



GETTING TO SES –

The Top Ten Reasons People are Not Selected for SES Positions & What to do to be More Competitive & Move your Career Forward



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Handpicking the best talent



Agenda

- 1. The Career Challenge**
- 2. Creating Career Partnerships**
- 3. Devising a High Impact Development Plan**
- 4. What to Avoid – The Top Ten Reasons Employees are Not Selected for SES**

Roadmap

**The Career
Challenge**

**Creating
Career
Partnerships**

**Devising a High
Impact
Development Plan**

There are approximately 7,200 Career Service Senior Executive (SES) Positions in the federal government.



There are roughly 161,000 GS-14, GS-15 employees and recently retired senior military officers who are currently eligible to apply to SES Positions.

There is no consistency across federal service in how agencies provide assistance to candidates who aspire to the Senior Executive Service.



While OPM has initiated efforts to inform, educate and encourage, many agencies do not budget or request funds specifically for programs to help prepare people for executive leadership programs.

While the odds of successfully competing for an SES position are daunting, as we will discuss, there are ways you can effectively prepare goals – with or without agency-organized assistance.



6 Imperatives for SES Candidates



Create Career Partnerships/Agency Networks

- Imperative 1: Identify Your Interim and Long-Term Aspirations
- Imperative 2: Prepare for High Impact Interactions
- Imperative 3: Engage With Your Career Partner(s)



Devise a High Impact Development Plan

- Imperative 4: Identify Development Areas
- Imperative 5: Select the Right Activities
- Imperative 6: Apply Learning to Drive Impact

Roadmap

The Career
Challenge

Creating
Career
Partnerships

Devising a High
Impact
Development Plan

Employees Struggle to See Internal Opportunities

Opportunities Exist in Organizations

“Given the size of our organization, employees have hundreds of opportunities available to them.”

*-Former CHCI
Department of Energy*

“With expanded program responsibilities and new funding, we’ve doubled in size in the past decade. No matter what kind of career employees are looking for, they can find it here.”

*-Department Executive
Financial Services Agency*

Employees Do Not See Them



Only **29%** of employees see career opportunities at their organization.

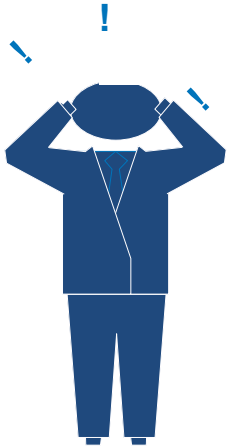
$n = 8,550.$

Source: CEB 2015 Careers Employee Survey.

Source: CEB analysis.

The Critical Touchpoint

Employee Find it Hard to Understand Relevant Roles



76%

Say prioritizing information about roles is difficult.

75%

Say understanding information about roles is not easy

76%

Say weighing the pros and cons of possible roles is challenging

Who Are High Impact Career Partners?

- ✓ Managers
- ✓ Executives
- ✓ Mentors
- ✓ Organization Leaders
- ✓ Subject Matter Experts
- ✓ Human Resources

Who can you partner with to gain what you need to understand your career trajectory?

Source: CEB analysis.

Imperative 1: Identify and Clarify Your Aspirations

To have high impact career conversations, engage with partners to pressure test your career aspirations and identify the skills you need for your next step.

- **Tip 1: Identify career partners who can provide you with information on specific aspirations.**
- **Tip 2: Understand the experiences you need to achieve your aspirations.**
- **Tip 3: Refine career aspirations based on career conversations.**

Source: CEB analysis.

Imperative 2: Prepare for Career Conversations

Understand your communications style as well as others to improve impact of interactions.

- **Tip 1: Assess your communications style to better understand [what you need in an interaction](#).**
- **Tip 2: Understand your partners' communications styles to best [frame career conversations](#).**
- **Tip 3: [Make a plan](#) to achieve your conversation objectives.**

Source: CEB analysis.

