

# GETTING PROMOTED ON YOUR TIMELINE (NOT THEIRS)

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*Welcome to The Highly Valued Leader podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.*

Hello, leaders. Welcome back to the podcast. This week, we're talking about something I love talking about, and that is getting promoted. I have several of my one-on-one clients in this position of about to get promoted, want to get promoted, and expected to be promoted but didn't get promoted. So if you're my one-on-one client, you will find a trend in my podcast episodes where whatever I hear a lot on a given week, I will turn that into a podcast episode because it just says to me that a lot of people are experiencing the same thing.

I kind of look at my podcasts almost like an extension of a group coaching thing where even though I coach one-on-one right now, I like to take what I learned in my one-on-one and bring it to the masses by sharing what's going on and offer you similar coaching to what I offer my one-on-one clients. Obviously, it can't be the same coaching because everybody's situation is slightly unique and everyone themselves is slightly unique. But we can talk about the general principles.

Today, I want to talk to the people who expected to be promoted but didn't get the promotion. And not only did you not get the promotion, but you didn't get a really good reason why you didn't get it. Of course, you're pissed. You're frustrated; you did everything they asked you to do but in the end, you still didn't get the promotion. It didn't come through. I've been there. And so have many of my clients. Two of them are in it right now. And that's one of the reasons people come to me.

I want to talk today about how to make sure you get promoted next time. How to make sure that you are working it all the way along so that when the time comes to be promoted, it is kind of just an easy yes. That's what we want—an easy yes. That's what I'm going to cover. What you need to do to get promoted at the leadership level to make it an easy yes. And I think why I call this episode is getting promoted on your timeline, not theirs.

A lot of what we're going to talk about today is how you can take control of when you get promoted. I know that feels like a hard thing to do because ultimately, someone else gets to make the decision. But you have a say. You have a lot more influence than you think you have. Maybe at your current company, the ultimate decision obviously isn't yours. Isn't that in most companies? But you have a lot more influence than you know. And we

want to really explore that and help you work that influence that you have both inside and outside the organization.

When it comes to being promoted, I see two common problems that come up. First of all, most people will treat their job plan as a career plan. I've talked a lot about this in the past, but I'm just going to put a quick push on it again today. We tend to put our advancement in organization in other people's hands. You might talk to your boss about the fact that you want to get promoted, they might understand what your career goals are, and then you ask them what you need to do. That's always a funny question. My clients say, *"I asked my boss what I needed to do and they didn't have an answer."* Of course, they don't have an answer. You should know what you need to do. But we'll get to that.

They say, *"I'm going to do those things, boss..."* Then you go away and do them. And then you wait like you just trust that your boss, who's also very busy negotiating their own career and negotiating their own trade-offs to get what they need for their team, or whatever it is. You're trusting that your boss who has a lot of other priorities, including you, to make sure that they get the job done and get you promoted.

When I say people are treating their career plans like a job plan, what I mean by that is, that they just think about their career in the context of just the job they have right now. They don't think about their career as a higher order than their job, which, in fact, it is. I'll always say this: your career is on a higher plane and your job is just one of the tools you are using to fulfil your career goals. But a lot of people will make their job goals and their career goals the same thing. You just need to separate those. I just see that as a problem.

You need to put your career goals, which include your job into the hands of someone who's going to put your needs first. And let's face it, the only person who was going to do that; the only person who's going to put your needs first, is you. The problem is you're not doing that probably. You're probably putting everyone else's needs first. You're probably putting the job first. And every time it comes to *'Oh, I've got to do something for my career,'* it is like the last priority, which is kind of interesting because we expect our boss to put our needs first, but we won't even do it. You won't put your needs first, but you're pissed that your boss won't put your needs first. That's the first problem. You're not taking control of your career; you're putting it in someone else's hands in which you're not their number one priority.

The other problem I commonly see, and I just alluded to it is that you make yourself so busy getting the job done that you don't make the time to manage your career. You don't see it as a priority. But it is the most important priority. It's the reason that you show up for work every day but you just get so absorbed in doing a great job because you think that's the way forward. You think that the way that you're going to get promoted is just by doing a great job. And that is just one strategy towards promotion.

Doing your job is just one strategy. And in fact, I will offer you that in table stakes. That's just like a baseline. And I think you probably agree with that; you probably already know that. But when it comes down to it, we get so absorbed with doing our jobs, we don't think about anything else and we're expecting everyone to see how great we are. We don't even spend time maybe spotlighting or shining a light on how what we're doing is working and how we are achieving our goals or anything.

