

In Order to Get Ahead, Get Out of Comfort Zone



by Alina Dizik

You like your company and your co-workers, but you're bored of your job. Chances are you've reached a plateau and need to step out of your comfort zone. Experts say making a move from a position that has become routine is critical to furthering a career. Even tackling new projects within the same company can help. Pamela Mitchell, founder of the Miami-based Reinvention Institute, says that change can mean anything from taking on new responsibilities to switching departments. How to break out of the rut:

Pay attention to metrics. Lackluster progress reports and not hearing feedback from a supervisor is a good way to tell if your work has become routine. Anil Mishra, an associate professor at Wake Forest's Babcock Graduate School of Management, suggests you constantly look at how you're helping the organization improve. Doing so can prevent you from getting complacent in a position.

Build a company support system. Developing continuing relationships with people in the company can help you stay informed about new opportunities. When Helen Arsenault, a senior vice president at Comerica Bank, moved from lending (where she spent 16 years) to investor relations, she says she learned about the job and made the transition with the help of her internal contacts. Ms. Arsenault wanted to develop new skills without leaving the organization.

Identify new skills. Drawing upon what you have learned or furthering your education to plan the next step in your career can help you make a smooth transition - and give you a goal to getting out of a rut. Jason Hodges, who started to work toward a part-time MBA at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Business while working in Hospira's public-affairs department, agrees. Halfway through the program, Mr. Hodges says he realized his new knowledge would help him in his public-relations role at the pharmaceutical company and also enable him to contribute to other departments.

Get involved. Participating in the company's community or business initiatives is an opportunity to access the organization's senior people without the usual barriers. "It's a great way to become known outside the work that you do," says Ms. Mitchell. Start attending more industry events outside the company; they can be a gateway to unexpected opportunities and help strengthen your network.

Look within the ranks. Human-resources representatives or your supervisor will be equally aware of internal job opportunities and are interested in retaining talent. Talk to them about next steps you might take. Darrell Luzzo, president of the National Career Development Association, suggests speaking with people you trust within the company to let them know you are seeking new opportunities.

Make time for career research. Set aside time to explore new avenues. "Think about your career like you do going to the dentist and getting a checkup every so often," says Mr. Luzzo. If getting out of your comfort zone isn't possible in your current company, look for a challenge elsewhere. If you stay long enough, you "become wedded to the culture," says Mr. Mishra.

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