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5 MISTAKES THAT PREVENT LEADERS FROM GETTING AHEAD

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.

Welcome back to the podcast, leaders. Today, we are still on the promotion train. We are talking all about how to get ahead at work. That can be with promotions, job opportunities, or just taking control of what you do at work so that you can start to build a brand, market that brand, self-advocate for that brand, and do it in an authentic way so that you are leading your career. As you know, I coach all about leadership, and a big part of leadership is leading yourself and leading your brand.

And that really is what we've been talking about for the last, I dunno, five or six weeks as we've been leading up to the launch of *Promotions on Demand*, which is my new group coaching program all about how to market and lead your brand so that you can get promotions dropped in your lap, get job opportunities dropped on your lap. It's all about taking care of yourself, and one of the most valuable assets in your life is your career.

Today we are not interviewing someone. We are talking all about what I'm saying are five mistakes that prevent leaders from getting ahead. What are the common mistakes that we see, that I see, that leaders come to me with and are preventing them from getting ahead? That's what we're going to talk about today. I probably have actually more than five, so I'm going to weave them in there together so that we can get to five.

Before I begin, I want to let you know that *Promotions on Demand* is open for enrollment. It's open until December 19th for enrollment, and the program will actually start on January 13th. So go to melsavage.com/joinPOD if you are interested in taking a look at what's there for you, what's involved in the program, and what you're going to be able to achieve in the program. But I will say this before I get right into the podcast: *Promotions on Demand* isn't for people who just want to get promoted. It really is for the people who want to build a strong personal leadership brand. They want to self-advocate for themselves authentically. They want to make sure that not only do they appreciate their own value, but that all the right people inside and outside the organization also appreciate their value so that when there are job opportunities available, people hear of stuff, and you're the first person that people are thinking about. They are bringing opportunities to you. They are dropping them in your lap.

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That's what we really want to have happen for you throughout your career so you're never stuck or trapped or only have one way forward. Always have multiple lanes of opportunity ahead of you. That's what I want to help you learn to build in *Promotions on Demand*. We're going to talk about the actual art of putting together your personal marketing plan, and we're going to talk about how to make time to do that work. And we're also going to talk about emotional resilience and building your capacity to have that emotional resilience to do that work. Because you know what? There is sometimes some rejection associated with doing this work, and we need to be able to bounce back from that quickly. We need to be able to keep that in perspective as we're doing that work. That's what we're going to talk about in Promotions on Demand.

But today, I really want to talk about the five common mistakes that I see people making that are preventing them from getting ahead in their careers. Before I get into the five mistakes, the main thing that I think is important to say is the foundation of all the subsequent mistakes that we are making is this thought error. I want to call it a thought error. And when I say thought error, what I'm saying, if you haven't heard me say this before, is it's a belief system that you have that actually may not be true if you stop and take a look at it.

And this belief system that you so strongly believe in as a fact is actually holding you back from getting what you want, holding you back from achieving your goal. That is what a thought error is—a belief that you believe so hard but actually may not be true and is holding you back from getting what you want. And the thought error that so many leaders have is that you think the quality of your work should speak for itself.

You believe that if you do a good enough job, people are going to notice and that you automatically deserve, whether it's a promotion or another job opportunity, that it's just going to come to you. You think you shouldn't have to "sell yourself." I like to think about it as marketing yourself versus selling yourself, but that's for another day. You shouldn't have to market yourself on top of that in order to get a promotion. Your work should just speak for itself.

And you think it's kind of your boss's job to fight for you to make that happen. Or at least they need to be as responsible for your promotion as you are to make that happen. You believe that your experience and your achievements should guarantee you being set up for those opportunities internally and also for job opportunities that you might apply for online. I have talked to so many people who actually are at least qualified or even overqualified for the jobs and hear nothing because these people are relying on the facts of their past experience.

They believe that all of their experience and achievements, when laid out on a piece of paper, should be enough to get them an interview. This is another way that you are tied to this idea that my work and my experience should speak for itself. It doesn't. Because your boss has a million things to do and doesn't have all day to fight for you and your career. And you do have to actually market yourself. It doesn't because your work doesn't speak for itself. And you're not getting the opportunities brought to you, dropped in your lap, or offered to you. You're kind of disappointed and a bit annoyed about the whole thing.

