

CLIMBING THE CORPORATE LADDER:

Top strategies for career advancement



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

In the modern workplace, career progression is no longer simply a matter of tenure or seniority. While hard work and diligence remain essential, climbing the corporate ladder requires a strategic approach that encompasses continuous learning, strong professional relationships, and a proactive attitude towards growth. Employees who want to advance must demonstrate their value in ways that align with both personal ambitions and the evolving needs of their organisations.

ZARIF FAIAZ

Having clear goals

A key element of professional success is having a clear vision of career objectives. Individuals who define their goals early on are better equipped to make decisions that will propel them forward. Understanding where one wants to be in five, ten, or fifteen years provides a roadmap that guides professional choices, from the skills one develops to the roles one pursues. For example, according to a Pew Research survey, 63% of US workers who resigned in 2021 cited limited opportunities for advancement as a primary reason.

A well-defined career trajectory enables employees to make informed decisions about which industries, organisations, and roles will offer the best opportunities for advancement.

Always learning

Beyond having a clear vision, continuous learning has become an indispensable part of professional development. The rapid pace of technological advancements and industry shifts means that employees must stay updated on new trends, tools, and methodologies. Those who commit to lifelong learning stand out as adaptable and resourceful professionals. Enrolling in courses, obtaining certifications, and attending industry conferences are all ways to ensure that one remains competitive.

Investing in professional development is not only beneficial for personal growth but also influences employee retention. LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report 2024 reveals that 70% of workers say learning improves their sense of connection to a workplace.

Learning does not always have to be formal; engaging with thought leaders, reading widely, and participating in professional forums also contribute to the expansion of knowledge and expertise. Those who cultivate a deep understanding of their field become indispensable assets to their organisations.

Networking

While technical skills are crucial, career advancement is also heavily influenced by the ability to build and maintain professional relationships. Studies indicate that networking is positively related to both current salary and

the rate of salary growth over time. Networking is not merely a tool for finding new jobs; it is an essential practice for those looking to climb the corporate ladder. Employees who cultivate relationships both within and outside their organisations create opportunities for mentorship, collaboration, and professional growth. A strong network provides access to valuable insights, career guidance, and potential job openings. Developing genuine connections with colleagues, superiors, and industry peers enhances an individual's professional reputation and increases the likelihood of career opportunities arising.

Taking initiatives and skills specialisation

Within an organisation, those who take initiative distinguish themselves from their peers. Demonstrating a willingness to go beyond one's job description by taking on additional responsibilities or leading projects signals ambition and reliability. Employers and managers take note of individuals who proactively seek solutions, propose ideas, and contribute to the company's success. This proactive attitude not only builds credibility but also increases the chances of being considered for promotions or leadership roles. Organisations value employees who exhibit a sense of ownership and a commitment to innovation.

Closely related to taking initiative is the importance of developing specialised expertise. Employees who become authorities in their respective fields are more likely to be recognised and rewarded for their knowledge. Rather than attempting to be proficient in every aspect of an industry, professionals should focus on areas where they can provide unique insights or skills. Specialisation not only enhances job security but also makes an employee a go-to resource within the company. Those who master a specific area within their industry gain leverage when negotiating salaries, promotions, or career moves.

Open communication

Effective communication is another vital component of career progression. Employees who articulate their ideas clearly, whether in meetings, presentations, or written correspondence, establish themselves as leaders.

Communication is not just about speaking or writing well; it also involves listening actively, adapting messages for different audiences, and fostering productive dialogue. Employees who master these skills are more likely to be entrusted with leadership responsibilities, as communication is a cornerstone of management and strategic decision-making.

Understanding and aligning with an organisation's goals further strengthens an employee's prospects for advancement. Those who take the time to study their company's mission, values, and long-term strategy can tailor their contributions accordingly. Managers and executives are more inclined to promote individuals who demonstrate a strong understanding of how their work supports broader organisational objectives. Employees who align their efforts with corporate priorities show that they are invested in the company's success, making them prime candidates for leadership roles.

In a competitive professional environment, it is also important to document and highlight achievements. Employees who keep track of their contributions, whether in the form of successful projects, efficiency improvements, or revenue growth, are better positioned to advocate for themselves during performance reviews. A well-maintained record of accomplishments provides tangible evidence of value to the organisation and strengthens the case for promotions and salary increases. Those who articulate their achievements effectively are more likely to be recognised for their contributions.

Willingness to take risks

Risk-taking is another often overlooked aspect of career growth. While caution and stability have their merits, professionals who seek advancement must be willing to embrace calculated risks. This might involve taking on a challenging project, moving to a new department, or applying for a position that stretches one's current capabilities. Growth often occurs outside of comfort zones, and those who push their boundaries are more likely to encounter new opportunities. Employers respect individuals who demonstrate adaptability and a willingness to tackle challenges head-on.

Handling priorities

Despite the emphasis on hard work and ambition, maintaining a work-life balance is essential for long-term career success. Burnout is a real risk for professionals who neglect personal well-being in pursuit of career goals. Employees who manage their time effectively, set boundaries, and prioritise self-care are more likely to sustain high performance over time. Companies increasingly recognise the importance of employee well-being, and those who model a balanced approach to work set a positive example for their colleagues.

Climbing the corporate ladder requires a combination of strategic planning, skill development, networking, and self-advocacy. Professionals who set clear goals, commit to continuous learning, build strong relationships, take initiative, and communicate effectively position themselves for long-term success. By aligning their efforts with organisational goals and maintaining a balanced approach to work, they not only enhance their own careers but also contribute to the broader success of their workplaces. In an era of rapid change, those who remain adaptable, proactive, and committed to growth will be best equipped to navigate the complexities of career advancement.

