

PART **3**

**DETERMINING THE
CRITERIA BY WHICH
YOU ARE MEASURED
AND WHAT IT TAKES
TO GET BETTER
PERFORMANCE
RATINGS AS WELL
AS PROMOTED**

CHAPTER 17

DETERMINING HOW THE COMPANY MEASURES YOUR PERFORMANCE

Do you realize your manager and other upper-level superiors are evaluating your performance every day? Do you know the criteria they are using to rate your performance? Do you know what they consider as minimum acceptable performance, average performance, and outstanding performance? Do you know what they consider as important and not important? If you have not taken the time to discuss and find out what they consider important or the performance required for a promotion, you could be wasting a lot of time and energy.

The analogy is one of a person driving to a new destination they have never been before and do not bother to get directions. They rely on their gut feelings and quickly jump into the car and take off. They know the destination is located near a freeway exit and they will recognize it when they see it. They do not even know if they are headed in the correct direction on the freeway, but since they are traveling at a speed of 65 miles per hour, it doesn't matter because they arrive sooner. You can waste a lot of time driving around and around hoping the exit is just around the next turn. Just like you can waste a lot of time working toward a promotion if you do not know the formal criteria you will be assessed by.

If you don't know the formal criteria by which you are being judged, you are acting like this person. Blindly driving around on the freeway. You rapidly perform task after task hoping the next one will get you promoted. You assume the quicker you get the task done, the quicker you will be promoted. You hope everything you do will result in getting the big raise or promotion. Just remember, it is very difficult to hit a target that cannot be seen. It is almost like you are operating with a blindfold on as far as your career is concerned.

► **Career Tip.** Don't leave your next promotion up to luck. Take the blindfold off.

In this chapter, we will discuss the methods you can use to find out the formal criteria being used to make judgments on your performance. In Chapter 18, we will discuss the informal criteria. Knowing the formal and informal criteria will, in effect, remove the blindfold. Once you have clearly identified the criteria by which you are assessed against, you will be able to see exactly what you must do to get promoted. With the criteria clearly identified, it is easier to obtain the raise or promotion. It should also come sooner since you can use every work task to your benefit and to help fulfill the criteria.

FORMAL CRITERIA: WHAT ARE THEY COMPRISED OF?

In every company, there are formal criteria by which you are assessed. You must understand the formal criteria for successful career development. The formal criteria are usually well-defined and documented.

The formal criteria are manifested in three ways. The first is through the job performance review process. The second is through the job performance criteria or guidelines. These guidelines summarize the performance expected of the employee at each level of the engineering ladder. The third way the formal criteria are manifested is through the promotion review process. Each company has its own promotion review process that all managers must follow to ensure employee promotion approval. This process is usually a very formal one that is well-defined and strictly adhered to. We will now explore how you can clearly identify and deal with each of the three formal criteria.

UNDERSTANDING THE JOB PERFORMANCE REVIEW PROCESS

The first formal criterion with which you must become thoroughly familiar is the job performance review process or job appraisal method utilized by your company. On a periodic basis your manager must formally document your performance on the job. Some companies review employee job performance once a year or once every other year. You must find out everything involved in the job performance review process for your company. How often do they conduct job reviews? When is your next review? What criteria are involved? A good way to clearly identify the criteria is through the paperwork processed during your job review.

In preparation for a job performance review, a manager will fill out some type of form which formally documents your performance to date. Some companies use a standardized form and other companies simply document your progress in a memo.

Ask your manager for a copy of the form used if you have not yet had a job review or performance appraisal. Study the form and make sure you are familiar with everything on the form. A sample employee job performance review form is shown in Figure 17-1. Keep in mind as we review this form, the criteria utilized by your company.

