Success and Recognition

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Some of us work very hard but may not feel appreciated for it. Is there something you can be doing differently?

It's a concern I've heard more than you might think from fellow new hires: I'm working my tail off here, but I'm not getting the kind of recognition I want. In my own experience, I've seen a lot of friends and co-workers struggle with this. It is my hope to share with you a few tips that I've learned along the way that have helped me to achieve both success and recognition.

Recognition shouldn't motivate you
Don't work or act purely for the sake of recognition. Work hard and make progress for your own good; the recognition will come. When I focus my efforts on things that I think will get the most recognition, my work ethic suffers. If you have goals, reach them because you want to reach them, not just because you feel others will look upon your successes favorably.

Start within your own circle
If you want to expand your horizons, start within your own circle first. The key to getting newer and better assignments at work is to be the first name that comes to your manager's mind when he or she needs someone reliable and capable for a specific job. If you are giving your best effort in your own area, and make efforts to improve upon the area you are working in, then you will be one of those top candidates for the next assignment. Envision for a moment a circle within a circle within a circle. You start in the center circle and do that set of tasks or assignments very well. If you are doing these things and reporting back consistently, you will be seen as someone who is capable of greater things. As new assignments crop up (the next circle from the center), it's the person who is perceived as responsible, reliable, and capable that will come to the assigner's mind first. As these new assignments come, and you accept them and complete them, opportunities in the outer circle and beyond will start to be within your reach.

Know your limits
Remember that you have limits and there are times when it is appropriate to turn down an assignment—especially if the task is of particular importance to your manager or colleague, and you know you can't complete it alone. Sometimes delegating portions of an assignment is a good practice here, but make sure you are keen with your follow-up skills if you choose the path of delegation.

Report back
Complete assignments on time and early where possible, and REPORT BACK. Never leave your manager or anyone else in the dark about what you are doing. If you are working on a long term task, any time you make progress in that task, at least send an
"FYI" notice. If you've finished something, never just wait for someone to come asking about it—make it known. Three things you accomplish here: (1) you come across as very responsible, (2) you will find out faster—and before it’s too late—whether or not what you've done meets the leader's requirements, and (3) a manager or another will realize faster that you are available for other potentially greater assignments. I cannot emphasize enough the importance to always return and report (without waiting to be asked). By the way, when you report back, don't make it appear that you are just doing so to get recognition. This should not be your goal. Your goal is to keep your manager informed so that the business can move on and so that he or she will be able to report progress to their management. Having some progress to report is always beneficial to your manager or supervisor.

Make your manager look good
I was told this particular point by my 'unofficial' IBM mentor. Let me first clarify that this is not 'brown nosing', which is the often fatal attempt to make yourself look good in front of your manager (and, more often than not, is accomplished by trying to make others around you look bad). Turn around your thinking for a minute. There's a difference here. Author Elizabeth R. Murphy says in The Assistant: New Tasks, New Opportunities, "Your job is to get your boss promoted—or at least to help him (or her) be extremely effective in doing his (or her) job."¹

It really makes sense—your manager's performance depends an awful lot on what you, as an employee, do. If you spend your time on things that make your manager look better to his or her manager, you will not only improve your relationship with your manager, but you'll always find yourself doing what's really most important with no additional effort!

Be prudent, and mind your mouth
Being assertive counts, but choose your battles or you could come off as confrontational and negative. It would do my point injustice to say any more than what Dr. Albert Einstein said: "If A equals success, then the formula is A = X + Y + Z. X is work. Y is play. Z is keep your mouth shut."

Good luck, and always, ALWAYS be honest!

¹ http://www.sharpertraining.com/library/article.cfm?articleid=5600 Note: this is also a great reference for learning more about the benefits of helping your manager succeed.