

How to Become the CEO of a Company

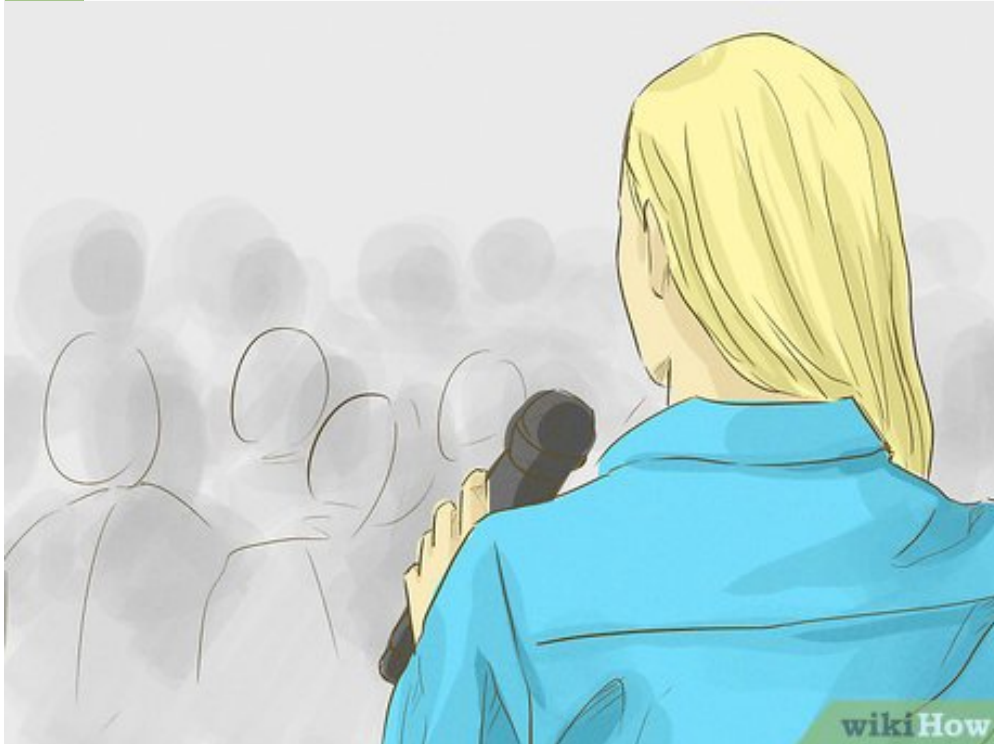
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Chief executive officers (CEOs) are the primary leaders of businesses and organizations. Although they typically report to a board of directors, they are principally responsible for the operations and earnings of the organization they lead. Becoming a CEO can be a long and arduous process, unless you're the founder of your own company. Fortunately, by developing the right skills and choosing the right career path, you can increase your chances of becoming a CEO yourself.

Method 1 of 4: Developing the Right Skills



1 Cultivate your communication and public speaking skills. Communication skills, including public speaking, elocution, and being a good listener, are among the most important personal characteristics every potential CEO needs to have. Developing and honing these skills will help you to become a better CEO candidate down the line.^[1]

- Working with a mentor is a good way to develop these skills by consulting with someone who can help you realize what specific aspects of your communication skills need improvement.
- If you're still in school, consider taking classes on rhetoric or public speaking as good opportunities to work on developing your communication skills. Trying out for plays or other dramatic performances might also be a good way to fine tune your oral performance chops.

EXPERT TIP



ELIZABETH DOUGLAS
CEO of wikiHow

Elizabeth Douglas, CEO of wikiHow, advises: "As a CEO, you need to have a vision that you are constantly working with your team to implement. Good communication will enable you to lead your team to execute your vision and strategy."



2 Embrace your ambition and push yourself to work hard. Having drive and ambition is considered even more important than communication skills when it comes to personal characteristics needed to become a CEO. Get comfortable with the idea of working hard for longer hours than average to ensure you'll have the work ethic to get to the top.[2]



3 Get a bachelor's degree in the field you want to work in. Although formal education is not generally a requirement for becoming a CEO, most CEOs do have at least a college education. Consider earning a bachelor's degree that will help you as a CEO in a particular industry, such as computer science or public policy, or simply study business administration.^[3]

- For example, if you want to become the CEO of a multimedia conglomerate, you might find getting a degree in communication or television to be particularly useful.
- Many CEOs have degrees in fields that aren't directly related to business, but rather are related to their industry. For example, Larry Page, the CEO of Alphabet, has a bachelor's degree in engineering and a master's degree in computer science.^[4]



4 Work or volunteer in your desired field to gain relevant experience. Generally speaking, a person has to accumulate a great deal of experience in an industry's field before they can become CEO. Take a job or volunteer position that will grant you work experience in the field you want to work in; remember, it's never too early to start accumulating experience.[5]

- For example, if you want to take over as CEO of a coffee company, a good way to gain relevant experience would be to work in a coffee shop, ideally one that is run by that same company.
- Consider volunteering or working in jobs that will grant you conflict management or organization experience; examples might include being a camp counselor, a conflict resolution assistant, or a convenience store manager.

