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As organizations run leaner and flatter, your ability to move up can stall much earlier in your career because, simply put, there's no place to go. This is true whether you work for a corporation, nonprofit, or public agency. So what should you do when you reach that plateau and you're only midway through your career? First, take stock. Do you enjoy and learn from your colleagues? Are you still energized by the mission of the organization? If the answer is no, it may be time to move on. But if the answer is yes, consider ways to grow on the plateau.

There are at least four proven approaches, all of which require that you ask what energizes you and what saps your motivation.

Lateral moves within your organization can be a great way to build new skills and relationships and get exposure to different products or services. You can explore new internal opportunities in a few ways, by: conducting internal informational interviews and meeting with a leader in another division or unit; taking on cross-cutting assignments involving other business units; or volunteering to move, say, from a business unit to a staff function that transcends units, such as finance, HR, or operations. Indeed, corporations like Kraft, consider role rotation standard for building well-rounded **leaders**, and actively invite promising line managers to take on staff jobs and the reverse. One senior leader at a professional services company, whom we'll call Bronwyn, made the move from client-facing partner to chief operating officer. She was able to build on the analytics and change management insights she had brought to clients to help strengthen her own organization from the C-suite. In the process she developed managerial muscle in finance, human resources, governance, and IT, and, as a bonus, Bronwyn gained more flexibility in her schedule since she didn't have external client demands driving her day-to-day work.

Reshaping your current role is another way to grow on the plateau. This calls for taking inventory of what you'd like to do more of, less of, and start doing. In concert with team members, you can redraw some boundaries to create stretch opportunities for others as you shift responsibilities to make space for your own new challenges. Two good places to look for these challenges are on your supervisor's plate (Does she have areas of responsibility that you find interesting that could help free her up?); and in employee and customer surveys (Are there needs the organization isn't meeting that you have the skills to respond to?) An expert in customer strategy at a consumer products company, whom we'll call Sandra, became a vice president in her early 30s and knew that she would need to wait a while for her next promotion, given the company's culture. She knew she wanted to stay with the company, however, so she looked for gaps in service delivery across business units - from supply chain to e-commerce - and then volunteered to help colleagues fill those gaps. Sandra spent the next several years intrapreneurially expanding activities within her vice president role, learning more about the company and gaining new skills, relationships, and a reputation for innovation.

Expanding your influence through actively mentoring others, building internal communities of practice, or stepping up to represent your organization with external bodies can forge satisfying new frontiers without changing roles. Take the program officer at a youth focused nonprofit whom we'll call Maria. She had nowhere to move up internally unless the executive director moved on. So she began collaborating externally with other organizations in her city that aimed to help immigrant youth plug into education, training, and job opportunities, growing her network and innovating her programs. By expanding her influence outside the organization, she gained credibility within. When the time finally came to name a new executive director, Maria was a top internal candidate in part because of her external network, and eventually got the job.

Deepening your skills is another way to build credibility and opportunity on the plateau. You can accomplish this on the job, by seeking out a mentor or volunteering for special projects; and off the job through formal leadership training. A medical service head we'll call Robert, at a large public hospital, for example, volunteered to lead a performance improvement exercise for one of the hospital's acute care groups. The results in improved patient care and timelier billing led hospital management to invest in sending him to an executive education course at a top business school, a qualification that eventually garnered him an offer to run a much bigger service line at the hospital, with close to 300 medical staff and \$380 million annual budget.

Most 21st century managers will find themselves on a similar plateau somewhere along their career. Before succumbing to the temptation to jump to a new escarpment, consider whether branching out in place may be the best way to build your skills, both personally and professionally, for your next ascent.

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