

PART **1**

SUCCESSFUL CAREER PLANNING

CHAPTER 1

SUCCESSFUL CAREERS START WITH YOU

Successful careers start with you. It's about your abilities to plan and control your career advancement. Do you have a career plan? Are you in control of your career? If you ask most people these questions, they usually respond with "yes," when, in fact, they have no plan and no control. They proceed along, day after day, assuming their next promotion is just around the corner but when nothing happens, they don't understand why. "I deserved it," they say, "Why does everyone else get promoted and not me?" "Why did they get the promotion and I'm still waiting?" The answer is simple; they do not have a good plan and they were not in control of their career.

Controlling your career takes a great deal of planning, hard work, and the ability to manage circumstances [1–3]. Knowing the criteria it takes to get promoted in your company and constantly working toward meeting and exceeding the criteria is essential to achieve career advancement.

Often, there are things going on behind the scenes of which you must be aware. As shown in Figure 1-1, there are multiple factors that could be limiting your career growth. Key among these are obsolescence, your personality, education level, your supervisor, and maybe even the company or department structure (just to name a few).

Always knowing what is happening and managing circumstances to the best of your ability is essential to reduce the time frame between raises and promotions. Are you in control as you should be? To illustrate the point, answer the questions below.

1. Was your last pay increase smaller than expected or your performance rating lower than expected?
2. Do you feel your hard work often goes unrewarded? Does it seem like other people are always getting awards or recognition?

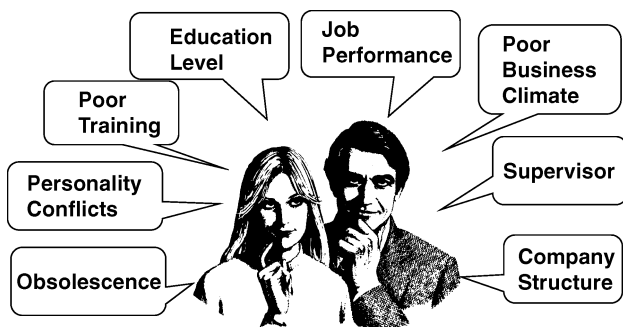


FIGURE 1-1 What is stopping your career growth?

3. Have you ever been passed over for a promotion and don't understand why?
4. Do you feel like you are stuck in a dead-end, thankless job with little hope for advancement?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, it reveals you are not in as much control as you think you are. If you wait until your job review with your supervisor to discuss your career plans, it is too late.

► **Career Tip.** You must accept responsibility for your career and take control; no one is going to do it for you. You must make things happen for yourself!

Do you need to be in control at all times? Yes! Yes! Yes! If you are not in control and planning your next career advancement, it means you need to start planning and stop letting others control your advancement.

Failing to Plan
is Simply Planning to Fail.

Not planning your career will most likely result in no advancement and possibly opening the door to failure. If you have no career plans and have not identified specific goals, where are you going to be a year from now? The simple answer is, doing exactly what you are doing now. Most promotions take one year once you start planning. So if you want a promotion next year, you better start planning now.

Who has the majority of responsibility for making
your career growth happen? You do!

The perceived share of responsibility for the engineer's growth is shown in Figure 1-2. As shown in the top portion of Figure 1-2, most people mistakenly

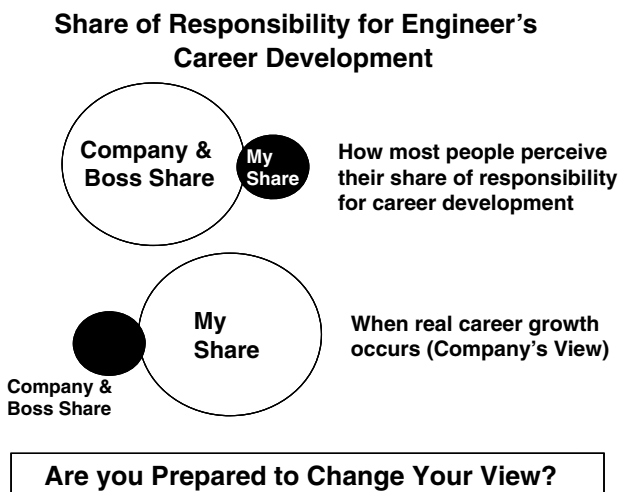


FIGURE 1-2 Share of responsibility for career development.

believe the company has the major responsibility for career development of the engineer. They sit back and expect the “company” to have a career plan for them and offer advances when the appropriate time comes. They think they only need to show up at work and complete the assignments given to them.