You're starting to see your friends and your past colleagues get ahead a little bit faster than you. You're disappointed when they don't think of you when they hear opportunities coming up. *Why am I not top-of-mind with all my friends? Why don't they reach out to me when they hear about that opportunity?* All of those things start to creep up on us. We start to think about all those things because, at the core, we think that the quality of our work, the quality of our experience, and our achievements should speak for themselves.

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Before I get to the five mistakes, this is the core problem: *The quality of your work does not speak for itself.* It doesn't. I'm pausing a little bit because I just want you to really take that in. What if that were true? I know you believe it is really hard because when you were an individual contributor earlier on in your career, all it really took was hard work. That differentiated you enough. But at the leadership level, everybody works hard. Everybody's pretty smart, more or less. It takes more than hard work. And if you're only using hard work, it's going to cause you lots of problems, and by the way, it's not going to work anyway. So you need to think beyond that.

I want you to just think to yourself, okay, what if my hard work, the quality of my hard work, doesn't speak for itself? What if that were true? What would my strategies be? And that's really the core of where I want to get to. But first, I'm going to talk about some of the key problems that you might be seeing because you have this belief system. These are the five common mistakes I see.

The first mistake is a lot of ***people believe that the work that they're doing is more important than self-advocacy.*** That the work that they do, their nine-to-five, is more important than self-advocacy. I just spoke to someone this morning who was thinking about joining POD, and she said that she couldn't make the calls. The calls are at 11 o'clock in the morning Eastern time on a Thursday. She said she could never come to those calls because they're during the workday. I'll tell you what I said to her. I said, *well, do you work more hours than your company is paying you for, effectively? Do you work more than nine-to-five?* Yeah. Of course, you do because you're in charge. You're a leader. You're deciding. You're making choices—rightly or wrongly—about how many hours you're going to work. Your job is to get the work, and the results, executed through your team, and delivered through your team. And if that means you need to spend an hour a week going to coaching, getting personal development, you can do that. You can make that decision.

She asked me if it was unethical to develop yourself during the day. That's how strong the belief is. And what I want all of you leaders out there to know is that working on your professional development is part of your job. The more you develop yourself, the better you are at your job. It is part of your role to develop yourself. I don't care if you're looking for a job outside your organization. Your current organization will get the benefits of the person you're becoming as you're looking for a job.

And I think some of that self-advocacy outside will spill into inside anyway, but you just being more confident about yourself as you're doing this work is going to be demonstrated in the quality of the work that you're doing. So, can you go on a call a week to get coaching to become a stronger leader in your career? Absolutely, you can do that during the day. And if you really feel bad about it, you can make it up somewhere else in the evening or whatever, but you don't have to feel bad about it because this is part of your job. Developing yourself professionally is part of your job. This isn't just about building your brand, which is a big part of doing your job, but also your time management, building your capacity for emotional regulation— all of those things are going to help you in the job you have right now.

So, if you're someone who thinks, *"Oh, I can't develop myself during the day. I have to do it after work. I can't look for jobs or write my resume during the day. I have to do it after work. I can't go to coaching during the day. I have to do it after work. I can't meet with someone for a coffee chat during the day,"* I want you to question that belief system. That you think work is more important than self-advocacy. Because there's always going to be more work than you can handle. And it's really important that you carve out two to three hours a week for your professional development during the workday.

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Otherwise, you're going to be telling yourself, *"Oh, you know what? I will do this as soon as things slow down a little bit,"* which they never do. Or you'll be doing this work at night when you're not your best self when you're exhausted from the day. And you really want to be as best as you can be when you are doing your professional development.

The way this idea—this belief that you have that your work should speak for itself—the first way, the first mistake that people are making, is that you actually think the work is more important than self-advocacy. And so you don't do self-advocacy. You don't figure out how to do it. You don't do your professional development during the day because you think the work is the most important thing. And it's important, but your development is actually the most important thing.

