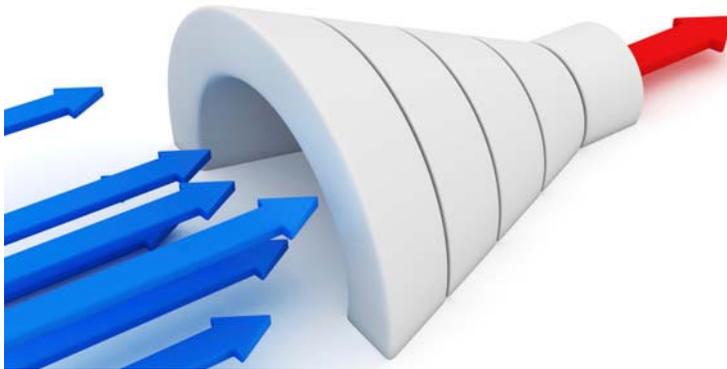


# Getting to the Next Level in Your Career



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There is a reverse funnel as you progress through the ranks of most organizations. As one moves into increasingly senior level positions, the competition for the positions becomes greater. Your existing talents may have landed you a management position, but likely won't boost you to the VP level. To quote the title of Marshall Goldsmith's bestseller, "What Got You Here Won't Get You There."<sup>2</sup> In our 30 plus years of coaching and developing leaders, we, at the Hayes Group, have noticed some distinct trends that get people promoted to VP levels. We assume by the time you are a senior manager or director you have learned to build and develop your team and have successfully learned how to work with your immediate manager. However, these skills are often not enough to make the jump from the management level. So, here are our five skills

required near the top of the funnel and the steps to take to attain them.

## 1) Financial Understanding

Leaders of business sectors, almost without exception, have a firm understanding of profit and loss statements. They possess a level of comprehension that surpasses a course on "Finance for Nonfinancial Executives." VP executive recognize trends and can formulate plans. P&L understanding and management is a skill that those without strong financial backgrounds (such as engineers, scientists, operations leaders) must intentionally work to acquire.

*To develop this skill:* Talk with the CFO or others in the financial team. Meet with your manager to discuss his or her role in the finances of the business. Talk about what they see. Accept jobs that give you experience in

managing profit and loss and display your level of proficiency.

## 2) Business Acumen

Movement into a VP level position necessitates an ability to look beyond your own business unit and see the broader picture. To manage the greater enterprise, you have to understand it. Executives require a wide-angle lens. Great leaders see how their unit can assist other departments and also see how other departments can aid theirs to help the business as a whole. This does not mean you are telling others what to do in their departments, but instead you are seen as someone who understands connections, relationships between units, and is consistently willing to help the entire business be successful.

*To develop this skill:* Build relationships with other departments. Forbes states, "The most effective way to expand your

*There are distinct trends that get people promoted to senior levels.*

sphere of influence is by becoming proficient at helping others do their job."<sup>5</sup> Ask the question: What can my department do to assist the others? This unselfish mentality both gains recognition for promotion and helps acquire the business acumen required to be successful when you advance.

### 3) Thinking Strategically and Operationally

Strategic thinking involves looking ahead by using long-term planning. In contrast, operational thinking is focused on immediate requirements for the business to run effectively. However, the best leaders are versatile. They understand both strategic and operational styles of thinking, and know when to alternate between the two. It is possible to be a strong strategic leader, but to begin to overuse the strategic aspect of your leadership at the expense of the operational aspect.

Robert Kaplan and Robert Kaiser, writing for the Harvard Business Review,

state, "it turns out you can take strengths too far.... 94% who overdo operational leadership in some way also underdo strategic leadership. Marked lopsidedness can limit your personal cachet and career prospects."<sup>3</sup>

*To develop this skill:* Decide which style of leadership you tend to overdo. If not readily apparent to you, ask for feedback from coworkers. Once you have identified which area is lacking, the solution is simple: allot more time for it. If you tend to be an operational thinker, set aside time

to think strategically. Mark a space in your schedule to think ahead toward the future of your group. Likewise, if you tend toward strategic thinking, make sure that you do not neglect the day-to-day operations of the business and ensure you know an appropriate level of detail to build credibility in the organization.

### 4) Global Understanding

Ninety-six percent of consumers live outside the United States.<sup>1</sup> Potential customers are spread across the earth, and successful businesses capitalize on what is

now a truly global market. A quick glance through the Fortune 500 list will confirm that the vast majority of large

corporations are no longer operating within a single nation's borders. Thus, moving to the VP level in many organizations now requires a global understanding. An ability to interact with other cultures and an ability think on a global scale are key.

*To develop this skill:* Learn about the cultures with whom you may interact. Asking questions of friends from other cultures is great, but for some may not be a viable option. Books like "When Cultures Collide" by Richard Lewis can be a great resource, and

even simple internet searches can be surprisingly enlightening. Ask for international assignments - even if only for a short term.

### 5) Peer Relationships

Your peers are the ones who will get you promoted. Many focus on the success of the team under their immediate command, rather than on the success of their first team, their peers. Patrick Lencioni, author of *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, explains it this way: Leaders "serve on two teams that are both important (the team they lead and the team they are a member of), they need to prioritize their leadership team (Team #1) first."<sup>4</sup>

It is imperative that your peers see you as someone who has their back and their interests in mind. This puts the interests of the company ahead of the interests of your individual group, which is a character trait of a good leader. In addition, it lets your peers see you as someone they would be comfortable following. *To develop this skill:* First, decide who your first team is. They are not those under your immediate command, though it may often feel that way. They are usually the other members of your peer team. Shift your focus from "my team" to "our team". Make your priority the good of the leadership team, rather than lobbying for the rights of your second team. Ask what your peers' teams need from you and what would be the best direction

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for the entire group. Let your peers see that you have greater interests in mind than those of the group you lead. Intentionally plan lunch and other meetings with your peer group. Build the relationship on trust by getting to know peers better.

As the old adage states, "Dress for the job you want, not the job you have." The key to promotion is not being great at your current job. Promotions are gained by being prepared for the job you want. By practicing now the skills needed at the next level, you display your readiness for a higher position. Senior level positions are

incredibly competitive, but by developing financial understanding, business acumen, versatility, global understanding, and peer relationships, you not only increase your chances of promotion but ensure that you will be ready to lead when the time comes.

Founded in 1976, The Hayes Group is dedicated to " *elevating organizations by helping leaders and teams become the best they can be.*" The Hayes Group International is a full-service organizational consulting firm. Our team of experienced professionals is proud to have had a positive impact on over 1,700 organizations worldwide, in over 28 countries, over the past 39 years.

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