

THE

Promotion Positioning Blueprint

Five insider strategies to close the gap between the results you deliver and the advancement you deserve.

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This guide is for the high performer who has delivered, exceeded, and over-contributed, and is still waiting for the title, the compensation, and the recognition to catch up. Inside, you will find five strategies drawn from 15 years of watching promotion and compensation decisions get made from inside the room, and one exercise to help you identify exactly where your positioning gap is right now.

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01 Why Performance Alone Will Not Get You Promoted

If you are reading this, you already know how to perform. You have the track record, the metrics, and the reviews to prove it. The gap is not your output. The gap is in what surrounds your output, and whether the people making decisions about your advancement can see it, describe it, and fight for it.

Performance is the entry fee. Positioning is what gets you in the room.

Here is the uncomfortable truth about how advancement works:

- Promotion decisions are not made based on output alone. They are made based on perceived readiness, which is shaped by visibility, narrative, and relationships, not just results.
- The people making the decision are not in your day-to-day. They are working from an impression of you that was formed in a handful of high-visibility moments and secondhand reports from your manager.
- Your manager is your advocate, but only if they can articulate your value clearly, confidently, and specifically. If they cannot, the decision gets made without a strong voice in your corner.
- In high-performance, bonus-driven environments like financial services and corporate America, the technical bar is high for everyone. What differentiates you above that bar is rarely more than technical excellence.

This is not a reason to perform less. It is a reason to be intentional about what accompanies your performance. The strategies in this guide are about building that intentionality.

02 How Comp and Promotion Decisions Actually Get Made

Most professionals imagine that compensation and promotion decisions are made in a structured, objective process where contributions are carefully weighed and the most qualified person wins. That is not what happens.

What actually happens:

Your manager walks into a calibration meeting with a number in their head and a list of their people. They sit across from peers who are each advocating for their own teams. The conversation becomes a negotiation, and the leaders who win the strongest outcomes for their people are the ones who can answer three questions quickly and convincingly:

1. *What specifically did this person deliver that moved the business forward in a measurable way?*
2. *What is the risk to the organization if we do not differentiate their compensation or advancement this cycle?*
3. *Who else in this room knows who this person is, and would they agree?*

Your manager cannot advocate for what they cannot articulate. And they cannot articulate what you have not made visible.

The third question is the one most people never think about. Cross-functional visibility, being known and respected by leaders outside your direct chain, is one of the most powerful and most overlooked factors in how advancement decisions get made.

03 **How to Build Visibility With the Right People**

Visibility is not self-promotion. It is not performing louder or taking credit for other people's work. It is the strategic, intentional practice of making sure the right people have an accurate, specific, and compelling picture of your value, before a decision about your future gets made.

The three visibility levels that matter:

Your Direct Manager They need to be able to describe your value in one sentence without notes. If they cannot, or if their description is vague, your positioning work starts here. Give them the language, the specific outcomes, and the context to advocate for you effectively.

Your Skip-Level The leader above your manager is often in the room where advancement decisions get made. They are working from a limited impression of you. Find legitimate, strategic ways to make your work visible at this level, through high-visibility projects, cross-functional contributions, and the quality of how you show up in senior-facing rooms.

Cross-Functional Peers and Sponsors

Leaders in adjacent functions who can speak to your value from a different vantage point carry significant weight in calibration conversations. Build these relationships before you need them. Identify one or two senior leaders outside your direct chain who can become genuine sponsors, people who will say your name in rooms you are not in.

04 How to Decode Vague Feedback and Turn It Into a Roadmap

Vague feedback is one of the most frustrating and most common experiences of high-performing professionals. "Be more strategic." "Increase your visibility." "Work on your executive presence." These phrases feel like directions but function like dead ends, because they do not tell you what to actually do differently.

Here is a framework for decoding the four most common pieces of vague promotion feedback:

"Be more strategic"

What they usually mean: You are operating at the level of your current role, not the level above it. You are solving the problems in front of you rather than identifying the problems that have not surfaced yet.

What to do: Start bringing recommendations, not just analysis. In every senior meeting or report, include one forward-looking observation about what the data suggests for the next quarter or cycle, not just what happened.

"Increase your visibility"

What they usually mean: The right people do not know what you contribute. Your work lives inside your team or function and does not travel upward or cross-functionally.

What to do: Identify one high-visibility project, working group, or initiative where you can contribute in a way that puts your name in front of senior leaders. One well-chosen opportunity is worth more than ten internal wins that nobody above your manager sees.