Second common mistake: ***You're overworking yourself.*** When you think your work should speak for itself, what do you do? You work a lot because you think it's the best way to get promoted. And if it's not getting you promoted, what do you do? You put even more time into the work and less time advocating for yourself because you think the hours that you put in, and your commitment to teamwork, are a big part of how you create value. But it's not. Not anymore. How you do your job, what you choose to focus on, how you lead your team, how you create the environment for them to get results—that is how you create value, not through the hours.

And if you try to create value through hours, what's going to happen is you're going to get more and more and more exhausted as you try to make hours be your value. And when you're exhausted, guess what? You're not performing at your best as often. And you're not as patient, and you're more frustrated, and you don't have the time to sit down—you don't have the energy, rather—to actually do the work at its best, deepest level. You don't have patience for your team. You might start cutting corners, all of the things.

And so your main strategy of letting the work speak for itself actually ends up in jeopardy because now some of the work that you're doing is actually speaking against you, not for you. And by the way, you're on your road to burnout. So, when you believe your work should speak for itself, you end up overworking yourself. And that is another common mistake that I see leaders make.

Number three: The third most common mistake that comes from "my work should speak for itself" is ***you keep your options—***like for promotion or job opportunities***—very narrow*** because your work is focused inside your organization or on a piece of paper. It's your resume or your LinkedIn profile or something like that. And so, you largely, predominantly, mainly focus on opportunities inside your organization because you think that's the fastest way to get you what you want because this is where you do your best work. People are actually seeing you do your work. And so, you keep your options very narrow inside.

Another way you keep your options narrow inside your organization is you use your boss as your main and only stakeholder because they're the ones who see your work most of the time. And so you think, *"They're going to speak for me. They're going to tell everybody about the great work I do. When my boss is happy, I will get promoted."* And you actually wait for them to lead the charge.

I had someone come to me—I can't recall if it was a client or not. It was just recent in the last couple of weeks, and I'm having a lot of consultations—but someone came to me recently and said that they're a little worried because they haven't been getting promoted. And they finally got a boss who really advocated for them and was doing a business proposal to get them promoted. But now that the boss is moving on, they are a little bit upset

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and nervous about the whole thing. And my first question to that person was: *Why is your boss doing the business case for you?*

Why are we letting our bosses lead the charge in our careers? We should be taking the leadership role in that. When you only use your boss as your main conduit to let everyone else know what a great job you're doing, you're keeping your options very narrow because your boss just doesn't have you. They have their whole team, and they have their own work. So, you're not going to get the attention—your career's not going to get the attention—it deserves.

The other thing I'll say in terms of being very narrow is kind of what I said at the very beginning end up putting your experience on a resume or on your LinkedIn profile and hoping, just applying for things, thinking that your experience is going to speak for itself. But when you cold apply for stuff, you don't get responses.

I was speaking to someone this morning—the same thing. She's been cold applying for 10 months and trying to reach out to hiring managers and the whole thing and not getting any responses. That's a lot of time invested. I'm not going to say it's a bad investment because I'm sure she's learning something along the way in each of those cases. But you don't get the best return on your effort—or you can call it ROI. I like to call it ROE sometimes: your best return on effort. You're not getting the best return on effort when you're cold applying when you're trying to let your resume or your LinkedIn profile speak for you. And so that is number three: You keep your options very narrow. When you think your work is supposed to speak for you, then you keep your options very narrow.

Number four: ***You stop trusting your own judgment.*** You have this belief that your work should speak for itself, but that doesn't seem to be working. So now you start to go, *okay, well, then maybe it's me. Maybe there's something wrong with me.* You start to believe that you're not good enough as you are. And so you're asking for feedback from your boss, from the executive team, from other stakeholders, and they're all telling you what you need to do differently to get promoted or get opportunities or whatever it is. And so you start trying to act the way that they're telling you to act, but it doesn't feel natural.

It's not grounded and authentically you. You're just trying to kind of pop it the way that they're suggesting you should pop it yourself. But it doesn't feel grounded. And so you start to lose trust in your own instincts and your own judgment. *Am I doing this right? Will everyone like how I'm doing this?* And we get into this very people-pleasing mentality, where we're just trying to do things the way everyone else wants them to be done so that we can get promoted. You're rocking your own foundation that way. You stopped being grounded.