PERFORMANCE COMMUNICATION PROGRAM			
RATING FORM			
EMPLOYEE NAME & JOB TITLE	EMPLOYEE SS NUMBER	GRADE	YEARS/MONTHS IN GRADE
DIVISION/DEPARTMENT	APPRAISAL DATE	PERFORMANCE PERIOD	
		FROM	TO
WHEN COMPLETING THIS FORM REFERENCE THE BASELINE AGREEMENT AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS			
PERFORMANCE CHANGE RATING			
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	GROWING RAPIDLY IN GRADE - EMPLOYEE IS DEMONSTRATING RAPID IMPROVEMENT IN PERFORMANCE & CAPABILITIES TO HIS/HER PAST PERFORMANCE & OTHERS IN GRADE.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	PROGRESSING WITH/GROWING IN GRADE - EMPLOYEE IS DEMONSTRATING IMPROVEMENT IN PERFORMANCE COMPARED TO PAST AND OTHERS IN GRADE.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	PROGRESS LESS/ DECLINING IN GRADE - EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IS UNCHANGED WITH NO GROWTH OR HAS DECLINED COMPARED TO PAST & OTHERS IN GRADE.	
JOB REQUIREMENTS RATING		OVERALL RATING *	
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	CONSISTENTLY EXCEEDS JOB REQUIREMENTS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	MEETS/OCCASIONALLY EXCEEDS JOB REQUIREMENTS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	DOES NOT MEET JOB REQUIREMENTS	
		<div>_____</div> <p>*(PERFORMANCE CHANGE + JOB REQUIREMENTS) / 2</p>	
CAREER DEVELOPMENT			
I WANT A CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM DISCUSSION WITH MY SUPERVISOR		<input type="checkbox"/>	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
REMARKS, SUMMARY, STATEMENTS, ETC.			
<div></div>			
SIGNATURE INDICATES A PERFORMANCE COMMUNICATION DISCUSSION BETWEEN EMPLOYEE & SUPERIOR HAS OCCURRED			
EMPLOYEE	SUPERVISOR	MANAGER	

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FIGURE 17-1 Sample employee job performance review form.

Across the top of the form is usually the employee data. This data includes the employee name, job title, grade level, years in grade or job, department, and some reference to the last appraisal date. Review your form and see what data the company considers important. Why do they consider it important? For example, some companies have a standing policy that an employee must be in a grade for a minimum of 3 years before they can be promoted. This is the reason for the time-in-grade block on the form. If your company has a similar policy, what do you think your chances are for a promotion if you have only been in the grade 1 year? Does your company have any other hidden prerequisites for promotion of which you need to be aware? For this reason, you must understand the importance of all the data on the form.

Below the general information employee data is the performance summary section. This is the bottom line. All forms have one. This section is where, in a matter of two or three lines, your entire performance is summarized. Most people do not realize the importance of this section. This section usually summarizes your performance and identifies some type of overall rating. Your raise is usually computed on the basis of these ratings; another way you can think of this section is in terms of promotability or dollars.

For the example shown, a three rating results in a demotion or salary reduction. In other words, it may cost you thousands of dollars and years of setback. For example, a two rating means status quo. Exhibit just average performance and you'll receive the average raise and years to the next promotion. Finally, a one rating means outstanding performance, you've earned a large raise and, by all means, keep up the good work. You will soon be experiencing that promotion. After identifying the hidden meanings behind these formal performance rating criteria, most people immediately start to pay more attention to this section.

Do you understand the section of the job performance form that summarizes your rating? How do the ratings get translated into dollars? What do they mean in terms of promotions? If you don't know, you are operating with a blindfold on. Ask your manager and they will tell you how the rating translates to raises and promotions.

Below the performance summary section is the career development section. This section identifies your desire to discuss a career development program with your manager. As far as I'm concerned, there are only two reasons why you would not want to check yes in this section. One reason is that you are making more money than you think you should and therefore you don't feel you need career development. The other reason is that you plan on retiring next year and therefore career development is not on your mind. If you do not fit into either of these categories then you should be requesting a career development discussion with your manager.

If your company's form does not have a section similar to this, ask your manager for extra time to discuss your career plans. You may want to schedule this talk when you both have more time to discuss your future plans. Do not try to get through your performance review and have a career

development meeting at the same time. It is too much to try to cover in one meeting.

The next section on the form is the remarks and summary section. Your manager usually fills out this section. In this section, your manager will try to summarize your performance since the last performance appraisal. Study the remarks carefully. On what matters have comments been made? What has not been noted? Do you know why things were missed? What do they consider important? What do they consider unimportant? After you answer these questions, you may come to realize your manager's opinion of what is important differed from yours.

