

Beware that promotion you strive for

by Michael Kinsman

Getting promoted might not be all it's cracked up to be.

A new study by the Pittsburgh-based consulting firm Development Dimensions International reveals that winning a coveted job promotion might just turn out to be one of the most stressful experiences in life.

It's ranked by 785 business executives as more trying than dealing with divorce, the loss of a loved one or the frustration of raising teenagers.

In short, getting a promotion doesn't seem like all that much fun.

The reasons behind this are many, but the primary reason is because every step you take up the corporate ladder means you have to change. You can no longer be the same person you were last year or five years ago when your job authority climbs.

That doesn't mean that you have to have a character remake once you get promoted. It simply means that the way you achieved success earlier in your career might not apply to your new job.

"Promotion means finding new ways of being successful - and walking away from the old ways that defined success," says Matt Pease, a DDI vice president. "A leader who tries to be the same leader across all levels is not going to be successful at all."

That doesn't mean you have to devise some sort of tightly designed business face to be successful. It means more that you have to be sensitive to your new job, its responsibilities and the best way for accomplishing that work.

Attaining success after a promotion means you are able to face up to the most intimidating word in the English language: change.

You get promoted because you probably figured out a way to focus on the problem in front of you and how to efficiently deal with that problem.

Climbing the management ranks, this becomes increasingly important, yet the problems don't remain the same.

Operational leaders need to learn how to be less hands-on and more inspiring to the people who report to them as they rise through the organization. They often find themselves with two or three times the number of direct reports they once had and that requires an intensive plan of action to develop relationships with each of the new reports so the managers will know their strengths and weaknesses.

Tactical supervisors might find their day-to-day talents less important as they morph into jobs that require them to focus on strategy.

And, any time you are promoted, your sphere of influence within the organization expands, too. That means that not just your successes are magnified, but your mistakes as well.

It's easy to see why promotions can be so stressful.

Sadly, most companies don't really understand that dramatic changes they are asking people to accept when they promote them.

That's why it's important for individuals to be self-aware and wide-eyed at promotions. Job promotions usually mean greater opportunities for individuals, but success in those jobs entails the ability to work smarter.

DDI reports that 19 percent of the executives it surveyed believed that their job promotions were the most stressful experiences in their life. That compared to 14.8 percent who identified coping with bereavement at their most trying issue, 11.4 percent who identified divorce and 8.6 percent who identified raising teens.

It's clear from that that your work is just beginning the day you get the promotion you want. But it's also just as evident that if you can assess the role your organization needs you to play in your new job and find a way to embrace that new role that success won't be far behind.