self-aware enough to consider advice and feedback, no matter where it comes from.

Angel investor, entrepreneur, and EY 2023 Entrepreneur of the Year SE winner [Donald Thompson](#), related his experience: "As a C-Suite executive, I have to be comfortable learning what I don't know, so curiosity drives that desire to create an environment where the best idea wins. Whether I'm building a team or coaching a senior leader, I am focused on competitive learning, which centers on leaving your ego at the door to get the best idea, no matter who delivers it. In other words, I don't care who the messenger is, I want the best message that leads to our organization winning in the marketplace."

Overall, aspiring to senior leadership roles is a journey that requires sharpening your existing skill set and taking it to the next level, adopting new approaches and a more general, visionary perspective of your industry. Perhaps [Chief Marketing Officer Art Maxwell](#) sums it best when he says, "Embrace challenges, because they showcase your capabilities, and commit to

continuous learning to stay relevant. Patience and persistence are crucial to your transition as it may take time. Keep adapting these principles to your unique circumstances, and remember that your journey to senior leadership is a process of growth and development."