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Ask yourself:

Are You CEO Material?

Do you look like a company leader?

Do you have top-notch interpersonal skills?

Do you have international experience?

Do you have the specific credentials hiring companies look for?

Do you have a solid business track record that would make others take notice?

Now read the article

Are You CEO Material? 5 Simple Questions Can Help You Make the Grade By Beverly Lieberman

You've been on interview upon interview. Each time you think you're going to land that CEO position you've been eyeing, and each time you learn that the company's Board of Directors offered the position to someone else. On the surface, you appear just as qualified as the other contenders, yet you're continually getting passed over. What's the problem?

While it's the dream of many corporate executives to run a company, most never make it to that final step - becoming a President or Chief Operating Officer. Despite their extensive skills and qualifications, they're stuck at their current career level and watch outsiders step into the position they've been working so hard to be promoted into.

The fact is that becoming CEO or President of a company requires more than just moving up the ranks. Because finding the right CEO/company match is so critical and labor intensive, many companies retain the services of an executive search firm to look outside for a new leader. In fact, more than 50% of F500 companies are hiring outsiders for the CEO role. This is good news for candidates, as it allows them to interview for the top position at companies they may not have been considered for otherwise. However, in order to win over the board and land the CEO title, candidates need certain skills and attributes company leaders deem critical for making the grade.

Below are the main criteria upcoming company leaders need to fine-tune if they want to be considered for the top positions. Use these as a checklist to determine which areas you need to work on. By focusing on the areas below, you greatly increase your chances of attaining your professional goals.

Do you have a solid business track record that would make others take notice?

Most often, executives select candidates who have had considerable experience managing large and complex functions in companies within the same or similar industry as the hiring company. Traditionally, hiring companies want people who are considered "best of breed" in their sector. They tend to look for the best business people who have helped turn around a faltering company or who have developed a winning business strategy that has resulted in major revenue growth and profitability. Candidates are expected to have recently been in a leadership role with substantial



operating experience, including P & L responsibility. The executive of choice is someone who would be viewed as directly contributing to his/her company's stock growth. Critically analyze your business accomplishments. If you seem to be lacking anything noteworthy, you may want to apply yourself more intently to your current position before seeking a move upward.

Do you have the specific credentials hiring companies look for?

Most successful CEO candidates have backgrounds that include serving as CFO (Chief Financial Officer) or CMO (Chief Marketing Officer) for a similar organization. These previous positions give them a mixture of line and operating experience. Additionally, their backgrounds include an average of 20-25 years experience with at least 10 years in substantial management roles. More than 50% have an MBA degree and are involved in various industry, trade, and professional associations. Many are involved in community activities as well. These individuals are first and foremost leaders - people whom others tend to want to follow. They are generally risk-takers and willing to relocate for their next assignment. If you're lacking in years of experience, specific roles, community involvement, or education, find ways to make up for the missing credentials. This may include putting in a few more years at your current position to gain extra experience, joining and networking at professional organizations, or even returning to school to finish an advanced degree. Do what's necessary to give yourself an edge over the competition.

Do you have international experience?

Having a business stint outside the United States is very important for top executives who want to move up the corporate ladder. Most companies expect their CEOs and COOs to have had considerable international experience. This means managing a line of business or a division overseas. Company leaders view this experience as crucial since most US F500 companies make or sell half or more of their products and services abroad. Cultural sensitivity and the ability to work effectively with diverse populations are deemed important. If three to five years of international experience are not on your resume, investigate opportunities that can take you abroad. This is one important yet overlooked qualification that can help you advance your career.

Do you have top-notch interpersonal skills?

In today's business environment, there is an increasing emphasis on communication skills - everything from the ability to persuade others to the ability to send and receive clear messages throughout the organization. In fact, one of the most important ingredients for up-and-coming CEOs is their ability to develop strong interpersonal relationships. The skill of working with people and gaining their trust and confidence is vital. In addition, knowing how to manage upward and laterally are as important as knowing how to manage your staff. How well tuned are your interpersonal skills? Do you find that others relate well to you, or do you constantly struggle to get your point across? To gain additional skill with interpersonal communication, some savvy executives utilize professional coaches and industrial psychologists. Many have attended courses and seminars in personal development. If this is one area that troubles you, perhaps attending a Dale Carnegie or other such course should be your top priority.

Do you look like a company leader?

In addition to business, leadership, and communication skills, executives today are expected to be tuned into their physical and psychological health. Because they are considered role models in their organization, they must be able to present a positive image to their staff and to the public. That's why it's common for companies to hire executives who appear fit and who have "executive bearing." Top executives are often involved in a regular fitness program. Jogging, golfing, playing tennis, and having a membership in a health club are the norm. In short, top executives must "look the part."



Closely examine how you portray yourself to others. Do you continually look tired and out of shape? Or, even more telling, would you want your entire staff to be in the same physical and psychological shape as you're currently in? If not, make your health a priority so you can physically and emotionally handle the stresses that come with leading a company. Remember, the company's health is only as good as its leader's.

Becoming a company President or Chief Executive Officer requires a critical balance of both professional and personal skills and attributes. When you can confidently answer "yes" to each of the questions posed above, then you'll have the greatest chance of landing that top position. So take the time to polish your skills and image today. Doing so will give you the competitive edge you need to reach your professional goal.

About the Author

Beverly Lieberman is President of Halbrecht Lieberman Associates, Inc., an internationally recognized executive search firm. She is also a sought after speaker on information technology management issues. Ms. Lieberman has successfully managed searches for communications, healthcare, high technology, management consulting, manufacturing, financial services, and retail companies. Executive Recruiter News recently honored her as one of the 50 leading retained search professionals, and The Career Makers heralded her one of the nation's top recruiters. For more information, call 203-222-4890 or visit www.hlassoc.com .