Real career growth generally occurs when engineers accept the responsibility for their own career development. This is shown in the lower portion of Figure 1-2, where the large circle surrounds the engineer and the smaller circle represents the company’s share. In many situations, the company only provides the opportunity for advancements but it is the engineer’s responsibility to make a promotion happen. Real career growth starts when engineers realize the responsibility for career advancement ultimately rests with themselves and not the company.

As Caela Farren points out in the book *Who’s Running Your Career*, many factors may be trying to control it but ultimately the individual must develop their own career plan [3]. My experience and training confirms this to ultimately be true also. Take positive career advancing actions and be proactive in demonstrating to the company that you are ready for advancement.

Getting control of your career starts with you. There is no one going to make it happen for you. It starts with having a positive attitude. With a positive attitude you can make changes and better your career. Experience has shown that people with a positive attitude advance and those with a poor attitude stand still or digress.

Success in your career comes with the thoughts and actions of “I can.” Failure usually results from the attitude of “I can’t.” Few people are promoted or advance when they are constantly responding to problems with “I can’t” or “It will never work.” Companies and CEOs promote people with positive

and proactive attitudes who think, "I can" or "We can find a way to make it work."

Success comes in

Failure comes in

"I Can!"

"I Can't!"

It is going to take hard work and effort on your part and you are going to need to be determined and strive for the best all the time. Can you do it? Of course you can. This reminds me of an inspirational quote from Robert Schuller that has inspired me and I know it has inspired others as well.

Great People

Are

Ordinary People

Who Simply Do Not Quit!

This saying summarizes the basic component of successful career advancement. Engineers who ultimately reach goals do so simply because they never gave up. They may have changed their approach but they never quit. I have seen engineers bounce back from failure and achieve even greater accomplishments.

In addition to taking control, you must have a strategy for career advancement. Before you develop a strategy, you must understand how to play the game. You must know what, when, and how to do it.

THE BEST STRATEGY FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Your fellow employees will tell you simple things you can do to get promoted: flatter the boss; it's who you know; work overtime and be a hero. The list goes on and on. In reality, most people have not done their homework and can only guess at what actually works. You must develop a strategic career plan based on how the game is played. In order to be promoted you must know how the promotion game is played and how to score points. The following example illustrates this point (Figure 1-3).



FIGURE 1-3 Learn the rules of the game.

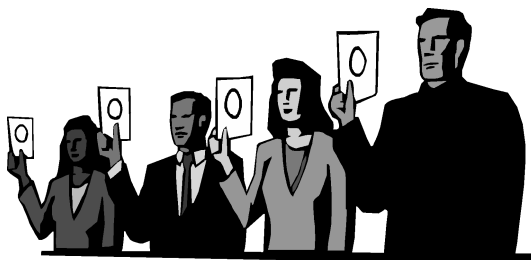


FIGURE 1-4 Learn how your company keeps score.

Let's assume you are the key player of the team and everyone is counting on you. The situation is this, it is the second period of the third quarter, the teams have lined up, and the goalie is calling the play. On the previous play the putt was good for three points, but the right wing was penalized when the fifth base was stolen. They have the option to bowl for a strike or fast pitch for a slam dunk. What do you recommend?

Everything sounds somewhat familiar, right? But you really don't know the rules, the players, or how the points are scored. Therefore, your chances of making the right decisions are very slim.

If you don't know the rules of the game, how to keep score, or who the players are, how can you expect to play the game?

Obtaining your next career advancement is similar; you are the key player for this game. The game sounds very familiar; do a good job, flatter your supervisor, and work hard. These all sound like great things to do, but will they lead to career advancement?

If you don't know how your company promotes people or how they keep score, how can you expect to get ahead?

The bottom line is this: if you don't understand the game, you can't expect to score points or do well. Similarly, if you do not know how your company plays the career advancement game, you cannot expect to get ahead. Learn the game, learn how your company keeps score, and start calling the plays that will score your career advancement (Figure 1-4).

This book will provide you with career tools and guidelines on how to play the game and score points. It will identify how to determine the obstacles limiting your career advancement and what you need to do to overcome them.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC CAREER PLAN

Developing a great strategic career plan takes time and is an iterative process [4]. A simplified process for implementing a strategic career plan is shown in Figure 1-5. The first step is for the engineer to develop a strategic career plan. Next, the situations at work need to be analyzed to determine the best career actions. To analyze the work situations, career tools shared in this

