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Volunteering for extra projects and asking for additional responsibilities are some ways healthcare professionals can excel.

You never set out to get professionally stuck in your healthcare career, but after many loyal years of service at your facility, you may find you haven't progressed very far.

Maybe you never formulated a plan to move forward or spent years waiting for a manager to notice you or opportunities to fall in your lap. Or maybe you're a promising new graduate who is frustrated after months of hearing nothing back from prospective employers.

Don't fret. You can start today to take steps to get ahead in your healthcare career.

A VISION

To jump-start your healthcare job, you have to do some soul-searching. "People go right into planning mode before they ask themselves what they want," said Deborah Brown-Volkman, career coach, president of Surpass Your Dreams Inc.

You need a vision, so ask yourself what you want professionally. If you want a new job, what does that job look like? How much money do you want to make? What type of healthcare facility do you want to work for?

If you seek a promotion or new title/responsibilities, Brown-Volkman suggested envisioning the position, and if there's an actual job opening resembling this post, she recommends looking at the description to see what is required. Then ask yourself: "How do I fill these gaps?" Rounding out a lack of experience or skills can come in the form of classes, volunteering, or asking for additional projects and responsibilities.

PROMOTION

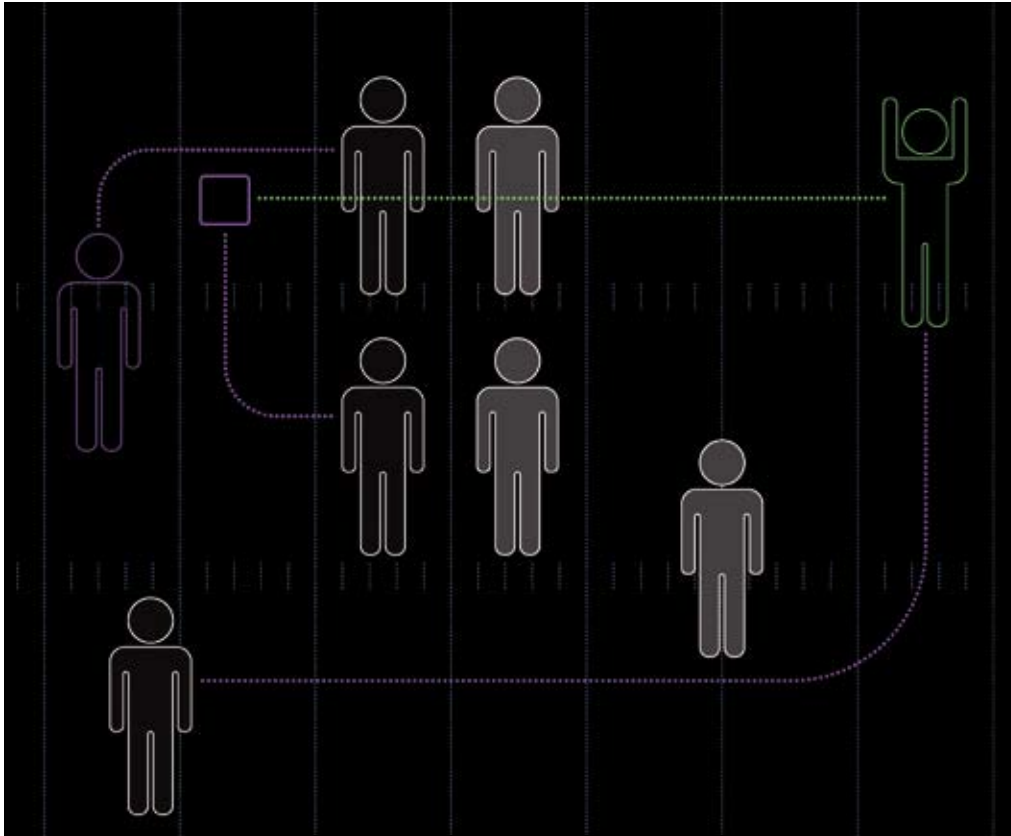
If you want to climb the career ladder in your field, you need to justify to your employer why you should get promoted. Find out items on the boss's or hospital's agenda and determine how you can help meet those initiatives.

