

Passed Over for Partner? How to Get Promoted Next Year

By Sharon Meit Abrahams

So you didn't get "the call" from your boss or department head when promotions were being announced. Instead, you were forced to stare at your phone, hoping it would ring and becoming increasingly disappointed and bitter when it didn't. Whether this is the first time this has happened to you or you have been passed over before, you undoubtedly feel upset, angry, and frustrated. This is natural. But rather than allowing those feelings to discourage you or distract you from continuing to perform high-quality legal work, capture that negative energy and redirect it to focus on what you need to do to get "the call" next year. The following steps can help you channel your feelings and gain control over your future:

1. Talk to your superiors, such as your department or practice group head or even the managing partner, about why you have not yet advanced. They should be able to share insights about how the firm views you and what roadblocks might be standing in your way.
2. Try to determine whether your lack of promotion was based on the firm structure or ability to support another partner in a specific group or office. If it was not a financial decision, then ask about specific improvements you need to make for the future.
3. Be self-critical and honest with yourself. Truly think about what you have accomplished in your career. Identify your strengths and, more importantly, your weaknesses. The more critical you are of yourself the more likely you are to improve in your weak areas.
4. Ask a trusted mentor for his or her feedback on your strengths and weaknesses, making it clear that you want to make positive changes and are open to constructive criticism.
5. Take some time to reflect on what these individuals tell you and absorb their messages, especially the constructive criticism. Think about how you can correct any problems that were identified, either by yourself or with someone else, or to improve in areas where you want to set yourself apart.
6. Find a coach, either by using an internal resource or hiring an outside executive coach, to help you take corrective steps to improve your weaknesses and enhance your strengths.
7. Write down your goals and the action steps needed to achieve them.
8. Your goals should be SMART—Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and within a Timeframe.
9. Set up a time every month to talk with your coach about your progress, and ask your coach to help keep you honest so you really work towards your improvements.

Examples of SMART goals:

- Goal: Starting next month, I will increase my business development time commitment by five hours per week.

Action Steps:

- make a list of current or potential clients or contacts;
- schedule a fifteen-minute call with one or more of these contacts per week; and
- be prepared to discuss a specific topic that would be of interest to that potential client or contact, be it developments or trends in the relevant area of law or pending legislation that could affect that client or contact. If possible, share a relevant news article or document you have prepared before the call to aid in the discussion.
- Goal: By February 2011, I will be known by ten more partners in the firm and receive work from them.

Action Steps:

- identify partners and practice groups who should know what you do;
- at all firm-wide meetings, introduce yourself to at least three partners;
- ask partners to have coffee or lunch with you so that you can discuss your practice and goals with them, explain your practice to them, and learn about their practice areas and whether you can do anything to assist them; and
- offer to conduct a CLE program for a practice group.

Accomplishing these steps does not guarantee you will make partner next year, but they will help build your practice no matter what happens. Anything you do to invest in yourself is something you will always have to take with you wherever you go. But the commitment you make along the way might just take you over the top!

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