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Outwitting the Job Market Over the Long Term - Part 2

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Summary:

Your boss is the person who will recommend you for a promotion, if the opportunity arises. For this reason and for many others, staying on good terms with her is imperative.

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STAY ON GOOD TERMS WITH YOUR BOSS

Your boss is the person who will recommend you for a promotion, if the opportunity arises. For this reason and for many others, staying on good terms with her is imperative. Put time and effort into the relationship. Try to think from your boss's perspective. What drives her? How does she do her job? And more importantly, what can you do to make her job easier? If there's an important project in the works, for example, don't hesitate to put in extra hours. Do the bureaucratic tasks that you know your boss detests. Come in early and stay late to make sure you're always available should your boss need you. If you can lighten her workload in a helpful rather than invasive way, you will make yourself more valuable. In fact, if you can become indispensable to your boss, she will bring you up with her if she is promoted.

But what can you do if, despite your best efforts, your relationship with your boss isn't working out? One account manager describes his difficult experiences with his former manager. He says, "My boss and I were actually competing for the attentions of his supervisor. My boss's boss had taken a liking to me and had even given me some of the important duties that would normally have been my boss's domain. There was some rivalry there, even though I didn't want there to be. I spoke with my boss about improving our relationship. I thought we could meet once a week for a lunch meeting, just the two of us, to sort of mend our working relationship. But he was opposed to all my suggestions-perhaps he felt threatened-and I realized I would probably need to move on." As this example indicates, not every relationship can be saved. If you've been consistently passed over for promotions, if you've been in the same job for a few years despite prospects of upward mobility, if relations between you and your boss are consistently tense or uncomfortable, it may be time to explore other horizons.

If you like your company, one option would be a lateral move. If you take a job at the same level, but with a boss who likes you on a personal level, your chances of promotion will be much greater. Of course, you can also look for employment outside the company.

SPEAK TO THOSE WHO HAVE SUCCEEDED

In your company, or perhaps in your industry in general, you have no doubt encountered people whose work ethic or management style you respect and admire. How did they get to where they are today? What paths did they take? And how do they stay at the top of their game? No matter what level you're at in your company, speak to those people whose abilities, skills, or drive you can learn from. You can do so informally. Sit with them in the company cafeteria. Introduce yourself after a company-wide meeting. Send e-mails asking if you can stop by their offices. Or you can take a more formal approach and ask for brief informational sessions. Either way, by listening to and learning from others, you can cultivate your own professional growth.

By the same token, you may be the person whom others are seeking out. If there are people at your company whom you can encourage and assist, reach out to them. The more friendships you forge, the more benefits-personal and professional-you will reap.

EXCEED EXPECTATIONS

Above and beyond your job description, what else can you be doing to make the most of your position? Complete the tasks expected of you, then strive to do more. An administrative assistant at a nonprofit organization was eager to showcase his technical skills, which he seldom used on the job. When the nonprofit organization decided to replace its outmoded computers, he volunteered to head up a task force to refurbish the old computers and donate them to a local public high school. "Everyone was impressed by my initiative and my sense of giving. I volunteered my time after work because I believed in the cause. But a perk was that my coworkers and superiors noticed that I was really good with technology."

There are many ways to make your mark at work. Volunteer to do something small, like record the minutes of a company meeting. Better yet, tackle a larger problem. Organize a team dedicated to finding a solution for a persistent company problem, or volunteer to complete an unpopular, but high-profile assignment. Consistently go the extra mile, as long as doing so doesn't interfere with your regular workload. Your leadership abilities won't be lost on those around you.