EXPERT TIP



ELIZABETH DOUGLAS
CEO of wikiHow

Elizabeth Douglas, CEO of wikiHow, advises: "In order to work your way up to a CEO position, it's very important to be able to understand, at a deep level, the different functions that need to happen for the company to operate and be successful."



5 Earn an MBA to make you a better candidate for CEO. Although CEOs come from a variety of degree programs, most large corporations do prefer their CEOs to have a Masters in Business Administration (MBA). Earn a degree from an MBA program if you want to eventually be hired on by a company to serve as CEO.^[6]

- Having an MBA is less necessary if your plan is to found your own corporation; there are no education requirements at all for becoming a small business owner.
- You can typically apply to an MBA program no matter what your bachelor's degree was in. Although business majors are sometimes stronger applicants, MBA programs accept all types of students.



- 6 Gain experience in a management position, if possible.** Other than relevant experience in the industry, CEOs almost always have had extensive experience in managing businesses or similar operations. Gaining management experience is one of the best ways to make yourself more qualified to be a CEO early on.^[7]
- For most corporations looking to hire on a new CEO, having senior-level management experience is almost always a requirement. Since you likely won't be able to start out in such a position, work in positions that will give you low-level management experience to build on.
 - For example, if you work in a movie theater, apply to become an assistant manager when a position opens up. From there, aim to graduate to general manager and gain even more management experience.

Method 2 of 4: Rising to Challenges



1 Say yes to chances to take on greater responsibilities. Many CEOs who rose up through the ranks of a company did so by making “big leaps” early on in their career. When opportunities for added responsibility appear, even if the role is outside your experience thus far, seize them and embrace the challenge.^[8]

- This is especially the case regarding opportunities to fill management positions. For example, if you’re offered the chance to become the president of your particular division, you should accept the offer even if you don’t feel entirely prepared for the job.



2 Look for chances to demonstrate your CEO skills. Depending on the details of the job you're in, you may find yourself in a position to take care of problems or issues that require the skills of a CEO to resolve. Keep an eye out for such opportunities and leap at the chance to resolve them.^[9]

- For example, if you work in a sales department, you might consider taking on the task of revamping a failed product or improving your department's poor performance.
- This is also a good means of demonstrating to your superiors that you're ready for greater levels of responsibility, if you want to jumpstart the process of earning a promotion.



3 Apply for jobs or promotions even when you don't feel qualified. Inevitably, becoming a CEO means moving up from whatever position you start in into higher and higher positions. Although you won't always feel like you're qualified for these positions, apply for them whenever the opportunity arises; they represent your upward path towards becoming a CEO.^[10]

- Even if you don't feel ready for taking on a higher position right away, you'll have the chance to learn how to perform your new job once you're in it. If you've developed the right skills and personality traits for becoming a CEO, you'll be able to tackle this new responsibility.



4 Take on small projects to show you can build a great product. You might think that taking on a relatively small project, or starting one yourself, won't matter when you're pursuing a big goal like becoming a CEO. However, small projects give you the opportunity to build something from the ground up and maybe make an outsized impact on the company or institution you're in.^[11]

- For example, if you're told to launch a new product in your department, take this as an opportunity to carry out a project that you can almost completely control and the success of which will be attributed entirely to you.

Method 3 of 4: Moving Up to the Rank of CEO



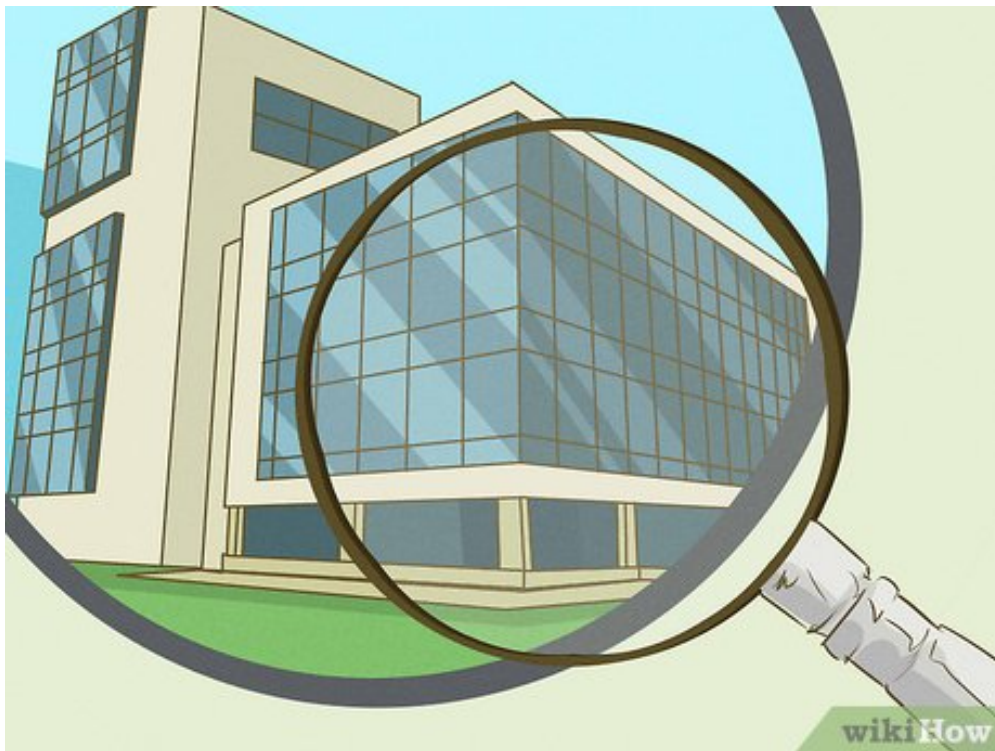
1 Don't be afraid to start out in a smaller position. If you want to become the CEO of a particular company by rising up in the ranks, your first step is start out in a lower level job and move up through promotion. Apply for the highest-level job you're qualified for, even if it's an entry-level position.^[12]