Imperative 3: Engage With Your Career Partner(s)

Career partners can help you understand the opportunities in the organization and help define your path to get there.

- **Tip 1:** Through dialogue, **capture the “reality”** of the aspiration and don’t be afraid to adjust your career aspirations.
- **Tip 2:** Set **intermediate steps** towards your career goal.
- **Tip 3:** Engage with your manager to **devise a development strategy** to close your capability – aspiration gaps.

Source: CEB analysis.

Roadmap

The Career
Challenge

Creating
Career
Partnerships

Devising a High
Impact
Development Plan

Where Typical IDPs Go Wrong

Individual Development Plan

Illustrative

| Development Objectives | Action Steps | Support to Achieve Goal | Success Measures | Target Completion Date |
|-----------------------------|---|--|-------------------|------------------------|
| Become an excellent manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training on coaching - Training on Project Management - Training on Diversity | Manager will maintain “open door” policy | Happier employees | Ongoing |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Ambiguous Objectives | Action steps focused exclusively on training | No clearly defined support | Weak metrics | No defined deadlines |
| Common Mistakes | | | | |

Source: CEB analysis.

Imperative 4: Identify Development Areas

Development Plans should emphasize building employee strengths as well as improving poor performance.

- **Tip 1: Leverage strengths** to quickly reach higher levels of performance
- **Tip 2: Fill skill gaps** to prevent a stall in your leadership development
- **Tip 3: Balance long term** aspirations with **short term** skill development needs

Source: CEB analysis.

Imperative 5: Select the Right Activities

Development Plans should include different types of experiential and learning opportunities – and not focus solely on training classes.

- **Tip 1: Push yourself **out of the comfort zone** by asking for stretch opportunities to build skills on the job.**
- **Tip 2: Talk to your manager, mentor and others about **new skills and knowledge** that you can gain with each new project.**
- **Tip 3: Connect to **key leaders and recognized experts** to gain valuable knowledge.**

Source: CEB analysis.

Balance Different Types of Learning

Learning While Working

Keys to Success

| Development Objectives | Action Steps | | |
|------------------------|---|--|---|
| | 70% | 20% | 10% |
| Improve project | Work Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a detailed project plan• Manage new project/effort, launch from beginning to end• Document project contingency strategy• Allocate small tasks to junior employees | Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Test project plan with senior manager | Formal Training <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attend Project Management Certification Program, Six Sigma, etc. |

Source: CEB analysis.

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Leverage On the Job Activities

On The Job Activities

High Impact Categories

| Access to Best Practices | Scope Expansion | Change and Adversity | Challenging Relationships | Persuading and Teaching | Making Difficult Decisions |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shadowed a Senior Manager or Executive to See How They Conduct Their Work Worked with a Recognized Expert Experienced a Notable Success in Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased Amount of Responsibility Had a Challenging Assignment Participated in a Group to Solve a Real Business Problem Filled in for Manager Temporarily | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked in a Situation with Rapidly Changing Circumstances Handled a Crisis at Work Something in Work Went Wrong or Failed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worked with People from Other Agency Units, Functions, or Locations Worked with Multiple People with Contradictory and Competing Views Worked with Difficult Customers Worked with Difficult Coworkers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persuaded Senior Managers or Executives to Take a Difficult Action Taught Peers How to Do an Advanced Component of Their Jobs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made a Risky Decision with Potentially Adverse Consequences Made a Decision(s) Outside Area of Expertise |

Source: CEB analysis.

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Imperative 6: Apply Learning to Drive Impact

Establish mechanisms to apply skills in the workplace through active reflection and teaching.

- **Tip 1: Reflect on lessons** to identify how you will apply skills learned in the future.
- **Tip 2: Work with peers to hold each other accountable** to reach development goals.
- **Tip 3: Connect with your manager, mentor and SES Network to assess development** and career path.

Source: CEB analysis.

