

THE JUNGLE

Know the Job, Call on Friends When Making Internal Moves

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With the U.S. employment picture murky, many people who have jobs are looking to make moves internally rather than hunt for better positions outside their companies.

So when a job opens up within an organization, scores of internal applicants may raise their hands. "People are finding that there still isn't that much job activity going on outside of their companies, so a lot of them are looking inside for new opportunities," says Wendy Alfus-Rothman, a New York organizational psychologist and career-management coach.

Internal candidates typically have an advantage -- hiring managers would rather consider people who know the culture of the organization and whom they can easily assess simply by observing their work and talking to supervisors and colleagues who have worked with them.

If you're battling for an internal position with other inside candidates, there are several steps you can take to gain a foothold.

First, know the protocol. The appropriate way to approach a job inside your company will likely depend on the level of the position. Human-resources staff can provide such information as well as tell you how long the position has been open and what the deadline is for finding a new hire.

Tap the friends you may have within the desired department to get information about the position, advises Bradford Agry, a partner at CareerTeam Partners, a New York career management consulting firm. Get a sense of the culture of the group, the type of people who get hired and promoted, and what kind of personality is the best fit for the group.

In addition, find out to whom you should be talking and whether it's appropriate to contact him or her about the opening. You can also try to learn about the hiring manager's personality and exactly what he or she is looking for in an applicant. Making the right kind of inquiries may lead to an informational interview with the

hiring manager and help you avoid "getting stuck in that 'send me your résumé' situation," adds Mr. Agry.

Some career coaches suggest looking for that same job outside of your company as well, particularly if it is a position that really interests you. Gaining insight into the position at competitive firms not only opens you up to another opportunity, but also provides broader knowledge about the job when vying for the internal opening.

Roy Cohen, a New York career counselor and executive coach, advises people to be on as many radar screens as possible -- what he calls "aggressive evangelism." Try to find people inside the company -- and even outside -- to serve as your advocates. This is a time to tap into as many contacts as possible.

Of course, this will all be easier if the internal job isn't going to be filled for a while. In that case, you have more time to volunteer for special projects and cultivate ideas to gain visibility. If your window of opportunity is narrower, you should quickly assess your competition and seek an interview with the hiring manager.

Before you pursue a new job internally, you should also be sure that staying at your current employer is the best move. Cici Mattiuzzi, a Sacramento, Calif., career counselor, says that if you've been at a company for a while, ingrained perceptions of you could hold you back from reaching your goals.

But most important, be mindful of your current boss. When you are applying for a job inside your company, word of your inquiries about an opening can easily get around. Many career coaches say disclosure time depends on your relationship with your boss and the culture of the company.

"My feeling would be not to tell the boss right away and to see if you can first have some off-the-record conversations about the job to get an idea about it," says Mr. Agry. "When things start to cook, then you should mention your interest in that other job."

Even if you don't get the job, stay in touch with the hiring managers and others in the department. That way, you may be on the top of the list the next time there is an opening. At least you'll have established a relationship.

"Besides, the first 30 days of a new job are always the most tenuous," says Ms. Alfus-Rothman. "The new hire may not work out, and you will be right there in the wings."