We just think, *'I'm going to show up and I'm going to keep doing it and people are going to notice.'* And when they don't, we get pissed. We think, *'Why didn't they notice? I've been busting my butt here.'* It's normal to expect it. But

let's be honest, it's just not realistic. It's normal that your brain would think, *'I'm just going to do my job and everything's going to be fine.'* But it's just not realistic.

Just like you, your boss has a million things coming at them. Not just a million things on their to-do list, but a million priorities, a million things to think about when they're running a team as well. And they can't just focus on you. They're not only focused on you or everyone else on the team but also on the bigger organization. They have a lot of priorities, and they have to balance those. So it's our job as leaders to help our boss in general because our boss is part of our team.

As I always say, as leaders, it's our job to create an environment for results to happen. When it comes to our day-to-day work, and we manage up to our boss, it's about making sure they stay informed. It's about getting them prepared for what might be coming their way. It's about help using them to help create space for us and our team when we need to do something. It's our job to manage up on a day-to-day basis. And the same is true when it comes to our job.

And when we don't do that, we're creating a gap; we're not creating the narrative that we need. The real problem is that we haven't taken the time to not only craft the narrative in our head that we want people to have about us but also we're not leading that narrative. We're not leading the discussion around that narrative towards promotion with our boss or anyone else.

And I get it, you don't want to have to do this. You're like, *'Please, do I have to do one more thing?'* And you wish you didn't have to. I wish you didn't have to. But wishing isn't going to make it happen. The reality is, that spending your time wishing you didn't have to is going to lead to a larger risk that you won't get promoted. So you could spend your time wishing, or we could just get down to business. You could just accept that your being promoted is a project you have to lead. Period. And it needs to be in your day-to-day work. Period. Just accept it.

If that was just true, now, what would you do? That's the question we are going to spend the rest of this podcast answering. When you put a plan together, and you execute the plan that I'm going to offer you, you will get promoted. You will never have to worry about whether or not you're going to be promoted because you will feel in total control of what's happening in your career. And there is so much power in that. It is so empowering to know that *I am leading the charge. I don't have to sit there with my fingers crossed because I have a timeline. I have a plan, and I'm executing that plan.*

When you feel in total control of your career, guess what? You perform better at work. You don't get graspy and needy. You're not going to be like, *'Oh, I want them to see and think of me better... I'm worried about what they think about the other people. I'm getting competitive...'*, whatever. You don't get any of that. You're like, *'I'm in control here. I'm performing my best. I am working on my plan totally.'* You're not going to worry about *'Did they see how great I am?'* Because you're going to make it easy for them to see it. And you're going to be in control of this entire narrative that you want to create around yourself. That is what is required to get promoted, and I'm going to talk to you about some of the ways to do that so let's get started.

The very first thing, like I said, is understanding that you are running a campaign. I call this a *Spotlight Strategy*. That's my terminology for how I teach it or how I think about it. And my branding for this is a spotlight strategy. You're running a campaign. This is a project. This is the first thing in the spotlight strategy. You have to understand that it's not something that is ad hoc or as you go, it is intentional. You're running an intentional campaign.

If you tell me you don't have time to do this, then you're not serious about getting promoted. If you don't make time for this, then it's not as important to you. You have the time. You can lead your time. You decide what you get to spend your time on. You get to make time. And depending on your timeline for promotion will dictate how many hours every week you spend on this. I like to say, that you should be spending one to two hours every week on your spotlight strategy. And if you're doing that in six months, you could get promoted.

You have to find one to two hours a week. It doesn't have to be all at once, it can be half an hour a day. This is planning. This is like incremental one to two hours a week. And then there's going to be things that you're doing as part of your job, as well, to make sure that you're shining a light on yourself and putting a spotlight on yourself. This is non-negotiable, meaning that when surprises come up, when things go sideways, or when all of a sudden the shit hits the fan, the things that are coming off your to-do list are not the spotlight strategy, are not this campaign. They are other things.

We often will throw the things off our to-do list that we can control, that we can sort of say, *'Yeah, no one's going to get hurt if I take this off my to-do list.'* And that's when we take off things like working out, seeing our friends, doing things for ourselves, going for lunch, or whatever it is taking care of our careers. So you have to make a commitment to yourself as part of this strategy that that will be your number one priority. It will be the thing that you will protect time for at all costs. As part of this, you want to make sure that you're grounding yourself in that commitment every day.