Three Important Considerations For Career Partnerships

To gain the most out of your career partnerships:

1

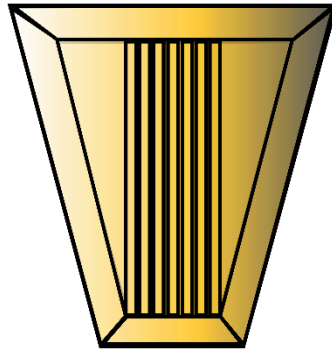
How can I best engage with my manager, mentor and SES Network to discuss my future career?

2

Who else can I engage with as a career coach to achieve my career aspirations?

3

How can I gain the experiences and skills I need to advance towards my career goal?



The Top Ten Reasons people do not get selected for Senior Executive Positions*

*In conjunction with a Leadership Development Series event several years ago, more than 750 incumbent SES responded to a survey about the primary reasons applicants were not selected to SES positions.

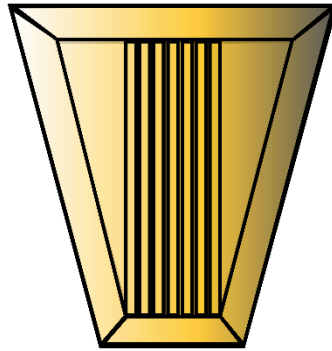
Here are the results:

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

10. Displaying an attitude of entitlement



Getting to SES:



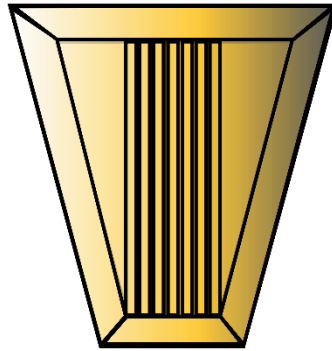
Consistently demonstrate supportive and inclusive leadership practices, confidence and humility. Your daily actions and consistent demeanor will far outweigh anything you try to say in your resume or interview. Within an agency, your leadership reputation, attitude and demeanor will precede you for any promotional consideration.

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

9. Poorly written ECQs or five-page resume that incorporates ECQs



Getting to SES:



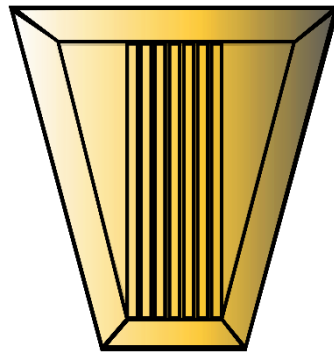
Preparing Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs) provide candidates with the best opportunity to state their case for the Senior Executive Service. Identify multiple reviewers and ask for a critical assessment – “Do the activities and accomplishments you have incorporated into the ECQs reflect “readiness” to be an SES. If needed, hire an editor to help you more accurately reflect the level of work accomplished.

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

8. Performance narratives and ratings for current position are not consistently excellent.



Getting to SES:



Making it to the “Best Qualified List” and final consideration by the selection panel requires consistently high quality performance ratings. It is essential that you strive for excellence in all facets of your current position to demonstrate performance readiness for senior management and the SES.

The challenge with the prominence of performance ratings as a qualifying or disqualifying factor is the significant variance among rating officials in how they view, interpret and assign ratings.

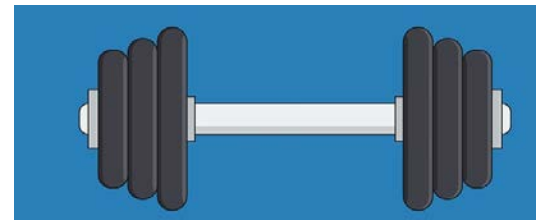
A good example is the recently announced effort across federal service to place a greater emphasis on what is considered “fully satisfactory”, which may potentially remove otherwise competitive candidates from the best qualified list.

