

**Harvard
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Review**

Managing Up

How to Get Noticed by Your Boss's Boss

by Melissa Raffoni

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Summary. How do you get noticed by senior leadership without going over your boss's head? One way to show how serious you are is to invest time outside of the office in learning skills that will help you grow and contribute to the company. This could mean taking courses that support the work you are doing, or reading texts in the areas you want to master. Senior leadership notices those who work collaboratively — so you should also be thoughtful in your interactions with others. Whether you are giving a presentation, working on a group project, or having a difficult conversation with your boss, it's important to know your audience and prepare how you will communicate with them in advance. Finally, don't be afraid to raise your hand and ask to participate in opportunities that could help you grow. **close**

You're bright. You have good ideas, insights, and the ambition to take on more. But you aren't getting the opportunities you want, and your manager has not been helpful. How do you get noticed by senior leadership without going over your boss's head?

To help me answer this question, I reached out to two of my most successful clients: Dave MacKeen, CEO of Eliassen Group, a strategic consulting and talent solutions provider with 21 offices across the United States, and Chuck Cohen, Managing Director of Benco Dental, the largest privately owned dental distributor in the U.S.

Chuck and Dave have decades of leadership experience during which they've been on the lookout for "future stars" or "high potentials." These employees are often identified as hard workers with the drive to make a difference — not only in the company's

success but also in the success of those around them. They go above and beyond their job titles and get noticed because they demonstrate potential to do great work on a more advanced level.

After putting our collective heads together, Chuck, Dave, and I landed on ten steps you can take to be recognized by senior leadership as one of them. If followed, these actions can help you grow and move toward greater opportunities — without coming off as a braggart or upsetting your direct manager.

Demonstrate your commitment to your growth and to the company. One way to show how serious you are is to invest time outside of the office in learning skills that will help you grow and contribute to the company. This could mean taking courses that support the work you are doing, or reading texts in the areas you want to master. For example, if you want to get better at developing strategy, ask your boss (and boss's boss) if they can recommend any books. Another way to show commitment to growth is to tell your boss that you're interested in taking on special projects, ones that will both help the company reach its goals and provide you with an opportunity to stretch yourself.

Focus on the team's success, rather than your own. While the voice of ambition may be telling you to focus on your own success, senior leadership notices those who work collaboratively and support others. They recognize that the greatest opportunity for success lies in a team working well together. "It's easy to

notice someone who gives their time and advice to help make others successful,” says Dave, “whether they be their direct reports or peers. Someone who makes those around them better is invaluable.”

Know your numbers and take ownership of your work.

Whatever part of the business you own, small or large, you have to know it inside out, and be ready to discuss the performance metrics and business analytics that matter most (revenue, profit and loss, etc.). You want to have a good idea of where you stand within the larger organization, especially in moments when all eyes are on you — such as presentations, meetings, or project reports. When you are able to prove the value of your contributions, you are able to prove the value of your worth as an employee and team member. Think of it as an opportunity to show senior leaders why they should be paying attention to you. Remember, though, this also means taking full responsibility for your failures. Adopt a “no excuses” mentality. Doing so shows a level of self-awareness that is inherent to great leadership.

Do what you say you will and do it well. Once you commit to something, commit to doing it well. When opportunities arise, execs are looking for someone with a good track record of getting the job done and bringing in positive results. This means your name needs to be associated with good work. Those who can take on small projects and hit a home run are more likely to be asked to take on bigger projects later.

Continually train yourself to think strategically. Being a strategic thinker is imperative to moving forward into roles with more responsibility. The best leaders know how to balance working “on” the business (strategy) with working “in” the business (day-to-day operations). When working “on” the business, they must be able to look beyond their to-do lists and think strategically about which opportunities will help the organization reach its larger goals. To do this, you have to be able to see the big picture, and keep it in mind when making decisions. This is a skill that doesn’t always come naturally. “If you want to get good at strategic thinking,” says Chuck, “you have to practice. It’s a muscle that needs to be exercised. The more you work on it, the better you’ll get.”

Challenge old ways and find new solutions. Do you see a different approach to a problem your company is facing? Maybe a creative way to meet a new challenge? If your organization is forward-thinking, all ideas should be welcome, particularly if you present them with humility and an appreciation for past efforts. The next time you have an innovative solution to a difficult problem, share it openly to show what you have to contribute. “I notice people who challenge the current process and communicate the possibilities of a different solution,” says Dave. “In our organization, people rally around them. We give these people more responsibilities. They don’t have to ask.”

Consistently improve your communication skills. You don't have to be the smartest person in the room, but you do need to be thoughtful during your interactions with others. Whether you are giving a presentation, working on a group project, or having a difficult conversation with your boss, it's important to know your audience and prepare how you will communicate with them in advance. Every person and situation will ask something different of you — so be adaptable and know how to adjust. You may want to project more confidence during a presentation, for example, but be more humble when working with peers. You may want to approach your boss with curiosity in some scenarios, but in others, approach them with data to support your point. It's always a good idea, however, to follow up with others and make sure you clearly understand their expectations.

Build relationships with people throughout the company.

Don't just stay within your "wing" of the building. Look for opportunities to connect and collaborate with other key players in your organization. When you build connections, you expand your network of allies and increase your visibility and influence. "Great leaders don't just wait to be asked, they put themselves in positions and situations where they're more likely to be asked," noted Chuck. When you work collaboratively and cross-functionally, your name will keep coming up for all the right reasons.

Live the values and purpose of the organization. Organizations use purpose and value statements to communicate what is and isn't expected of employees. Values speak to what an organization seeks not only in its staff, but in its leaders as well. A strong leader knows the values, lives them, and encourages the upholding of the values in others. "A person doesn't need to be the most vocal or work the most hours to be noticed," says Dave. "It's the person that demonstrates the values and ethics of the organization and lives the purpose, who will inspire people to follow them." The best way to show your commitment to your company's purpose and values is to talk about them. In meetings, give kudos to colleagues whose actions align with your organization's values, and when discussing projects of your own, note how they reflect the company's core purpose. In doing so you are saying to others, "I'm paying attention, and I'm noting when we do great work."

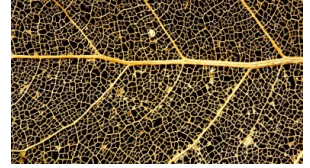
Raise your hand. Don't be afraid to ask for opportunities to show your skills and talents. While there is certainly a line to be walked here — you don't want to push too hard, or repeatedly ask the same question — showing initiative is always a good thing. If you see an area where you believe you can be an asset to the company and support strategic initiatives, ask to participate. Explain why you believe you can make a valuable contribution, as well as what you will gain from the opportunity. Ultimately, your boss and boss' boss want to put you in a spot where you can do the most. Sometimes you've got to identify where that is and ask for it.

There is no short path to getting noticed. And even if you find one, you may not have what you need to do the job well if you get there prematurely. But if you focus on these ten key areas with dedication, patience, and the acceptance that growing a stellar career takes some time, you'll keep moving in the right direction and be ready for what's next when it comes.

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