

Overlooked for promotion

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As an adviser to corporate business on personal development, I believe in the culture of empowerment, with the emphasis on promoting individuals, or even groups, whose low self-esteem may have held them back.

I realise, of course, that I have been only studying and encouraging a one-way, i.e. upward, movement all this time - somewhat at the expense of the other half of the picture, the mindset of the failed candidate, the grounded high-flyer or the unselected applicant who has no option but to accept the disappointing decision.

For such a person, all our progressive talk about wider enfranchisement must be somewhat irritating, especially if it has effectively reduced his/her status by promoting a colleague but without directly replacing them. This tends to mean a greater workload being shared-out amongst the remaining group. Such is one example of staff dissatisfaction that might not occur to the minds of managers, who are more preoccupied with selecting tomorrow's high-fliers. It confirms that it is possible to place too much emphasis on identifying future stars and too little on developing humbler talents who may, nevertheless, be effective and important in their individual roles.

Meanwhile, HR professionals have identified three standard reactions of rejected candidates.

1. Those who immediately quit, on impulse - a petulant reaction they may regret later and which leaves the company with the expense of immediate recruitment.
2. A show of resentment - a refusal to communicate and an attitude of general disengagement and minimal contribution, that can seriously affect departmental efficiency.
3. An attitude of denial - questioning the correctness of the decision, and adopting a position that refuses to accept or recognise the status quo as it affects them.

Holistic approach

There is an immediate duty to failed candidates to help them to put the decision in perspective. It means simply that they will not be promoted on this occasion - but this does not preclude a different decision in the future - and the current disappointing news has to be accepted.

But it's possible that the decision can be turned to their advantage. It may help them to see that promotion, in this case, might not have been the best outcome for them, at this time, for various reasons: i.e. they might have been under-qualified and would have been uncomfortable in the new post.

However, the real challenge is to 'drive engagement' by understanding and developing skills, strengths and aspirations that may be independent of the published person specification. It is not hard to see how personal qualities, such as humour, optimism and creativity can provide the 'yeast in the cake' that can impact future prospects of promotion.

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