

Why People Get Promoted

By Rose Jonas, Ph.D.

You can learn one very wrong thing at your mother's knee and later in school: "If you do a good job, you'll get ahead." This is a big misconception to take to the workplace.

Yes, it's important to do a good job. Unless you're the owner's kid, the company can't support promoting someone doing a bad job. But you can overdo it. I've watched exceedingly competent people fling themselves at the trapdoor separating them from the next level up. It might as well be nailed shut for all that their great performance mattered.

The company's happy that you do a good job; in fact, they may want to keep you there because no one else could do it as well. But they don't promote based on your performance here. They promote based on your how well they think you'll do the bigger job. If here your job requires a brusque efficiency, but *there* you need a smooth diplomacy, you won't even get on the short list if your style is to bark orders and keep people on a short leash.

What you have to do to get promoted is do a good job today, look up and see what behaviors the company rewards at the higher levels, and then do those behaviors. It's not quite as simple as that. Luck and hard skills also play a role, but this works better than bloodying your fists on that trapdoor to the executive suite.