

What if your best friend gets the promotion?

By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

You work with your best friend. What do you do if both of you go for the same promotion, and your friend gets it instead of you?

First you cry. You go home, tell your family you've had a bad day and they're having carryout pizza for dinner, and you go into a closet and pout. You say every bad word you know and you make up a couple of new ones. If you can talk with your family about it, that's golden. The next day you go into the office with your best first runner-up smile on your face. You congratulate your friend and offer to be of help.

This is not the end of the world; this is not the last promotion; this is not the end of the game. If getting ahead is what you want, you must stay focused on your goal, not on your hurt. You just have to get over it ... now.

Should you and your friend talk about how this might affect your relationship?

That's an excellent idea if you have a solid friendship. It is important to preserve friendships and working relationships. The trouble is that competition can drive a wedge between two people, and jealousy is an ugly beast. That can keep friends from talking.

As bad as you may feel, though, your bottom line for your friend is, "I'm happy for your success" more than "I'm miserable I didn't get the brass ring."

How is the relationship likely to change afterwards?

That depends on whether the friend is now the boss or the promotion was to a different department. If your friend is now the boss and your friend is doing the job right, she will distance herself from you, even if only a little. She has to; you can't make good decisions about people otherwise. If your friend is going to another department, the relationship can flourish, maybe even grow because it's valuable for both of you.

Next time the brass ring comes around and you get it, you'll understand what your friend is going through when she gives you her best first runner-up smile.