- For example, if you have an engineering degree, you might apply for a job within a company as an engineer and work your way up to higher and higher positions.
- Keep in mind that no job is too low of a starting point. Even entry-level custodial positions are potential launching points for a person aiming to become a CEO.



2 Aim to become the head of a company's operational division. No matter where you're starting out, you should always strive to become the head of a major division or international business within a company. The people who fill these positions are usually the first ones to be offered the job of CEO of a large corporation.^[13]

- Operational divisions are those that involve the primary practice of a business. For example, in a manufacturing company, those divisions that would fall under operations include design, planning, procurement, and production. Human resources and marketing would not fall under this category.
- Although it's possible to become a CEO by rising through a different department, the majority of CEOs were pulled out of operational divisions.



3 Consider working at a smaller company to gain greater experience. If you want to become the CEO of a particular company, you don't necessarily have to work there. Although it's helpful, you may find better opportunities for gaining senior-level management experience by working for a smaller company with more opportunity for upward advancement.^[14]

- This method also enables you to expand your professional network beyond the confines of a single company, which may help you to become the CEO of a different company in the long run.



1 **Decide on and research your business idea.** The first thing you'll need to do is decide on the basics of your business, such as what product or service you'll be selling and how you'll be selling it. Then, research how unique your product is, who else is selling it and how, and whether or not your product solves an actual problem for consumers.^[15]

- Researching these topics ahead of time will help you to avoid potential losses in the marketplace when you actually establish your business.
- The more you can research how your idea compares to what others are selling, the better you'll be able to offer a unique product that stands a better chance of succeeding in the long run.



2 Write out a **business plan for your idea.** If you want to become the CEO of your own company, you'll need to start one and make sure it's successful. To minimize your chances of failure early on, write out a plan for your business that answer critical questions about how your business will operate.^[16]

- For example, you should write out who your intended customers will largely be, how you plan to market your product or service, and so on.
- Although you probably can't plan too much, you should aim to make your business plan at least a page long. Anything less will probably not adequately address critical questions about your business model.



3 Develop a plan to market your business. Whether or not your business succeeds will depend in large part on whether you're able to successfully market your product. Figure out ahead of time how you plan to market your product to potential customers and take steps to bring that plan to fruition.^[17]

- For example, you can go ahead and create a website for your business and begin promoting it on social media before you officially open for business.



4 Assemble your team of employees and advisors. Although your business may be a one-person operation, you'll very likely need to have some trusted advisors by your side who can help you in more particular areas of the business. Furthermore, if you want your business to expand at all, you'll need to hire employees at some point.^[18]

- For example, unless you have legal training, you'll probably find you need a lawyer at some point to help with business issues. Likewise, you may need experts to help you with accounting, insurance, and advertising.



5 File the proper paperwork. Once you've written out your plan and assembled your team, the last thing to do is file the paperwork that will make your business official. This will definitely include filing for the applicable licenses and registrations from your state government, though you may need to file other forms as well, depending on the state you're in.^[19]

- You'll also need to purchase the appropriate business insurance before you begin your actual operations.



Warnings

- The majority of new businesses fail within the first 10 years, with a sizable proportion failing in the first year alone. If you're starting your own company, get comfortable with the idea of it not succeeding in the long run.

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About This Article



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This article was co-authored by [Elizabeth Douglas](#). Elizabeth Douglas is the CEO of wikiHow. Elizabeth has over 15 years of experience working and managing teams in the tech industry. She has held roles in multiple areas, including computer engineering, user experience, and product management. She received her BS in Computer Science and her Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Stanford University. This article has been viewed 19,650 times.

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