In terms of picking how many hours a week or whatever you want to spend on this, it depends on your timeline. I want to be clear about the timeline because a lot of people will attach to a timeline. So if you say to yourself, *'I want to be promoted in six months,'* for instance. If it takes you eight months, if it takes you five months, if it takes you one year, it doesn't matter. The point of the timeline is to decide the cadence with which you will be focused on doing this project. Obviously, you don't want to go on forever and ever. If all of a sudden you have a six-month mark and you're so far away, you need to be reflecting on your strategy and whether it is working or not.

In fact, I wouldn't wait till the six-month mark. If six months is your goal, you'd be sort of taking stock of your strategy as you go along, like every month. How are things going, you'll be checking in, and you'll have a sense already well before the six-month mark as to whether or not you're on track or not. And that's something that we'll talk about here. But really, the timeline is something that helps you gauge the amount of effort you put in day to day on this. But again, if it takes you an extra month or an extra two months, it's not a big deal. The idea is to make sure that you're focused on the commitment to showing up for yourself every day. That's the purpose of the timeline. Hopefully, I'm making myself clear on that.

The first thing is understanding that with this spotlight strategy, this is a campaign that is a priority. Number two, you need to know who your audience is. You need to make sure who needs to know. Obviously, your boss is part of your audience, but who else? Who are the people that are going to be sitting around the table making this decision? Who are the influencers of the people who are going to be sitting around the table making a decision? At McDonald's, we call that *talent roundtables*. You might have called it something else in your organization. So who are the people around the talent roundtable who are going to be making this decision, and who are the people who influence those people?

You kind of want to know all the pieces. You don't have to be targeting everyone all the time, but you want to get a sense of who the stakeholders are. And you need to have allies around that boardroom table. You need to know that those people are going to speak up for you, and by the time they get to that table, it needs to be an easy yes for them. They're willing to fight for you. If not everyone around that table is an easy yes, these people are willing

to fight for you. They know what you've accomplished. They can talk about it off the top of their heads. And that's not their job to get that way; it's your job to influence them to have that information.

I'm not talking about giving them a two-pager that they're going to read, I'm talking about using your time over the course of whatever it is, six to 12 months, or whatever your timeline is to make sure that these people just know. And it's your job to help them do that. They don't have to do the heavy lifting on their own.

So you know you've committed yourself to running this spotlight strategy for this campaign. Part of the spotlight strategy is knowing who your audience is beyond your boss. And then based on the audience that you've selected, you got to make sure you know what you need to do. You have to make sure you know what you stand for. So are you clear and aligned with what you need to do to get a promotion?

It might be some technical skills that you need to sort through. There may be some leadership style skills like emotional intelligence, growth, creating influence, having a presence, knowing how to get certain things bought off on, learning how to play well with others, creating certain relationships that you don't have, or maybe you need to bring some business in. I don't know what it is, but you need to find out what it is. And the way you do that is you talk to your stakeholders. You have to take a leadership role.

You don't just walk up to them and say, *"Hey, I want to get promoted. What do you think I should do?"* You have to do your homework. What do you think you should do? That's the first thing. You are the first stakeholder. What do you think you should do? And then you can pick I guess a representative group of these stakeholders, starting with your boss first and saying, *"I want to get promoted. Here's what I think I need to do."* And then get them to comment on that.

They can build on it and they can add value to it. Nobody is sitting around thinking about what you need to do. You should be thinking about that. And you should be getting people to comment on it. You have the plan, you lead the plan, and you share highlights with these stakeholders, depending on the person, not everyone needs to know everything. And of course, you asked for feedback. And if you want, you could ask for some informal mentorship or guidance. So that's what you're going to be doing.

One of the things I work on my clients with as well as something I call the *Power Brand Framework*, which is helping you understand who you're going to be as a leader. Let me say it this way, there are some technical things that you will learn to do in your job, perhaps you need to get more sales, you need to do certain types of things, or lead certain types of projects, or whatever it is. And then there's who you're being.

When things are sideways, how do you show up as a leader? When someone needs support, how are you showing up as a leader? When one of your peers is blocking the road ahead, how are you showing up as a leader? It's really defining your leadership style and your leadership essence so it's practicing being that person now. Not only do you have the technical skills, but you have the emotional intelligence skills and leadership skills to step into this role. So it's about not only knowing what you're going to learn and need to learn to do, but it's becoming that thing ahead of time. That's one of the things I really helped my clients with as well.

Not only do you accept this as a campaign, but you know who your audience is, and you have a really good perspective on what you need to do. I don't know if you're tracking with me on this, but obviously, this is just like running any other project. *I got the project. I know what my audience is for this project. And now I've established my objectives and strategies for this project.* That's what you're basically doing. And as you execute this strategy, you kind of put a plan together.