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

Standard Chartered



Associate Relationship Manager, Priority Acquisition

Deadline: March 7

Eligibility:

• Bachelor's degree from a reputed university. Prior banking experience will be an added advantage.

Minimum experience: 1-2 years

DBH Finance



PLC

Brand & Communications

Deadline: March 6

Eligibility:

• BBA/MBA degree preferably in Business Administration/Marketing with high academic attainment from recognised universities.

Minimum experience: 5-7 years

RADIANT PHARMACEUTICALS

Radiant Pharmaceuticals Limited

Assistant Manager, Commercial

Deadline: March 1

Eligibility:

• Master's degree in Supply Chain Management, Business Administration, or any relevant field.

Minimum experience: 5-8 years

Asset



Developments & Holdings Ltd.

Executive, Sales & Marketing

Deadline: March 12

Eligibility:

• Graduation from a recognised university with prior experience in sales and marketing.

Minimum experience: 1-4 years

FOR MORE DETAILS AND THE APPLICATION LINKS, SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW.



A thinker sees his own actions as experiments and questions—as attempts to find out something. Success and failure are for him answers above all.

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Alibaba to invest \$50 billion in AI and cloud computing

AFP

Alibaba has said that it will spend more than \$50 billion on artificial intelligence and cloud computing over the next three years, a week after co-founder Jack Ma was seen meeting President Xi Jinping. Investors have piled into Chinese technology stocks since the start of the year, with Alibaba -- which runs some of the country's biggest online shopping platforms -- seeing its shares soar to three-year highs.

In an official statement, the company said its strategy was aimed at "reinforcing (Alibaba's) commitment to long-term technological innovation... (and) underscores the company's focus



on AI-driven growth". The statement did not detail how the company would allocate the funds or what specific projects would be supported. It did add that the investment would exceed its total AI and cloud spending over the past decade.

TikTok lays off trust and safety staff in Singapore

NEXT STEP DESK

TikTok has laid off at least a dozen employees from its trust and safety team in Singapore as part of a global restructuring effort aimed at aligning its operations with long-term growth plans, according to a report by The Straits Times.

As per the report, employees in Singapore were notified of the layoffs on February 26, 2025.



20 via an internal email, which cited operational efficiency as the reason for the restructuring. Some affected staff had their access revoked within an hour of being informed, while others were retained. Among those impacted was trust and safety product manager Eric Tan, who posted on LinkedIn that he had been made redundant after more than three years at the company.

SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

We've all been there—burning the midnight oil, skipping lunch breaks, or replying to emails at 2 am because we believe that grinding harder than everyone else is the golden ticket to promotions and respect. But is it really? The truth is far more nuanced than a simple 'yes' or 'no'.

When hustle pays off

There's a reason 'hustle culture' has become a badge of honour. In the short term, putting in extra hours can create opportunities. For example, taking on high-visibility projects or stepping up during a crisis might earn you recognition from leadership. It is generally accepted that employees who occasionally work longer hours during critical periods are often perceived as more committed, potentially leading to faster promotions.

Industries like startups, finance, or consulting often reward 'always-on' mentalities. If you're gunning for a partnership at a law firm or a leadership role at a fast-growing tech company, showing grit during crunch times might help you stand out.

But here's the catch: this only works if it's sustainable and targeted. Think of it like sprinting in a marathon—you can't sprint the whole race, but a well-timed burst might help you pass competitors.

**The case against overworking**

Flip the coin, and overworking isn't just exhausting—it's counterproductive. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially classified burnout as an occupational phenomenon in 2019, linking it to chronic workplace stress. A Stanford study found that productivity plummets after 50 hours of work per week. By hour 55, you're basically getting nothing done except reheating coffee and staring blankly at your screen.

Beyond productivity loss, overworking tanks your physical and mental health. A 2024 study from the Journal of the American Heart Association states that work-related stress is a psychosocial risk factor linked to a higher risk of cardiovascular disease. Plus, when you're perpetually exhausted, creativity and problem-solving

skills take a dip.

And let's not forget the social cost. Missing family dinners, cancelling plans with friends, or neglecting hobbies doesn't just harm your relationships—it erodes the parts of your identity that make you 'you'. Over time, that can leave you feeling hollow, even if your career looks 'successful' on paper.

The middle ground: Work smarter, not (just) harder

The key to thriving without self-destructing is to focus on strategic effort rather than raw hours. Before diving into an all-nighter, ask: "Is this task actually advancing my goals?" Prioritise projects that align with your long-term career vision or your company's key objectives.

Keep in mind that boundaries

aren't selfish—they're survival skills. A 2023 report by global consulting firm Deloitte found that 77% of professionals who set clear work-life boundaries reported higher job satisfaction. As such, try time-blocking your calendar, turning off notifications after hours, or saying "no" to non-urgent tasks.

Companies like Microsoft Japan and countries like the UK and Iceland have experimented with 4-day workweeks—and found that productivity increased. This is because when you're not fixated on clocking hours, you're forced to focus on outcomes. Track your accomplishments (e.g., "launched X project" vs. "worked 12 hours") to prove your value without burning out.

Overworking can give you a short-term edge, but, likely, you'll eventually stumble. Sustainable success isn't about outworking everyone; it's about working with intention. If you're in a season where hustle is unavoidable (e.g., launching a business or upskilling for a promotion), pair it with recovery periods. And if you're stuck in a grind that never pays off? It might be time to reassess your role, company culture, or even your definition of 'success'.

Remember: Careers are marathons, not sprints. The goal isn't to collapse at the finish line—it's to keep running, growing, and enjoying the ride.

Will overworking get you ahead?

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