HANDLING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK AND CRITICISM

At some point in the performance review you will get to the "Needs Improvement" part. In this part, the manager informs you of things you need to improve upon. Make sure you spend enough time on this subject. It may be hard to sit there and listen to your manager spell out all the things you need to improve upon, but it is a must for career development. By identifying your shortcomings, your manager is telling you the very things you need to improve upon to get the raise or promotion.

Whatever you do, please, don't take the feedback too personally. Try not to find an opening in the commentary wherein you rebut anything you interpret as detrimental. You are only going to lose. Your best bet is to listen patiently to the feedback and make sure you understand it. From this criticism you can learn what they consider important that you are not doing. If the manager lowers both guns at you, you need to consider whether you really want to continue working for them or if, perhaps, it's time you move on. Most performance appraisals do not go this poorly even though they may seem that way. Listening to criticism is tough but here are some tips on how to turn this difficult time to your advantage.

► **Career Tip.** "Tag-on" statements turn improvement areas into strengths during appraisals.

One way to turn this difficult time to your advantage is to use a tag-on statement after each criticism. Typical tag-on statements go something like this:

I understand now. If I improve my performance doing . . . (state the item your manager just identified) . . . then do I stand a better chance for a raise?

Let me make sure I understand, one of the reasons I did not get the promotion was because . . . (name the item your manager just

identified) . . . and if I correct or improve myself there should be no reason why I would not get the promotion next time?

Let's summarize, the areas I need to show improvement on in order to get the promotion by the next appraisal time are . . . (name your improvement areas) . . . and if I improve these things I stand a good chance for advancement.

Are these the only things I need to improve upon to qualify for the promotion by the next appraisal time?

By adding these tag-on statements to the criticism you are doing three things. First, you are clearly identifying what has caused you to miss the big raise or the promotion this appraisal time (removing the blindfold). Second, you are hopefully getting your manager to identify everything you need to do to get the promotion next time (identifying any hidden agendas your manager may have). And third, you are sending the message that you expect the promotion by the next appraisal time since you will be improving your performance in each of the identified areas (setting the deadline for the raise or promotion). You have clearly sent the message to your manager that you understand your weaknesses. You will correct the problems and after doing so you expect the raise or promotion next time. Remember, people rarely get promotions they do not ask for.

► **Career Tip.** People rarely get promotions they do not ask for.

Another tip is to think of each criticism as a step closer to the next big raise or promotion. This should help make acceptance of the criticism much easier. Every criticism that your manager identifies becomes another reason why you deserve the promotion after you have proven to your manager that you corrected the problem. The more reasons your manager identifies, the more reasons you will have in your defense once you have overcome the problems. When your manager does not identify areas for improvement, then it is time to worry. If this happens, you need to get your manager to open up more.

► **Career Tip.** Criticisms, improvement areas, and lack of skills are the areas to concentrate on for most improvement.

My own experience has shown the quickest and best promotions came only after I got my manager to really open up and clearly identify what I had to improve. It was only after we got everything out in the open and I started to improve my performance that they soon realized there were no reasons not to promote me.

At the end of your performance review you should have a clear understanding of what you need to do from what is recorded on the appraisal form. From this point on, getting the raise or promotion becomes much easier.

This brings us to the last section on the appraisal form — the signature block. Who has to sign it? The signature block tells you immediately who controls your raises and promotions. Do you know who will sign your appraisal and approve it? If you do not know them, then they surely do not know you. And most managers do not promote people they do not know. Some people do not even know who will see their appraisal form. Meeting with, and getting to know, the people who sign your appraisal form is the key to career development.

The sample form in Figure 17-1 may not look at all like your performance appraisal form. I have used it as a guide to help you study your form(s). Some companies use appraisal forms that are several pages long. Some forms require the manager to rate you in each area of your job that the company considers important. Whatever type of form your company uses, make sure you are familiar with everything on the form. Understand the hidden meanings behind each block. Only after you have taken the time to understand the formal criteria defined on the performance appraisal form can you expect to use it as a guide for your career development.

Determining How Job Performance Is Measured in Your Company

The second type of formal criteria you must be aware of is the criteria your company requires you to meet at each level of the engineering ladder. The starting point to discovering these criteria is your manager. Your manager has written guidelines that define the performance expected at each level of engineering. Meet with your manager and ask them for a copy of the criteria. Usually, these criteria have been developed over time and with the help of the personnel department. If your manager does not have a copy, stop by the personnel department and request a copy. Make sure you obtain the formal description of your level and the level you hope to reach when promoted.