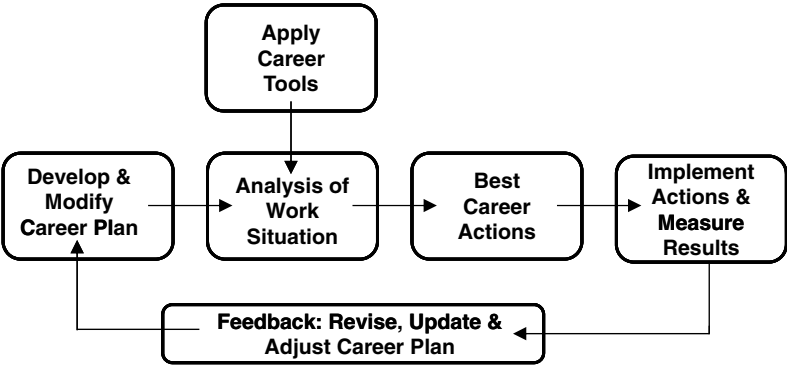


FIGURE 1-5 Process for implementing a career plan.

book need to be applied. These tools allow the engineer to identify what is happening behind the scenes and determine the best potential actions. After careful research and analysis, the best career actions should be selected and implemented. Next, the engineer needs to measure the success of the actions. If the actions are successful, keep going with the plan. If, however, the actions are not successful, the plan needs to be modified. The engineer needs to identify changes and make revisions to the career plan as necessary or adjust the career plan.

The process in Figure 1-5 is only a process; it does not identify the specific situations that need to be analyzed. The situations that need to be analyzed are shown in Figure 1-6 in pictorial form. These situations are shown as switches in a simple electrical circuit. The engineer needs to turn on the light of career advancement. They need to close ALL the switches and get the circuit operating to obtain career advancement. In the analogy, closing the switch

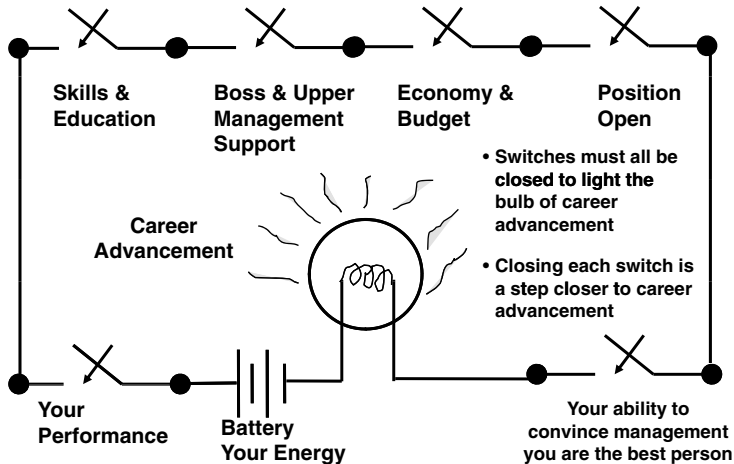


FIGURE 1-6 You must close all the switches to achieve career advancement.

is like controlling the work situation and getting the outcome desired per the strategic career plan.

The battery in the circuit represents the engineer's energy and drive. If the engineer has insufficient drive and energy to make things happen, it is like a dead battery.

However, simply having energy or one or two switches closed is not enough. The engineer must have energy and control ALL situations, or close all switches to turn on the light or get career advancement.

The first switch is the engineers' performance. You must have top performance ratings. Second, you must have the skills and education required for career advancement. Even having a PhD or advanced degree is no guarantee of success as Peter Feibelman points out in his book, *A PhD Is Not Enough: A Guide To Survival In Science* [5]. The third switch is the support of upper management, their backing, and belief you are ready for advancement. The following switches are concerned with the economy, profitability of your company, and a position available for you to move into. Finally, the last switch you need to control is the ability to demonstrate to management you are the best choice.

The chapters in this book have been arranged to show you actions you need to take for real career advancement. They will identify career tools to apply to a multitude of work situations and help you analyze the various situations in order to identify the optimum actions to take.

I leave the definition of career advancement up to you to define in your personal strategic career plan. Career advancement means different things to different people; to some people it means a promotion, to others it means a pay raise. And still to others, it means more challenging assignments or more responsibility. Defining what "Career Advancement" means to you and taking the actions necessary to make it happen is the essential ingredient for success.

Career Advancement = Promotions, Pay Raises, Better Assignments

Following the techniques presented in this book and applying the tools will shorten the time to your next career advancement. Remember, your next promotion is at least a year away from the time you start planning.

Plans Lead to Actions

Actions Lead to Advancement

As you read through the book and study the examples, I hope you will begin to accumulate actions you need to take for your particular career situation. To help you collect and organize these ideas and actions, I have created a notes section at the end of the book to record your thoughts. Simply record the actions you wish to take as you read the book. Later on you can use these ideas to generate your career plans.

So for now, let's move on to getting control of your career and hopefully realizing your career aspirations.

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