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### How a Promotion Can Test a Friendship

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By EILENE ZIMMERMAN

Q. A good friend at work has been promoted and is now your boss. Is this the end of the friendship?

A. Possibly, although not inevitably. "The truth is, the promotion is going to change the nature of your relationship, and that is something you have to talk about," said Michelle Tillis Lederman, founder of Executive Essentials, a communications and leadership consulting firm in New York.

Discuss how you will manage specific situations, like disagreements at work, how to handle performance reviews and what work-related topics you can and cannot talk about, Ms. Lederman said.

The promotion of one friend over another is often a point where a friendship deteriorates, according to research done by Patty Sias, a professor of communication at Washington State University in Pullman, who studies workplace relationships.

Preserving the relationship will require guidelines for behavior inside and outside of the office that recognize your obligations to the company as employees and to each other as friends.

It will help if both of you agree to make it clear whether you are speaking as friends or as manager and subordinate, said Susan Gebelein, an executive vice president at Personnel Decisions International, a human resources consulting firm in Minneapolis.

Ms. Gebelein suggested saying things like, "I want to talk to you as a friend now" — literally spelling out your relationship at that moment. "If the two of you have been in a meeting and you want feedback on how you did, you could ask them, 'as a friend' or 'as my boss,'" Ms. Gebelein said. "You do that initially and pretty soon it becomes clear which relationship you are in without saying it."

Q. After the promotion, is there anything you can do to make the situation less uncomfortable for both of you?

A. Pull back a little, giving your friend time to adjust to the new role. "Don't go into their office all the time to chit-chat. You need to accept that you are the underling now and they are the boss and, at least at first, keep your relationship more businesslike," said Rebecca Roy-Jarboe, a psychotherapist in Beverly Hills, Calif., who coaches executives in the entertainment industry, where, she observed, this situation often arises.

It's also important to be supportive. "Offer them congratulations and ask if there is any way you can help as they transition," said Stephen Xavier, chief executive of the Cornerstone Executive Development Group, a coaching firm in Westlake Village, Calif. Tell your newly promoted friend that you know the relationship will have to change; this could ease any anxiety, he said.

Q. Should you expect to be treated differently than your co-workers because of your friendship with the boss?

A. Yes, but probably not in the way you are hoping. Don't assume that you will receive preferential treatment or that you will be privy to confidential information about the company or co-workers, said BJ Gallagher, a workplace consultant in Los Angeles who teaches the seminar "How to Manage Your Boss" and is the author of "A True Friend ... Is Someone Just Like You" (Blue Mountain Arts).

"You shouldn't take advantage of the friendship by slacking off at work, coming in late or taking long lunches," Ms. Gallagher said.

If anything, expect the new boss to be a little harder on you, to make it clear to co-workers that you are not receiving special treatment, Ms. Lederman said.

Q. If that promotion was something you wanted, will you be able to work for your friend now, despite feelings of resentment or jealousy?

A. You have to come to terms with those feelings first, Ms. Roy-Jarboe said, by talking to someone outside of work, like a

spouse, a good friend or even a therapist — “anyone who can be objective and is willing to tell you the truth.”

Handling this awkward situation with grace could actually be good for your career, Ms. Gebelein said. “One question executives are often asked in interviews is about a setback or failure in their past,” she said. “This situation could be that example. If someone has had tough things happen and worked through them, that shows character.”

Q. Should you tell your friend how you feel, to clear the air?

A. That could make things more awkward, said Janie Harden Fritz, an associate professor of communication at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh and co-editor of “Problematic Relationships in the Workplace” (Peter Lang).

Find someone you really trust and ask that person to help you refocus. “They can let you vent about your frustrations for five minutes and then tell you it’s time to stop,” Ms. Fritz said. “You don’t want empathy. You want someone who won’t let you wallow in pain.”

Q. Are your co-workers likely to treat you differently now that your friend is their boss?

A. They may put you in the role of messenger, asking you to pass their complaints along to the boss, Ms. Gallagher said.

“Never put yourself in that role because you could be seen as a snitch or someone who can be used by others with an agenda, someone not to be trusted,” she said.

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