Study the guidelines. Try to identify all the things you have accomplished at your level and the things you need to work on. Next, look at the level above yours and study it to find out what you have to do to reach the next level. In studying the guidelines you will probably generate more questions than answers, which is good.

Since every company will have its own guidelines, Figure 17-2 is a sample guideline based on several companies. Studying this guideline should help you in understanding yours. This sample guideline is organized in a matrix fashion with the job grade levels defined in the first column and the criteria categories defined across the top. For this example, five levels of engineering

Grade Level	Technical Requirements	Technical Judgment	Technical Challenge	Leadership and Work Direction	Management of Cost and Schedule	Team and Interaction
I Junior Level	Supportive of Project 4 to 5 Years Training	Evaluate and Recommend Technical Solutions	Applies Known Techniques	Can Explain and Coordinate Work with Members of Equal Grade	Performs Assigned tasks within specified cost & schedule	Customer Contact Not Normal Coordinates with own group
II	Perform basic Engr. Tasks Perform analytical prediction of results	Evaluate and Recommend Effective Solutions Justify solutions based on facts	Technical path usually defined Define tasks to be performed	Can Explain and Coordinate individuals of same or lower grade	Performs Required tasks within cost and schedule Estimates supporting goods and services required	Coordinates with Depts. and Projects Infrequent Customer Contact
III	Experienced Performer in a specialty Capable of performing in broad range of assignments	Evaluate Alternatives and Select technical approach Justify Alternative selected	Can identify Tech Cost and Sched. constraints Can apply original approaches based on established methods	Can direct small or specialized team in pursuit of a task objective	Accomplish Task/Team objectives within cost & schedule Anticipates Problems and initiates Action	Regular Supporting Role in customer contacts Usually limited Technical Exchange
IV	Experienced leader in her/his field Has depth of knowledge in related fields Demonstrated ability	Select and Implement state-of-the-art solutions Precedence may not exist	Technical method not established Original or creative approach may be required Makes Tech., Cost, Sched. Judgments	Can organize and direct a small or specialized team in pursuit of project objectives	Accomplish Team objectives within cost and schedule Cost and schedule implications typically have significant project impact	Regular Tech External Contact with customers Normally has a limited role for tech interface Communication and Judgment key to success
V Senior Level	Recognized Authority Grad Work or Adv. Work in Field Advice respected by Mgmt. and Customers	Technical Options are respected internally and by customer Technical decisions reviewed by results only	Technical solutions beyond industry precedents Assimilates complex problems and develops tech solutions	Can define the need for and direct the work of a group concerned with a variety of engineering disciplines	Accomplish Team objectives within cost and schedule Select Alternatives involving Cost, Sched., and Tech Trade-offs	Regular Ext. Customer Contact Lead role in Customer interface and Tech solutions Key individual to ensure project success
	Technical			People, Cost, and Schedule		

FIGURE 17-2 Typical engineering grade level performance guidelines.

are defined and six performance categories are identified for each job level. The job levels are ranked from entry level Grade Level I engineering to the most senior Grade Level V. The six performance categories contain two groups of skills. The left three columns identify the technical skills needed by the engineer and the right three columns identify the interpersonal or team leadership skills needed.

First, let me try to show you the differences between each engineering level with an example of how the job responsibilities vary for each level. At engineering level I, you might receive an assignment that requires you to analyze some data. The data has all been collected, the analysis has been defined and programmed into a computer, and the program output is on a graphics plotter. Your job is to enter the data and generate the plots with the existing program and computer.

At grade II, your assignment may be to collect the data from the test, enter it into the computer, modify the program if necessary, and plot the results.

At level III, your assignment would be to collect the data. However, first you have to assemble the hardware, plan tests, and obtain the help of a technician to collect data, organize the results for input into the computer, and plot them out with the help of junior engineers.

At level IV, your assignment will be to collect data and analyze it. However you must first organize a team, get a time and cost estimate to accomplish the tasks, schedule tasks and make assignments to collect the data, write a program to analyze the data, choose a computer to complete the task, identify type of language, and define the plots to be generated. You will do this by organizing a team of engineers, computer programmers, and technicians.