I guess that's really what I mean by rocking your foundation because I've done this. I know what it feels like, and I know that you know exactly what I'm talking about if you're doing this. Where you end up, you just stop trusting your own instincts. You've lost your footing. The ground underneath you feels unstable, and you end up performing even worse because you're not being true to yourself. You're not trusting yourself anymore. And once you lose the trust in yourself, you have to stop. We've got to stop. We've got to get a new strategy.

I hope it's at this point that you are seeing that what you're doing isn't working. It doesn't mean that you're not good enough. I just really want you to take this away. It doesn't mean that you're not good enough as you are. It doesn't mean you're not as valuable as you are. You just are executing against the wrong strategy. Not only do you think your work should speak for itself, which is the wrong strategy, but in this case, you're starting to try to act the way other people want you to act, which is also an ineffective strategy. So we're going to need to stop

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doing that. Start getting grounded in what makes you special, and what makes you valuable, and really learn how to market that to your audience.

And then, in the end, the common mistake that a lot of people I see who have been through the first four mistakes have made is they just feel exhausted**.** The whole thing is so fatiguing, that you stop applying for jobs. ***You start to lose hope***. You're not getting callbacks. You're not getting initial interviews for things that you are actually even overqualified for. Your strategy of puppeting what your senior management wants you to do isn't working. Your overworking isn't working. You're feeling burnt out. And you start to believe that you're not good enough to get a job anywhere—not only not to get promoted, but not get a job anywhere.

This is where we start to think about: *Should I even be in this career anymore? Should I keep going? Should I pack it in? Should I find something else to do?* And I have to tell you that so many people who come to me saying, *"I'm thinking about changing my career,"* are not saying it because they are thinking, *"I've always wanted to do this thing, and now is the time, and my kids are grown,"* or whatever. No, it's because they're not getting the success they want to see in their current career. And they just think that they've lost hope that they're good enough. And that's not the case. Don't throw away your whole career. It's going to be much easier and much more comfortable—much less uncomfortable, let's call it that way.

It's going to be much less uncomfortable to learn to self-advocate, ground yourself, and focus on what you're good at. Maybe tweak a few things in your style, but do it authentically to you. It's going to be much easier to do that than it is to start from scratch. I promise you.

Let me just summarize this. The five common mistakes I see that are basically coming out of this idea that your work should speak for itself are that **you don't make time for self-advocacy** because you think the work is the most important thing. **You end up overworking yourself to exhaustion**, which actually works against you because your work starts speaking against you versus for you. And believe me, people see the mistakes. They don't see the good work as much, but they definitely notice when shit goes sideways.

You keep your options very narrow. You focus only on the inside. You only use your boss as your conduit. You don't really expand your opportunities inside and outside your organization. **You stop trusting your own judgment**. You start trying to do things the way other people want you to do it, which becomes really uncomfortable. And it gets very unstable.

You stop trusting your own instincts. And **you start to lose hope**. You stop applying for jobs, you start thinking about a complete and utter change in your situation—which is unnecessary. You've worked really hard to get where you are right now, and there is a lot of runway ahead of you. So let's try to capitalize and optimize what you've already built for yourself.

So what is the solution? I think I've said it a hundred times, but I'm going to give it to you straight up: It's your job to speak for your work. Your work doesn't speak for itself. It's your job to speak for your work. That's what you need to do to fix this. You need to accept that it's your job to speak for yourself. It's a hundred per cent your responsibility to get promoted. Not your boss. Not anyone else. Don't make it a problem that it's your responsibility. Just understand that that's the situation. And we're going to use your strategic thinking to find solutions. The quality of your day-to-day work, like the work that's supposed to speak for itself—that's just table stakes. As I said, everyone is good at their job at the leadership level.

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You need to be able to speak for yourself. And like I said, it's not really about selling yourself. I'll give you the short form version of what I mean by this. It's not about selling yourself It's about marketing yourself. And while those two things might sound the same—selling versus marketing—I feel like marketing is about having a story and sharing that story with people in a way that shows how it's a benefit to them. Versus selling yourself, which is kind of pushy and *graspy* and convincing and really is talking about how to get something that's really good for you.

