

Want An Executive Job? 3 Tricks To Get Out Of The Weeds



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Want An Executive Job?

3 Tricks To Get Out Of The Weeds

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In a [previous post](#) about [job interview tips](#), I outlined the findings of several research studies about advancing your career – especially for professional women in leadership who want to land a C-suite executive job. The research basically pointed up the following:

1. If targeting a C-suite job, you won't get there by doing what got you to where you are now. Specifically you need to gain a strategic perspective, business acumen, a global outlook and maintain high integrity.
2. Once you're there, you need to excel at making decisions *about* the business more than running the business in any functional specialty.

Career coaching: 3 tricks to getting out of the weeds

When you're targeting the top executive jobs, you need to broaden your perspective, act strategically and think globally *before* you go for the top spot – to help you get noticed, rock the interview and to help you survive when you've got the coveted slot. But this can be tough because it requires refocusing and spending energy in places that don't always feel like they're helping you get your current job done. When you're getting yourself ready to leap from middle management to the executive suite, how do you stop focusing on what you've spent your whole career becoming good at?

Here's some practical coaching advice for how to do this.

#1: Be Good Enough

The first thing to do is to accept that you're good enough at your functional skill set and start actively expanding your perspective, exposure and knowledge of the interdependencies your function has with other parts of the business. Sometimes we women struggle a lot with this acceptance. We've succeeded so far by refining our skills and knowledge of our chosen area of expertise – and we never feel that we're good enough – so we just work harder. But this approach keeps us in the weeds of our jobs and saps our energy from learning to fly over the treetops to get the broader view an executive needs.

If you want to move on through the glass ceiling and into a C-suite job, you've got to get over the "not good enough" thing and stop letting those negative thoughts trigger you into inaction or playing small. As an exec your scope of responsibility will be so broad that you can't possibly know every detail, and you don't have to. The data says that at the executive level you're *not getting paid to know every detail*. You're getting paid to have good people working for you (like you, now!), trust them and know when and how to cross-check their work. Before you make the move up, learn how to detach from the details and weeds, accept that you're good enough at them and start expanding your perspective.

If this feels challenging, it could be because you've got to invest in activating more of your own internal power more before you take on the challenge of going after, and managing, more external power.

The secret to getting an executives job: beginner's mind. – *Click To Tweet*

#2: Get “Educated”

Start working on problems and opportunities outside your area of expertise. Suck up the insecurity while you work on building your own InPower reserves, and start vying for committees and task forces where you’ll work with colleagues from other parts of the company or industry. Do a stint overseas if you can.

Going back to school is certainly an option, but before you do that ask yourself if you really need more book-learning. If you already have a master’s degree, look even harder and ask others – including HR and your mentors for an opinion on education vs. experience. The way you’ll succeed – especially in the top slots – is by having experience to draw on. Experience helps inform your “gut” so your instincts and intuition become better. That’s hard, if not impossible, to get at school.

You also need to get smart about your industry and “upskill” yourself on a regular basis in order to stay competitive and future-proofed *today* for the job you’ll have *tomorrow*.

The point is that you have to expand your understanding of the business. You have to work on strategic projects because strategic thinking is different than being in the weeds, where meticulous research and detail focus score you the points.

#3: Ask Questions!

To become an executive you have to interview like an executive. To interview like an exec you have to be noticed by the execs. To be noticed, you have to think like they do, provide information and statements that answer questions they haven’t even articulated (to you). How do you think like an executive? This is pretty easy.

Ask yourself why they do what they do. If you aren't 100% sure you know why they do something – or ask for something to be done – then ask them! Asking demonstrates that you want to learn how they think. Most of the time they'll be glad to tell you. Always, they'll notice that you asked. Listen to their answers and take it in so that the next time they do something, you have a hypothesis about their reasoning. Tell them your hypothesis and see how close you were. Sometimes you'll even give them some good ideas (a great way to be noticed!)

Here's an example. The VP of Sales sends down a request for a new kind of analysis on the numbers. Instead of looking at revenue per sales person, which is in her normal weekly report, she's asking for number of sales per sales person, in addition. You think she might be planning to give some spiff bonuses to some high performers at the upcoming awards luncheon. When you deliver the report, you ask her why she wanted the additional data. She tells you that the VP of Product Development is considering a new product at a different price point and it would require a higher volume of sales. She wants to give him the names of the sales people who are already selling at a higher rate for an internal focus group on the new product idea. You tell her you'd be interested in sitting in on the focus group to expand your knowledge of product-sales team interaction, and you tell her about the bonus idea. She nods and says she'll ask about your meeting attendance; she likes your spiff idea too and thanks you. Together you brainstorm a new productivity metric, which combines both the number of sales and revenue per sale to add a new commission bonus level into next year's sales compensation plan. She tells you she'll talk to the CFO about it.

In this example, here's what that one question did for you:

- You learned that Product Development is looking at a new offering.

- You learned that one way to choose internal focus groups is based on the specific aspect of sales productivity required.
- You share a good idea with the VP.
- You create an opportunity to broaden your experience and exposure to the product development group.
- You work with the VP to refine the comp plan to incent more sales productivity.
- The VP notices you and is likely to mention you to both the VP of Product Development and the CFO.
- If she's not already your mentor or sponsor, this interaction creates the potential for you to ask her to be and increase the chances she'll say yes.

Of course, not every question is going to be so productive, but you might be surprised how often they are, especially if they help you establish relationships with the executives you have a chance to interact with. See one sitting alone in the cafeteria? Sit down and start a conversation. Ask them about the hardest decisions they've made, the best product launch they've been through and why, the most surprising board meeting they've attended. Just get them talking. They're people and they like to share their knowledge. They will absolutely notice that you take the time and have the interest. If your questions are good, you'll be on their radar.

What is your experience with the weeds and how to get out of them? Do you find it challenging to believe you're good enough? Are you easily intimidated by people with big titles? Do you see other ways you can learn about other parts of the business or industry you're not taking advantage of? Do you have some broadening experiences you can share

with us? When is school education enough? What does “education” in this context mean to you? Talk to your execs and tell us what they say too!

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