

PROMOTION

Pave the path to power

Moving up is about identifying your strengths and improving skills, writes **Sue White**.

Keen to end 2012 a rung or two up the career ladder? It may be worth taking note of Martin Keetels' journey. Thanks to two significant promotions in the past three years, and a recent accolade as the Australian Institute of Management's Young Manager of the Year for 2011, there's no doubt this bid manager's career is on a fast track.

Part of Keetels' success may come from his having tried to improve his job skills from day one.

"My first job out of university [2005] was as an associate in the District Court of Queensland," Keetels says.

"I worked for a judge for a year and learnt a lot. He taught me about taking pride in one's work, reliability and trust."

Keetels then diverted from law and spent three years running his own business, helping small and medium-size enterprises produce better business tenders.

The experience allowed him to leap into a job as a senior bid manager at Konica Minolta. Within a couple of years, promotions propelled him into the concurrent roles of national commercial counsel and national bid manager.

Keetels believes part of the reason his success has come quickly is because he's found something he enjoys doing.

"After university, I expected to go into private practice in the legal industry but I found I'm much

more interested in business, economics and working with people," he says. "That's turned out to be my niche."

However, when it comes to climbing the ladder, Keetels has numerous tips for those planning their own career trajectory.

"Maintain high standards and never compromise on those," he says. "You can be tempted to let things slide every now and then but when you least expect to be caught out, you are."

"[It's better to] continually produce your best work."

Keetels says bosses notice those who are willing to take on additional challenges.

'Maintain high standards and never compromise on those.'

Martin Keetels, Young Manager of the Year

"Volunteering for extra responsibility is a good way to put yourself in a position for promotion," he says. "I have always put my hand up, although only when I also think it's the best option for the business."

While it's tempting to simply volunteer for the small tasks, Keetels says stepping up for the big projects pays off.

"I've tried to identify things that can be seen as game changers," he



Leaps and bounds ... award-winning manager Martin Keetels. Photo: Domino Postiglione

says. "That tells your manager you have the business's best interests at heart ... and shows [those at higher levels] that you are capable of strategic thinking."

An organisational psychologist with human resources company Randstad, Kellie Rigg, agrees there's more than one piece to the promotion puzzle. When coaching those hoping to climb the ladder, Rigg ensures they spend time understanding their skill set and creating a vision of what they want to achieve.

"If you know your strengths and what motivates you, it will fast-track your success," Rigg says. "If you're not going with your strengths, you're really going against the tide."

Rigg says success is different for everyone. "For one person, it might mean being highest up the chain; for another person, it could be linked to a financial goal or values and beliefs," she says. But whatever your goal, Rigg says the ambitious need to be adaptable and resilient.

"Things will change, as will the market," she says. "You need to be open to adapting to those circumstances and cope with setbacks."

Training is another key consideration. Keetels is at the tail end of completing a master of business administration degree and says any training – in-house or out – is important.

"My MBA has given me access to new stimulus, ideas and concepts that I've been able to apply in the workplace," he says. "However, I don't think people should do an MBA simply for the fact it might reflect positively on their CV. I would recommend it to develop yourself personally and professionally, not simply to tick a box."

While Rigg agrees that training and volunteering can help your chances of promotion, she also says staying put for a while can pay off.

"It can take time to learn the skills and function at your optimum level in a role," she says. "[So] it's sometimes important to [stay put] during the period in which you're flourishing and doing well."

And if you do try for a promotion but miss out, take a tip from Keetels. "Maintain calm, respect the umpire's decision and get on with the job," he says. "People will respect your attitude and maturity if you behave in that way."