



## You Don't Know What You Don't Know

Written by Belen Gomez



### Article Highlights

- There seems to be a general lack of understanding and knowledge of how advancement occurs within an organization amongst high-aspirational folks.
- Most aspiring leaders will not make it to their desired positions without aggressively moving through their organizations or job-hopping in order to gain the necessary experience.

"You don't know, what you don't know," this is a phrase that we discuss quite often at XCEO, especially in regard to professional career development. We are continually amazed at the number of individuals who fervently express a personal commitment to their own career advancement, yet when presented with evidenced-based opportunities to further their development, seem to have no grasp on the steps necessary to fulfill personal career aspirations, and simply pass on them.

There are various reasons to explain why we witness such behavior. Perhaps individuals believe they have more time before they need to consider plans for career advancement. Perhaps they believe their talent will be recognized and rewarded in due time. One thing is certain, for these high-aspirational folks, there seems to be a general lack of understanding and knowledge of how advancement occurs within an organization, and worse, a general lack of interest in taking the initiative to learn.

Truly high-aspirational individuals should, at the very least, have some understanding as to the core attributes and decision factors their organizations look for as well as the processes they go through when assessing top talent and filling senior management and C-suite positions. My hypothesis is that most don't understand and, more importantly, they may not even realize what they need to know to be successful.

Thus, the point of this article is to explore some issues and misconceptions that young professionals, and perhaps even seasoned professionals, still accept as common wisdom today, but can ultimately prove fatal to hopes of a promising career.

All XCEO suggested actions are provided based on Dr. Curtis J. Crawford's book, *Corporate Rise: The X Principles of Extreme Personal Leadership*. For more information, visit [www.corporaterise.com](http://www.corporaterise.com).

### Myth 1: You still have time

As we like to say at XCEO, "it is always later than you think." In other words, your plan for career advancement should not be delayed until some personally determined time of "being ready". Your career is not just in your future, but it is very much your present as well. Your career is built on what you are doing today. If you have high aspirations and you are not considering your next career move as a part of a longer-term strategy, you are severely hindering your development. "We all have to change our future-oriented notions of a career."<sup>1</sup> By not changing this mentality, you may miss out on career advancement opportunities today.

XCEO Suggestions:

- Create a set of development goals, including both short-term and long-term goals
- Clearly define your personal development plan, and personal performance plan. They are not the same, understand the difference
- Plan a meeting to review your goals and plans with your immediate supervisor
- Ensure that your organization's employee development practices are aligned with your goals

### Myth 2: You will be discovered



*"The responsibility for your career lies solely with you. Most individuals within your organization do not care if you advance. Do not be foolish enough to believe otherwise."*

I wonder how many of the next generation of potential business leaders, really understand the time investment, dedication and strategic planning it takes for most individuals to reach the upper echelon of corporate America. I have no doubt that most imagine that if they work hard and do their jobs well they will be "discovered" by their organization and will be catapulted to great success, however, it just simply is not reality. "Don't presume that the important people in your operation are aware of your good performance!"<sup>2</sup>

The responsibility for your career lies solely with you. Most individuals within your organization do not care if you advance. Do not be foolish enough to believe otherwise. It is simply unrealistic to assume that your supervisor or your organization will lead you down the path to a successful career without additional effort from yourself. Yes, work ethic and job performance are critical, but you must take the initiative to use these to leverage career success. Do not simply wait to be recognized.

XCEO Suggestions:

- Be bold about letting your aspirations be known to your colleagues and supervisor
- Plan to meet with your supervisor at least twice a year to discuss your progress and make any necessary adjustments on your personal development and performance plan
- Openly seek a relationship with your boss' boss, you should always have at least two levels of support within the company

### **Myth 3: Your organization will share the key to corporate advancement**

There are unwritten rules in organizations regarding corporate advancement. Many professionals do not understand how to advance within an organization. Many do not recognize the value of lateral movement and severely underestimate the number of different positions they must hold before they will be deemed adequately prepared to

take on a senior management role. It is likely your organization will not tell you. Most aspiring leaders will not make it to their desired positions without aggressively moving through their organizations (what we describe as career velocity) or job-hopping in order to gain the necessary experience.

XCEO Suggestions:

- Become a student of your organization, understand your company's organizational chart and where the influence and power are concentrated
- Learn how the successful people within your organization gained their experiences, focus on your aspirations and look at the key jobs held previously by these individuals
- Find out how these people were developed within the organization or any third party consulting that was employed
- Learn the rules of the game. Ask about the "unwritten rules" within your organization and do not accept vague answers like "exhibit strong leadership" or "exceptional teamwork". Find out what that really means to your organization

Unfortunately, this is only a few of many common misconceptions that can mislead you, but at this point it should be clear that you are responsible for your own career and you cannot succeed alone. The passive mindset toward career advancement will not get you very far and continuing to pass on development opportunities will only set you back further.

It is important to recognize that it is one thing to attend a conference, or networking event to fulfill a personal need. These gatherings can make you feel empowered, like you are doing something to progress professionally. However, it is quite different to commit to a structured program, or mentoring relationship that will actually help produce the desired results. Our advice is always to find a support system within your organization, find a partner, and get started

today. Now you know your success depends on it.

### References

<sup>1</sup> B. Blessing. Career Planning: Five Fatal Assumptions. *Training and Development Journal*. September 1986.

<sup>2</sup> C.J. Crawford. *Corporate Rise: The X Principles of Extreme Personal Leadership*. 2005.

For information regarding XCEO and our professional mentoring programs and career development tools, visit

[http://www.xceo.net/xceo-new/for\\_professional\\_mentoring/index.cfm](http://www.xceo.net/xceo-new/for_professional_mentoring/index.cfm).

## About the Author



Belen Gomez

As Brand Manager, Ms. Gomez oversees XCEO's marketing, research and publishing efforts. She is involved in all marketing projects including organizing media relations, arranging and authorizing XCEO interviews and book signings, and developing marketing content for Dr. Curtis Crawford's books *Corporate Rise*, *Compliance & Conviction* and *Manager's Guide to Mentoring* (McGraw-Hill). Ms. Gomez also acts as a liaison between the XCEO public relations team and book publicists for *Corporate Rise* and *Compliance & Conviction*. Next, she will begin research on Dr. Crawford's next book, *Consumer Divide*.

Ms. Gomez earned a BS in Psychology from Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California in 2006. Before joining the XCEO team, she worked for SRI International.

## About XCEO

At XCEO, Inc., we believe individual leadership is the driving force for inspiring creativity and ultimately maximizing intellectual capacity. We provide individual and corporate development in the principles of *Extreme Personal Leadership*®. We call this *X-Leadership* and it is the touchstone of our company.

In today's globally competitive world, intellectual property is a key indicator of long-term success. Corporations and individuals are seeking knowledge intensive solutions to sustain a competitive advantage. At XCEO, we offer *Professional Mentoring and Personal Leadership Development* programs, as well as *Corporate Governance and Board Leadership Development* programs, for high-aspiration individuals and forward-looking corporations.

Through our Professional Mentoring and

Personal Leadership programs, we assist individuals in developing personal career and development plans to achieve senior executive-level positions. We also support corporations that recognize the need for a broad array of development options for their high-potential employees being groomed for senior leadership responsibilities.

As part of XCEO's pursuit of enlightened corporate governance, we have created *the Enlightened Corporate Governance Board Performance Evaluation Program* to support boards and directors in their pursuit of excellence. Through our program, we are leading the movement past compliance, toward principled action which maximizes shareholder value. We have designed a set of eight individual and board evaluation exercises which provide an exceptional opportunity for directors to take their boards to a whole new level of

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