

Promotion Strategy

Bliss Out Your Boss

Initiate an all-out impress-athon that will have the big cheese itching to bump up your title and increase your take-home pay.

By Cynthia Hanson

■ When you lift your fingers from the keyboard and poke your head outside your cubicle, what do you see? That cut-down queen from public relations who humiliates her rivals at the monthly meetings? Or the back-stabber from accounting who seems to get ahead by bringing everyone else down? Or maybe the new pretty girl, loitering Lewinsky-style outside the boss's office? Should you take a page out of their book if you want to get ahead? "Absolutely not," says Debra Benton, author of *The \$100,000 Club: How to Make a Six-Figure Income* (Warner, 1988). "At every level, the bottom-line secret to getting promoted is to work *smarter*." Here's how:

Go the Extra Mile

Current status: Freelancer, intern, part-timer, or temp

Next step: Entry-level staff position

"At this point, attitude is everything," says Arlene Hirsch, a Chicago career counselor and author of *Love Your Work and Success Will Follow* (John Wiley & Sons, 1996). There's a benefit to being so low on the totem pole—no one expects you to be an expert, so the accomplishments you achieve through your dedication and positive attitude will surprise them at every turn.

"If you want a full-time job, swallow your pride and do everything your boss asks—even if you think it's beneath you,"



Go girl: Make a promotion commotion.

says Ann Green*, 25, an associate editor at a New York City publishing house. "Whether it's fetching coffee, making 150 photocopies, or buying feminine-hygiene products, do it with a smile and do it as quickly as possible." Green knows the drill: By going the extra mile and never complaining, she parlayed a three-month stint as an editor's assistant into a permanent gig as a staff editor with benefits.

Clue In Quickly

Current status: Entry-level staff position/assistant

Next step: Midlevel job/associate

Doing the job with a smile isn't enough anymore. Now the boss is watching to see if you're a quick study, if you're batting

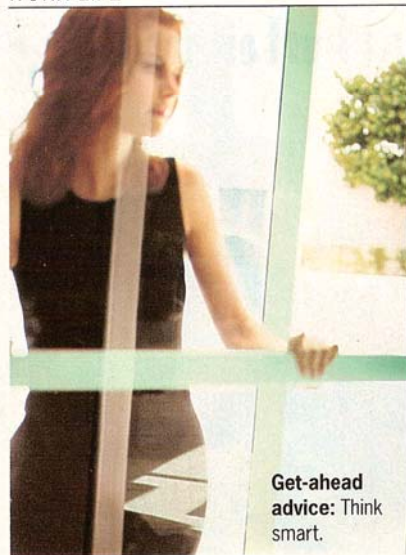
"I focus on staff who never say 'no' when I need an extra hand."

home runs on every assignment, and if you're contributing fresh ideas—from developing a customer-feedback system to recommending a much more effective way to recruit on college campuses.

Take charge. "I'm totally impressed when entry-level employees do what needs to be done—without being told,"

*Some names have been changed.

CAROLINE KINNEY. Top: Sisley by United Colors of Benetton. Skirt: Express



Get-ahead
advice: Think
smart.

Promotion Secrets of 3 Overnight Sensations

"I got my start in public relations by bluffing. After college, I was an assistant to the owner of a fur salon. Within a few months, I was bored out of my mind. Nobody was handling PR, so I pretended I knew all about it and started to develop contacts with the local fashion reporters so they'd feature our furs in their stories. The next thing I knew, I convinced my boss to create a new position for me."

—Sally, 30, public relations exec

"During my first two months on the job—while my other new coworkers were still trying to find the coffee station—I busted my butt on the phone, calling potential clients day and night. I wouldn't take no for an answer. I brought in 30 new clients and raised \$500,000 in new assets—and was promoted from stockbroker to vice president and given two assistants."

—Mary, 26, vice president at an investment-banking firm

"I work in a big office. When my supervisor quit to have a baby, I applied for her job. I interviewed with the office manager, but I also left my résumé in the fax machine, hoping she'd see it and worry that I'd already started job hunting. I knew it was a risk, but it must have worked because I was promoted."

—Courtney, 30, dental-hygienist supervisor

says Terrie Williams, president of The Terrie Williams Agency, a public relations firm in New York City, and author of *The Personal Touch: What You Really Need to Succeed in Today's Fast-Paced Business World* (Warner Books, 1997).

Kathy Walker, 26, credits her rapid rise at a Los Angeles record company to that strategy. "When I was a secretary, I would finish all the boring stuff quickly, so I'd have time to do interesting things, like search for new talent by listening to demo tapes from new bands," says Walker, promoted to an assistant producer after nine months. "My boss didn't even realize that I was listening to demos until I handed him my reports on several hot bands that I had found first. Then he knew that I was capable of much more."

Be a People-Problem Solver

Current status: Midlevel associate

Next step: Department head or supervisor

The boss wants to know whether you have the right stuff to run an entire department. In other words, do you have interpersonal skills—the ability to train, motivate, and manage people? Can you organize work flow by taking a primo project from start to finish, sticking to a budget, and meeting deadlines?

You're locked in a catch-22: How do you prove you're a natural-born leader when your current job doesn't allow you to manage people, budgets, or megaprojects? "One way is to get leadership experience on your own time," urges Jane Winter, CEO and president of Les Concierges, a San Francisco firm that arranges entertainment and plans events for Fortune 500 clients. Organize the company's summer softball tournament or end-of-the-year holiday bash, chair the publicity committee for a local charity, or recruit employees to tutor at a local school. Of course, it's not enough to do these things and keep it a secret. To enhance your image with your boss, mention your activities in conversation or explain in a memo what you're doing to get the goods to become a supervisor.

Think—and Talk—Big

Current status: Supervisor

Next step: Manager and beyond

Can you look beyond your department to see where the company's headed? Do you have ideas that will take the business in new and profitable directions? "In management, you can't simply implement other peoples' ideas," Winter notes. "You also must be an innovator who presents creative ideas and solutions to business problems." Of course, innovation varies by industry and company. Ask around to learn what it took for people in superhigh places to get there—and use those ideas as models for developing creative strategies for your own rapid rise.

Talk to people who see different pieces of the puzzle. "Never forget that building a career is a social activity," says Hirsch. Through power schmoozing with people in your industry, you'll gain knowledge and perspective on how your department fits into your company and how your company fits into the bigger picture. You'll also form contacts that help you take on projects outside your area, so you can gain a broader perspective on how your company works. That broader view can lay the foundation for the groundbreaking ideas you'll need to succeed once you reach that pinnacle.

That's what worked for Kimberly Mulcahy, 38, who's been promoted nine times in her 16 years at Budget Rent a Car in Lisle, Illinois. Though she was hired as a secretary, Mulcahy is now vice president of corporate communications—a senior-level position that includes managing a staff of six and overseeing the employee newsletter. She snagged the job after serving time in the trenches, doing everything from training sales representatives to managing franchises. "Early on, I realized I needed to develop as broad a view of my business as possible to maximize my value. So I attended conferences and chatted up senior-level people at other companies, and also went out of my way to talk to managers in different departments," says Mulcahy. "Then I acted on my knowledge, and the rest is history!" ■