Marketing yourself is telling a story, nudging people to understand a narrative versus selling yourself, which is like, *"Give me, give me this. Give me what I want. I need it now."* It's a totally different energy. Brands have been doing it for years. They market themselves. They sell things as their marketing, but they don't do it in a *selly* way. When someone's trying to sell you in a *selly* way, it feels icky. It feels pushy. It makes you uncomfortable because it's offering you something that you don't want.

And so your job when you are marketing yourself is to speak for yourself in a way that people want, where they think it's valuable. And make it natural for them. It's your job to amplify who you are, what you're doing, what you want. That's how promotions happen. That's how job opportunities come to you. When you are in full control of your narrative, then you're also, to a large degree, in control of the timeline of your success. As long as you're not tied to having it haveen inside your organization, it can happen in a lot of different ways. It can happen in a lot of different places.

I've talked about the five different common mistakes. I've talked about the new belief you need to have and the mindset shift that you need to have. But when you are able to make this mindset shift—that it's your job to speak for yourself—I want you to know the opportunities are going to be coming to you without you having to apply for jobs or chase promotions or ask for opportunities to be on a task force lead, or whatever it is. People are going to be reaching out to you consistently. Because you're going to have your eggs in lots of baskets, not just with your boss at this one organization.

You are going to have allies working for your promotion across your existing organization and outside. You're going to be top of mind with your friends so the next time they hear something, they're going to be like, *"Oh, I know who you can call. I know the perfect person for you."* You want to have more people than just you talking about you—and more, certainly, more than your boss. It's going to feel natural to market yourself when you learn to do it well. It's just going to feel like a normal part of the job like you already have things that work that you do that just feel normal. You do them all the time. You don't even think about them. That's how this is going to feel.

It's going to feel natural to market yourself. And you will get a big salary bump or a holistic compensation package when you get the promotion, when you get the opportunities, and when you are marketing yourself. People are going to see your value. And they're going to want you. Supply and demand. When you're in demand, you get more compensation. So that happens, that comes over time. And you're going to stop cold applying. You're going to get a better return on your effort when you do this work. When you learn how to effectively market yourself to your audience on a consistent basis, you're going to get a better return on your effort.

And bottom line, in the end, you're going to perform better because you're going to be more confident because you have all the eggs and all the baskets, and you see your value, and lots of people see your value, and you have allies, and you're working it, and you're in control of your timeline and all of the things. That is so empowering. That is so confidence-building. That is so grounding. That you do your job better all the time. You show up for your day job better. You do everything better, and life is better, and you enjoy your work. I'm not saying you're not

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going to have bad days. I'm not going to say things that won't stress you out. But they're not going to stress you out as much, and you're not going to have as many bad days, and you're not going to let as many things get to you. Because you're not going to be as worried.

The reason things get to you and you're so stressed out is because a lot of the time people worry about failing and what it's going to mean if they fail. And by doing this work, you create your own safety. You create your safety because if, for whatever reason, one day your current employer doesn't want you, there's a lineup. There's a line out the door.

I want you guys to be like the Apple store, where people would line up to want to have you on their team. That's what we want. We want to create choices. We want to create control for you so that you always know that you're safe. Whether there's a recession, whether you end up having a shitty boss situation one day when it happens, where you're just like, *"You know what? I got to go,"* whether you're not getting advanced as quickly as you want, or whether you just want to make more money, you can start to dial in. When you have this foundation of a marketing plan, you know how to sell yourself, you can just dial it up and down when you need to.

I really think that this skill of marketing yourself and speaking for yourself as a leader is such a critical skill but gets downplayed because we believe the quality of our work should speak for itself. But I want you to really consider letting go of that belief system.

And if you're someone who is looking for support in how to start this process and learn this skill, then I really want to encourage you to—and I invite you to—check out *Promotions on Demand*. Go to melsavage.com/joinPOD. Read about it. And if you want to have a one-on-one with me, I have a 30-minute consultation to talk about it, to ask your questions, to get a sense of what it's like to work with me. Then do that. You can book that on that page as well. Just book 30 minutes, and let's talk about it. Let's talk about how we can make this the right solution for you.

Okay, my leaders, I'm really excited for what you're going to achieve in 2025. And I really hope that part of it is going to be learning how to market yourself effectively so that you can have job opportunities and promotions dropped in your lap for the rest of your career. I'll talk to you next time. 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 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.

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