Other strategies to move up include getting to know key decision makers, working on projects outside of your direct line of expertise and attending industry conferences, said Joel Garfinkle of Garfinkle Executive Coaching and author of *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*.

You may have mastered the technical aspects of your job, but you need to demonstrate an understanding of the "big picture" to be considered promotable and a leader. "That means if

"As an employee, it's your responsibility to make sure the decision makers are aware of your accomplishments."

—Joel Garfinkle



you are a healthcare professional, you must step out of your comfort zone to move to the top,” Garfinkle said. “You must seek out exposure and experience not only in your job description, but also in other key fields, like accounting, operations, sales and business development, research and development, information technology, project management and human resources.”

PERCEPTION IS REALITY

Even utilizing the above strategies, you may still hit a brick wall. Skill, merit and hard work will only take you so far; other people’s perception of you is the other critical piece of the pie, Garfinkle explained.

Stefanie Zizzo, career and life coach, encourages clients to decide how they want to be seen by other team members at their organization and compare that to reality. If reality doesn’t measure up, individuals need to figure out actions to take to be known that way, she said.

Importantly, you need to eliminate any negative perceptions your superiors or colleagues have of you (e.g., behavior, attitude, etc.), Garfinkle said. “You want to eliminate these damaging perceptions and take actions that cause others to see you in a more positive light,” he noted.

NEW JOB

If you are out of work, fresh out of school or have just decided that it’s

time to move on, analyze your field for trends to find where opportunities exist. “Healthcare is about treating people who are sick, and there’s always people getting sick,” Brown-Volkman said. “So where are people getting sick? Maybe you shift yourself. Maybe there’s more opportunity with the elderly.”

Then network. Social networking has added a new dimension to the job search. It’s not enough to go on a job board and apply for a job, Brown-Volkman noted.

“The Facebooks of the world, the LinkedIns of the world have taken off for professionals because people recognize that they don’t really have a network,” she explains. “They didn’t keep up with their relationships because they got busy. And then the economy got tougher. And they recognize that they really do need a network.”

SELF-SABOTAGE

If you have a clear vision and have taken concrete steps to progress in your existing career but aren’t seeing results, you may have to turn inward for answers. “It’s important to look at yourself and say, ‘What part am I playing?’” Brown-Volkman said.

Sometimes employees have played it too safe by staying under the radar and not speaking up—possibly because they have undervalued their own worth or allowed negative self-talk to get too loud, said Zizzo.

“As an employee, it’s your responsibility to make sure the decision makers are aware of your accomplishments and know the impact of your work and the value you bring to the organization,” said Garfinkle. “People need to know who you are and what you do. You can’t just hide out, hold onto your job and hope you will keep it.”

EXTENUATING FACTORS

Factors beyond your control may prevent you from succeeding. Personality conflicts, politics or a clash of values between an employee and manager could be to blame. “Your boss might expect you to work 60 hours a week, but you want to be home with your family,” Zizzo said. “Often it means the individual needs to find a different environment.”

So, if you gave it your best shot, it may be time to move on. Otherwise, your self-esteem can start to erode. But with so much uncertainty in the economy, Brown-Volkman said many people are resigning themselves to be content where they are.

“You can still go after what you want,” she said. “It might take longer, but at least you’re working toward something.”

ATTITUDE CHANGE

If you’re stuck for the moment, you have two choices: Focus on the positive or focus on the negative. Brown-Volkman said fixating on the problems with your job is a demotivator that leads to general career dissatisfaction and rut perpetuation.

Zizzo had one client struggling to find contentment in her job because she was consumed by negative thoughts about difficult co-workers.

“She not only shifted her thoughts, but she started to talk to her colleagues to appreciate them for what they’re doing,” Zizzo said. “Even if they’re not as supportive as she would want them to be, she’s thanking them for where they are supportive. That was a huge transformation for her.”

Hang tough if you aren’t seeing results, and keep striving for your best. Even if your employer doesn’t recognize you, that doesn’t mean the work you do isn’t valuable to patients or your healthcare facility. With the right attitude and a little persistence, you may just find yourself in a better place—be it a physical location or a state of mind—than when you started.

Jill Hoffman is on staff at ADVANCE.