

Passed Over for Promotion

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One of the worst experiences at work is to get passed over for promotion. How do companies decide who's the best person for the job?

They have a set of criteria they use in looking for the right person. If you didn't get the job, it's because you didn't meet those criteria. One of the most common and most bitter assumptions people have is that because they're doing a good job in their current position, that they're automatically in line for the next level up.

You can and you should ask your boss why you got passed over. I'll be surprised if you get a straight answer, however. "We picked the best qualified person," is what most bosses say.

Here are the reasons people get passed over (and maybe you can see why it would be hard for a boss to tell you): You're great at the technical aspects of the job, but lousy at the people part. You're not a team player. You can't see the bigger picture. You don't manage up well.

You'll get a vague answer or, if your boss is inexperienced, you'll get a list of specific things you don't have. Too often (and also unhappily), the passed-over employee WORKS on that list then says to the boss, "Here, I did what you told me I didn't have. NOW give me the promotion."

You still won't get the promotion, the boss will be unable to say why, and you'll be even more unhappy.

But if you were the one who TRAINED the person who got the job, why wouldn't the company give YOU the promotion?

Because you didn't have what they wanted for the NEW job. Technical competence is only half the job, and may not be relevant to the new job. The other half, the "soft" half, often matters more.

Your boss can't say these things to you, but they may be true: I don't like you. You don't feel like a fit in the mix of the management team. The chemistry's bad. You're not the right age/race/gender for the job.

If you get passed over two or three times, should you give up hope of ever being promoted?

Not getting promoted had to do with who you ARE, not what you DO, and you probably can't change that. So, with the current management structure, no one is going to think differently of you.

But I've known plenty of people who've gotten their promotion because: (1) They outlasted the management, and the new management saw them as promotable; or (2) They've gone to another company, gotten bigger and different experience, and been knocked around by life, then come back to the old company in an even HIGHER position.

So, don't have blinders on, but don't lose hope either.