I talk to my clients about how to really put together a very simple to-do list on a quarterly basis so that they're not overwhelming themselves on a day-to-day basis and trying to be like, what am I going to do in these two hours? You need to keep it sort of loose and flexible but also focused at the same time. But as you're working through your plan, you also want to make sure that you're consistently talking about what you're doing and how you're doing it. So this is really about the execution of your spotlight plan.

If we were doing a marketing plan for a specific brand, let's say, we would already have some channels. We would have identified some channels where we're going to advertise our message. We might say, I'm going to do this digital campaign, and I'm going to make sure I'm available on the sites, and I'm going to have an email campaign or whatever it may be. At McDonald's, we had TV, we had radio, and we had all these outdoor boards, and all those different kinds of things. We had all these channels where we communicated our message to get to our audience.

What you need to do, based on your audience is devise the channels that will create consistent awareness of what you're doing. You don't want to make this weird and awkward, you want to make this natural. That is really, I would say, the guiding principle of how you communicate what you're doing; you want to make it natural. You bring it up on every one-on-one with your boss, depending on the cadence of one-on-ones with your boss. If you're doing a one-on-one every week, maybe you're going to bring it up every other week. If you're doing a one-on-one with your boss once a month, I'm sorry that that's happening to you. But then you bring it up at every one-on-one.

Who are these stakeholders? Are they in meetings with you? If they're not in meetings with you, then how are you connecting with them outside of that? Do you have consistent catch-ups? Are you implementing informal mentorship and relationships with these people? You really need to be clear on how you are getting in front of them in the most natural way to make sure that they're not only seeing what you're doing, but they're also helping you. They're actually going to be allies of yours.

One of my favorite things, especially if these people are going to be in meetings with you, is to say to them, *"I'm working on x... I'm working on being this kind of a leader. When you see me doing it right, can you come by and just tell me what you appreciate about it so I understand and I can really connect when I'm doing it in the right way based on what you're feeding back to me."* You can ask them because lots of people just check until you when you're doing it wrong. You can ask them to check when you're doing it right in their eyes so that you really get a sense of what they think the right look is on what you're trying to do.

Challenge yourself to come up with ways. You're a very creative person, and you've solved lots of problems. You don't have to solve it all in one sitting either. But just keep your mind open for ways that you're going to be able to talk about what you're doing, ask for support, and just make sure that you're on track to get the promotion. And then in addition to that, I would say you need to be formal about it in some type of cadence.

Maybe once a quarter, you sit with your boss, and you review the whole thing more in detail, and you're like, *"Am I on track?"* They may not be able to always say yay, nay, or on track, but you need to be able to get a perspective and a sense of why you're close or not close. Is there a squeaky wheel that you don't know about out there that you need to understand? *This person is maybe going to be a problem, and I need to kind of get them on board.* You need to be always tracking with that.

And you need to make sure that with all your key stakeholders, you're having some kind of conversation. Maybe it's not always in as much detail as you'd be having it with your boss, but you need to be having some kind of

conversation with them saying, *"Do you think I'm on track to get this promotion? Do you see the problems? What do you think I still need to do?"* You just want to be able to have like a sort of refresher conversation, almost like you had at the beginning with, *"Here's what I'm going to work on to get the promotion,"* they give you some feedback. And then you're going to do it again. *"Here's what I think I've achieved... Here's what I'm still working on, what do you think?"* And get some feedback.

You're going to be constantly having those conversations. And you're going to be tracking and understanding what's working, what's not working, what you need to shift, and all of that stuff. Obviously, you can do all of this yourself, but when you have a coach beside you, you also get to brainstorm with them on different ideas and opportunities for you to continue to move your strategy forward. So that's what I would suggest you do internally. Give yourself time, get your audience lined up, have a plan for what you're going to do with this audience, and then also consistently be talking about what you're doing and how you're doing it with this audience. And get them talking about it if you can, as well.

Then, you also need to have a concurrent external spotlight strategy. A lot of the time, what happens is we think, *'Job one, though, is going to be getting promoted where I am.'* We get tunnel vision, we get very focused, and that's the only thing that we're focused on. But job one is not getting promoted where you are. If you want to get promoted, job one is getting promoted. You need to be open to that. Job one is actually getting promoted. Your preferred strategy is getting promoted where you are now, and you probably will put a bit more emphasis on that than you will on your external strategy.

But if your goal is to get promoted, then it needs to be *'I'm going to get promoted somewhere. Ideally, where I am, but I'm open.'* Because when the next review cycle comes, and the promotion cycle comes and you don't get promoted again, for some reason, which doesn't make any sense to you and you're pissed again, you don't want to be starting from scratch going, *"Well, now I'm going to leave."* You want to be able to employ the same spotlight strategy in a slightly different way, externally at the same time.

