

How to prove you have management potential, even if you're not in charge

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Management skills are essential to climbing the career ladder, but you don't have to be sitting at the top of the org chart to be a leader in the office.

Even if you don't currently have a management role, you can still highlight your leadership capabilities without stepping on anyone's toes.

"Embrace the power you actually have," said Janice Shack-Marquez, adjunct professor of leadership and management at George Washington University and the University of Maryland. She recommends looking for opportunities in your current position to showcase your leadership.

Establish relationships

Trust is a big part of influencing people. Create relationships with your colleagues so you become the person people turn to for help and guidance.

"If you really want to influence people, use the platinum rule: Treat them how they want to be treated," said Mary Abbajay, author of "Managing Up: How to Move up, Win at Work, and Succeed with Any Type of Boss."

That means considering co-workers' work-style preferences and pet peeves. "The more you are able to adapt and work well with different people, the more valuable you will be in the world."

Being empathic is also an important trait of leaders. "Get comfortable with emotions," suggested Shack-Marquez. "We are emotional people, that is what makes us human."

Act the part

Take a look at the job description and responsibilities of the people above you and compare it to your duties and note any skills you can improve and responsibilities to take on.

Push yourself beyond your job description and find projects to join or take the initiative to propose new solutions that will allow you to exercise more leadership.



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JOEL GARFINKLE. EXECUTIVE COACH

"Leaders love to see people who take ownership and who are decisive and bold and move toward a solution," said Joel Garfinkle, executive coach and Author of "Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level."

Don't be afraid of feedback

No one is perfect. And people who pretend to have it all figured out tend not to make the best leaders.

Be open to feedback and criticism, and don't be shy about asking your colleagues what they need from a leader.

"Even though feedback is critical to professional development and healthy relationships, most of us dread it and/or ignore it," said Shack-Marquez.

She recommended the "stop, start, continue" model to help solicit feedback. This process is a series of three questions: What is one thing I should stop doing? What is one thing I should start doing? What is one thing I should continue doing?



Communicate clearly

Leaders need to be good communicators.

"The best leaders out there might say very little, but when they do speak everybody listens," said Garfinkle.

Make sure to be part of the conversation, but be concise and clear while also showcasing your knowledge and enthusiasm. That means doing your homework before a meeting to make sure you are prepared and will be adding substance to discussions.

"You need to be willing to take the stage, he said. "Think about the key point you might want to bring up, be on point but also be conscious of dominating the room."

If you are afraid of over talking, Garfinkle offered the following trick: Place three small objects in a pocket. Each time you speak, remove one object. Once the pocket is empty you've hit your limit.

When making requests to peers, be clear with what, when and why you need something and make sure to follow up on the progress.

"You have to hold people accountable," said Abbajay. "If they aren't delivering, you have to have a conversation about it, but you can't blame them because you don't have that authority."

Be a good follower

A leader needs followers. So master the art of being your boss's best follower.

"A powerful follower is someone who can challenge their boss and also be willing to encourage and support the boss and have their back to help them be as successful as possible," said Shack-Marquez.

Figure out the priorities of the boss and raise your hand to assist when help is needed. "If you help your boss succeed, there is a good possibility of a succession plan where your name could come up," said Garfinkle.

Track your accomplishments

Make sure your bosses are aware of your accomplishments and leadership capabilities.

Many workers feel uncomfortable with the idea of tooting their own horn, but think of it more as being informative.

Share feedback from clients about how your work has helped, or send updates to your boss that tracks your progress on an important project.

"You have to get away from the idea of 'I am self-promoting' and think of it rather as you are sharing information," said Garfinkle.

