

## Curious case of Denied Promotion

Decisions about who gets promoted can seem mysterious and arbitrary. Stellar performance reviews and a strong track record—and you still get passed over. What’s going on? In most companies, feedback is vague and confusing—sometimes intentionally, so as not to demoralise. It’s up to you to understand why you’re not getting the job.

Let us take the case of Stephen...

Stephen is the vice president of operations for the Consumers Industrial Products Division, the company’s largest operating group. (All names and identifying details in this article are disguised.) The announcement didn’t blindside him. This was the second time he missed a division General Manager job in four years. The first time, the company hired an outsider who later left for a significant role at a rival firm.

Stephen always had excellent performance reviews. His 360 results indicated that people loved working for him, and as far as he could tell, managers across the company were beating down the doors to join his group. In terms of execution, his track record was flawless: He and his team had met or surpassed their numbers in each of the past five years. Additionally, they had successfully implemented every major corporate program during that time, and his division had recently been selected to serve as the pilot site for an SAP installation. When he had learned of these last two GM assignments, he’d also been told that he had a great future with the company and that with a bit of “seasoning,” he’d be ready for advancement. He had tried several times to get the real scoop on why he hadn’t been promoted, only to hear vague comments about improving his “communication skills” and demonstrating more “executive presence” and “leadership.” It seemed to him that the company valued people who could look and sound good in the boardroom more than it cared about the year-over-year results of proven performers like himself.

Stephen was quite confused. He was not able to decide on the next steps. He needed to move forward in his career and was ready to do whatever was necessary.

What would you suggest to him to do?

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