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

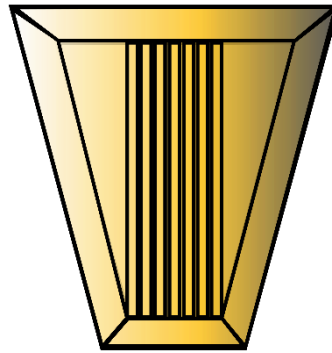
7. Inability or failure to build a sufficient senior management and SES Network



Strengthen Your Networking Muscles



Getting to SES:



Look for opportunities and activities within and outside your agency to connect with people who share your professional, leadership or volunteer interests. Cultivate and be honestly reciprocal in building and maintaining those relationships.

Identify executive mentors you believe have or will develop interest in advising and/or supporting your efforts to progress in leadership development activities as a prelude to candidacy for a senior manager or executive position.

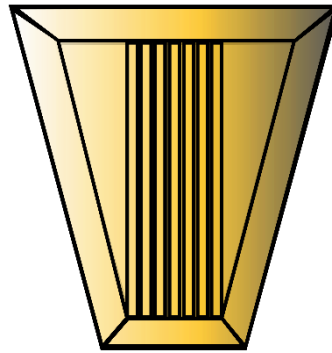
“What you know” got you to this level. “Who knows you” is essential in being promoted to the senior and executive levels.

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

6. Failure to obtain adequate breadth of agency experiences that support your candidacy



Getting to SES:



Unless you aspire to an SES Senior Leader (SL) or Senior Technical (ST) position, you will need to seek career broadening experiences that take you out of a limited niche position.

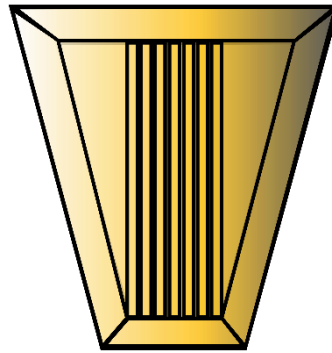
Invariably, there are agency study groups or councils that are established by organization or agency leaders that are created to problem solve on organization or agency-wide issues. Sometimes, it may be necessary to lateral to another assignment to continue building credentials to fill in the experience gaps needed to lead a complex organization.

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

5. Poor interviewing and/or communication skills



Getting to SES:



Some people just don't interview well. It's important to get feedback on how well you express your interests, accomplishments and capabilities. Failure to do so is a problem for you and the selecting official who may have overlooked the best candidate.

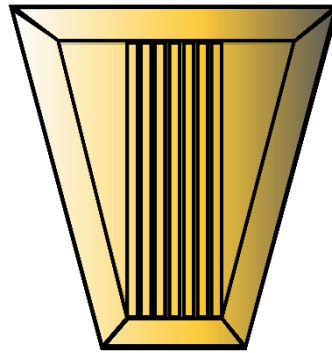
Setting up a mock interviews with your mentor, manager or trusted colleagues could provide insights for improving communication in an interview situation that will impact on your possibilities getting to senior management or the SES.

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

4. Lack of executive level knowledge or demonstrated perspective deemed necessary by the selection panel



Getting to SES:



Increasingly, executives are required to have a broad, senior level expertise in the area to which they have been assigned or selected. A generalist is not going to fare well in a position that oversees the safety and operation of nuclear reactors.

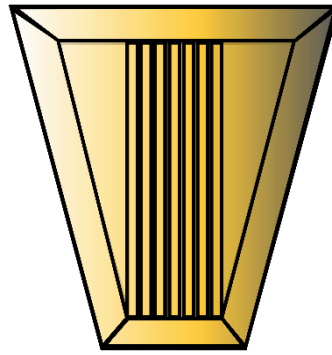
It's not just ST or SL positions, but also SES positions that lead complex organizations in highly technical fields. These accomplished executives are the backstop for cascading challenges and the way-showers for the path forward in highly critical areas of national security and related program areas.

