

# Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

## Jam in the Sandwich - the role of the Middle Manager

Traditionally, the middle manager's job was to implement the vision and goals set from the top. Sandwiched between the decision makers and general staff body, they were glorified messengers with little job security. In badly run organizations, there was little chance of upward movement.

As organizations' structures changed, they tended to get 'flatter', less hierarchical, which meant middle managers could find themselves redundant. Often times I've heard clients say it's the junior to middle managers who are most resistant to change.

However, there are ways to ensure success and career progression if you are a middle manager, and a lot of this has to do with attitude. As a middle manager, it is your challenge to play a key role in cultural change programmes or new business initiatives. Your aim should be to embrace change efforts, become role models for those below you, whilst portraying the right competencies to ensure senior management sees your promotion potential.

Step one on your journey to promotion will be the need to think and act like a senior manager. This will mean you have to understand, and if possible, take the initiative to be involved in setting the organization's goals. Don't get caught in the 'silo' effect where you are thinking just of your function or small team of supervisees; strive to see the business holistically. Understand the organization's strategy and see your role in achieving that proactively.

Many middle managers have years of experience in their organization, and rather than 'hoard' that knowledge, they should share their expertise and insights especially to guide those new decision makers at the top in order to ensure old mistakes are not repeated.

For this reason, middle managers can make excellent coaches for new comers, and you should keep in mind that your efforts to develop those you supervise or are peers with is sure to attract positive attention. Subordinate development is, after all, a key leadership competency.

If you are a middle manager and you are given an opportunity to express your ideas on how things should operate, jump at the chance. There is nothing more frustrating for senior managers than to deal with middle managers who show no initiative, who are constantly sat waiting to be told how to do things, or how to solve problems. Be willing to show lateral thought, come up with your own solutions, and keep those around you informed of your progress and you will surely be destined to move up the ladder much faster.

As the 'jam' in the middle of the organization's sandwich, you will be in an excellent position to play a mediating role, seeking collaboration from different levels and helping them better understand each other. You are well placed to take visions and turn them into reality. Most importantly, though, you must avoid getting stuck in a 'rut' and absorbed into unimportant detail. Think holistically; see the world beyond your role.

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