"Work on your executive presence"

What they usually mean: How you communicate, carry yourself, or engage in high-stakes rooms does not yet read as someone operating at the next level, in terms of confidence, conciseness, or the ability to hold a room.

What to do: Ask for one specific example of a moment where your presence fell short. Vague feedback without an example cannot be acted on. A specific moment can. Then practice the specific skill, whether it is conciseness, confidence under pressure, or commanding the room without notes.

"Not ready yet"

What they usually mean: One of three things: the decision has already been made and this is the diplomatic version; there is a specific gap that has not been named clearly; or the decision-makers do not have enough information to feel confident in your readiness.

What to do: Ask directly: "What would ready look like? What specific evidence would you need to see, and over what timeframe?" If the answer is still vague, the problem is the relationship and the perception, not the performance.

05 How to Position Yourself Before the Conversation Happens

The biggest mistake high performers make in pursuing advancement is waiting for the formal conversation to make their case. By the time the promotion discussion is on the calendar, the decision is largely already made, in the informal conversations, observations, and impressions that accumulated in the months before.

The promotion conversation is not where you make the case. It is where the case gets confirmed.

Four positioning moves to make before the conversation:

- 1 Own your narrative.** What is the one-sentence version of your value at the next level? Not your job description, your leadership identity, and your specific impact. If you cannot say it in one sentence, your manager cannot say it either. Write it. Practice it. Make it the frame for every conversation you have with senior leaders.

- 2** **Stop waiting for your skip-level to notice you. Give them a reason to.** Identify one legitimate, strategic way to get your work in front of the leader above your manager in the next 90 days. A cross-functional project, a presentation, a well-timed insight in a senior meeting. One well-placed contribution builds more visibility than a year of strong work that lives below the waterline.

- 3** **Build the sponsorship relationship before you need it.** A mentor gives you advice. A sponsor uses their political capital to advocate for you in rooms you are not in. Identify one senior leader who could become a sponsor. Invest in the relationship, bring them insight, ask for guidance, make it easy for them to see your value, and remember your name.

- 4** **Make your promotion narrative part of your regular conversations.** Do not wait for a formal review to articulate your readiness. Find natural moments, project updates, development conversations, and feedback discussions to communicate where you are headed and what evidence of readiness you are building. Leaders who know your goals can support them. Leaders who cannot.

06 Your Positioning Exercise: The Promotion Readiness Audit

This exercise is designed to help you identify your specific positioning gap, the place where the distance between your performance and your perceived readiness is widest. Answer each question as honestly as you can. There are no right answers, only accurate ones.

Part 1 — Your Narrative

Write the one-sentence version of your value at the next level. Not what you do in your current role, but what you bring to the level you are seeking.

My value at the next level:

Now ask yourself: Could your manager say this sentence in a calibration meeting without notes? If the answer is no or you are not sure, that is your first positioning gap.

Part 2 — Your Visibility

List the three most senior leaders above your direct manager who could describe your value and your readiness for the next level right now.

Senior leader 1:

Senior leader 2:

Senior leader 3:

If you could not name three people, or if the people you named have not seen your work directly in the past 90 days, that is your visibility gap.

Part 3 — Your Feedback

What is the most recent piece of feedback you received about your promotion readiness? Write it exactly as it was said to you.

Now answer: What do you think they actually meant? What specific behavior or gap were they pointing at?

What is one concrete action you could take in the next 30 days to address that gap?

Part 4 — Your Positioning Gap

Based on your answers above, where is the biggest gap between how you see your readiness and how leadership currently perceives it? Circle the area that needs the most attention.

Narrative clarity	Upward visibility	Cross-functional relationships
Feedback translation	Sponsorship	Promotion conversation readiness

Your answers to this exercise tell you where to focus. If your narrative is unclear, start there. If your visibility is limited, that is the work. If you cannot decode your feedback, the Alignment Audit is the next step.

Ready to close the gap?

The Promotion Positioning Blueprint gives you the framework. The Alignment Audit gives you the map: a focused 60-minute session designed to identify your specific positioning gap and build a clear, personalized path to the promotion you have already earned.

What happens in the Alignment Audit:

We assess your current positioning across all five areas in this guide: narrative, visibility, feedback translation, sponsorship, and promotion readiness, and identify exactly where the gap is widest and what to do about it first.

Investment: \$197 | 60 minutes | Virtual
Applicable toward the full Promotion Readiness Experience program.

Book your Alignment Audit at:
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