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

3. Lack of supervisory and leadership experience that demonstrates executive potential



Getting to SES:



Sometimes, people who wish to become SES have no idea that their base of leadership experience is insufficient. They do not appear to understand or accept the premise that in being an SES, it requires the demonstrated potential to lead multi-level organizations in an increasingly complex environment.

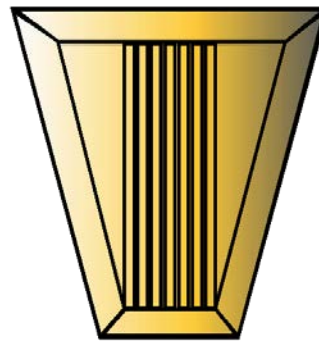
Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

2. Overconfident and lack of preparation for the interview

What creates a bad impression?

- Poor personal appearance
- Lack of preparation
- Poor knowledge
- Failure to give concrete examples of skills
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm
- Negative attitude or evasive answers

Getting to SES:



Over the years, I have had the opportunity to meet with hundreds of SES candidates. It has always amazed me in how expectant and un-prepared some of the candidates presented themselves.

Some had much of the experience that would support their candidacy, but when they got to the interview, they expected to be anointed and totally bombed the interview.

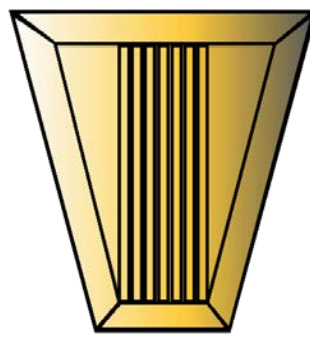
Regardless of how many accolades you have received about your potential to become an SES, you still have to be prepared to effectively present your credentials and demonstrate your potential to be the best person for the job.

Top Ten Reasons Employees Don't Get Accepted for Senior Executive Positions

1. Selection Panel does not believe you are ready or the best candidate for this position



Getting to SES:



First, given the number of exceptionally high-qualified candidates for an SES position, you may not be “the one” the selection panel/official thought was best for this job. It happens. The best of the best or the best “connected” make it through.

That’s not necessarily something you can do anything about other than continue building your network and sharpen your information focus and presentation for the next SES position.

The confidence you gain about yourself through this selection process can aid you in preparing for the next opportunity. If you choose to persevere, you will clarify the types of things you can and must do to accurately reflect why you are the best candidate for the next SES position and - encourage your selection.

WHAT HAVE YOU
LEARNED ?



- **Getting to SES is a possibility that improves with concerted, persistent and dedicated efforts.**
- **Being selected to an SES position cannot be done alone. No matter how smart and determined you may be, you will also need to obtain the assistance and active support of others in your organization and leadership network.**
- **Ultimately, it is a melding of excellence in performance, results and relationships.**

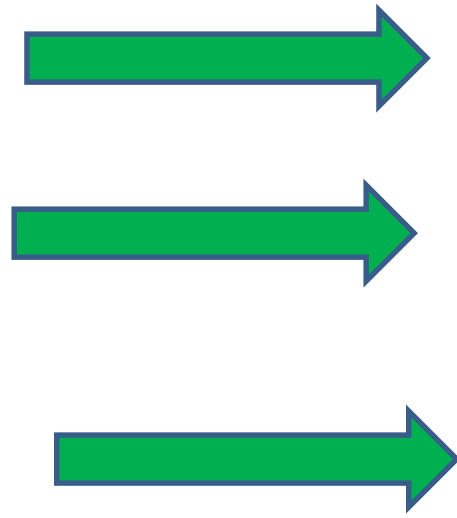


Discussion Questions (Time Permitting):

- What's the value of SES CDPs?
- Is there a “best” way to build my leadership network?
- When should I apply to an SES position?

Forcefield Analysis

Driving Forces



Restraining Forces