You know you want to get promoted, you're giving it the time. Who is your audience? Who needs to know that you want to get promoted? Who needs to see your value as you get promoted? That can be past colleagues, your industry, specific companies, specific people at specific companies, recruiters, or lots of different things. You have to decide who your audience is. And then you have to decide what value you will provide to that audience.

One of the things that I work on with my clients as part of the spotlight strategy is what are the two or three things they want to be known for in their industry. I was talking to one of my clients this week, who's a director of HR, and we talked about how she feels about people, how she feels about her industry, and how she feels about how HR can impact the profitability of her organization. It was in those territories. She said she wanted to be known for those things.

I have another client who is thinking specifically about communication style in her industry and the relationship between the type of people she services, which are doctors, she's a marketing person for doctors, and how doctors can relate to patients. So within that sort of area of communication, what are the key things she wants to be known for being able to do in that capacity?

Meaning, how unique her strategies for communicating in those areas are. You can talk about those things at industry panels, discussions, speaking engagements, or as part of catch-ups with other colleagues or with potential people. You could be doing LinkedIn posts. You can do lots of things. You can talk about it with

recruiters, whatever. You have to have a sense of what your audience is, you have to know what you stand for in your industry, and what you want to be known for, and you have to provide value in those areas.

Value isn't like, *'Hey, look at me and what I've achieved,'* which is so much of what LinkedIn is. One of the things I was talking about with the HR director that I'm talking to is the impact AI and tech will have on the HR industry. What's her point of view on that? What's her unique take on that? And how will she communicate that? Because that's value: your take on that, your thoughts about that, and your support of other people. Like I'm doing right now, I'm providing you value. I'm not talking about what I'm great at as a coach. I'm saying, you want to get promoted, audience? Here's how you do it. And so you need to be doing that in your field.

How AI will impact HR in the future, here are three things you can think about right now. That's how you add value to your audience. And when you add value to your audience and give free value to your audience, they start to think of you as an expert and an authority in those areas. That's how I built my business as an authority on leadership. You also have to decide what your external channels are. So your internal channels, we talked about, like, how will you reach your audience. You have to decide what your external channels are as well. How will you reach your audience? And I'm sure they're going to make you nervous and uncomfortable.

Posting on LinkedIn, writing blog posts on LinkedIn, or just meeting up with people or whatever it is, you have to decide what it is, and then you have to get to work. That's how you find jobs in your industry. Posting randomly on a job opportunity on LinkedIn is the lowest conversion rate possible or the least effective way to find a job. If you want jobs, you want people coming to you to offer you jobs. And the way to do that is you got to get out there and be known.

I know that sounds like a lot of work, but getting promoted is a lot of work. It's not just doing your job. So one, two hours a week, maybe you say one to 10 hours a month, and then you spread it out. You get to do it any way you want to do it. But you have to have the ingredients of an internal and external spotlight strategy that focuses on making sure you're giving it enough time, you know your audience, and you know what your audience cares about. Not only do you deliver what your audience cares about, and give them the value, but you also make sure that they realize they have received it.

One of the things I talk about a lot when I talk about influence, trying to get recommendations, change to an organization, or new recommendations on new projects for an organization is something I call *'knowing the vote.'* You never want to go into a room cold with a presentation or recommendation. You always want to have, first of all, allies around the table who are going to support your recommendation, but you want to know who the squeaky wheels are. You want to have brought them around beforehand. You want to know the vote before you walk into the room so that when you are actually presenting something, it's just a formality.

It should be the same with your promotion strategy. By the time those people are sitting around the talent roundtable or whatever you guys call it at your company, where people are deciding who gets promoted and who doesn't, it should be a formality. Of course, when they hear your name, everyone should just be like, *'Of course... Yeah, they're totally ready... I got this... I totally support them...'* That should be what you're going for. You can't control that, but you can totally influence that.

Okay, my friends. Getting promoted is your job, not anyone else's. You are the most important person to you. No one is going to care about this more than you. And if you're not caring about it, you can't expect anyone else to. That's what I have for you this week, my friends. Have a great one. Talk to you soon. Bye for now.



Hey, if you want to simplify leadership while amplifying your value, then you need to get your hands on my free training. Head over to [melsavage.com/simple](https://melsavage.com/simple) for instant access to the training and get a taste of how I help my clients lead with ease and make more money in the process. I'll see you there.