At level V, your assignment will be to figure out what has to be done. What tests are to be done? What data is to be collected? What does theory predict? First you must organize a team, get cost estimates established, brief management on plans, and get approval. Next, schedule tasks and make assignments to accomplish your experiments and collect data. You must oversee the team's choice of computers and language as well as plotters. Once the data has been collected, you must get the team to write a final report and you must present the results of your effort to management. If technical problems arise you are expected to determine the best methods to modify the experiments and resolve the issues.

This simple example shows how to identify the differences between grade levels. The example also shows that as you move up the chain interpersonal skills and team leadership skills become more important. Managers are not really expecting much in the way of team leadership skills from junior engineers. However, you should be developing them as you go because management is expecting good leadership skills from the upper grade level engineers. Therefore, the criteria on the right of the chart become more and more important the higher you advance.

All managers interpret these generalized guidelines differently. Some managers firmly believe that all you have to do is be good on the left-hand side of the chart while other managers believe the right-hand side of the chart is most important. All managers think differently. On your company's guidelines, do you know what your manager considers the most important? You could be working to impress your manager with your

technical judgment skills and they may be thinking that leadership is most important.

Another common mistake engineers make when looking at these guidelines is interpreting the level one should be rated at. Your job assignment may allow you to perform at many levels. Let's assume an engineer has the following ratings for each performance category:

Technical Requirements Level III
Technical Judgment Level III
Technical Challenge Level III
Leadership and Work Direction Level IV
Cost and Schedule Level II
Interaction Level II

What level would you rate this engineer? Most people respond with level III. However, from a management point of view this is not an appropriate rating. Engineers are rated on their lowest level of performance.

To be rated a level III, the engineer must demonstrate performance at level III in all categories before they will be considered ready for promotion to that level. This level II engineer has a good start on promotion to level III but some areas must be worked on before promotion.

Why have I put these guidelines into this book? Not for you to study them and learn about engineering levels, or for you to determine how you are performing. I did it because it's a cheat sheet! Copy down these guidelines on a single sheet of paper, make sure they are readable, and take them to your manager. Explain that you got them out of a career development book and sit down with your manager and ask for an opinion. How important these criteria are and what does your manager see as the real differences between grade levels? From that point on, don't talk but only listen. The guidelines are too general for anyone to really determine the criteria for each grade level. Therefore, anything said defines the criteria as your manager sees it.

Everything they will tell you will be exactly what you will need to know about their criteria for development. Have them explain what they consider the most important criteria for your next level. How do they rate you for each category and where do you need to improve? Remember, you should be all ears at this point because they will be telling you everything they consider important. Try and absorb as much as you can, you should be like a sponge soaking it all up. As they are talking, make notes all over the guidelines. Mark them up together, cross out, and change things to their satisfaction. When you are done, you will now have everything on one sheet of paper that identifies exactly what your manager thinks and what you must do to earn the next promotion. In effect, you will have a piece of paper that has most of the answers on it, a perfect cheat sheet to help you shorten the time to your next promotion.

► **Career Tip.** Make an appointment with your supervisor and jointly go over the grade level performance guidelines!

If the sample job level guidelines are too different from your company guidelines, then use yours. Meet with your manager on an informal basis and review the company's job grade guidelines together. I recommend the best place to do this is at your desk or office, where it is not intimidating for you or your manager. Your manager's office can be too intimidating. You also stand a better chance of not being interrupted.

Ask your manager to explain the performance expected by the company at your level. Then ask them to explain the performance it would take to be at a level up from yours. Once you get them talking, don't interrupt. Make notes in the side margins for everything you can. If you do this right, at the end of the conversation you will have identified the formal criteria you must meet for your level and the level above yours.

During your talk try to get your manager to identify some specific things you have to demonstrate in your work that will show that you are meeting the criteria for your job, and possibly, for the next level. For instance, you might ask, "If I complete my assignments on time and within cost, does that signify performance at my level or the one above my level? How might I perform my tasks such that I will have demonstrated I meet the criteria for the next level? What exactly do you see as the difference between my level and the one above? How do I get broader assignments so I can demonstrate performance above my level? What exactly do I need to do on my present assignment to increase my chances for a raise or promotion?"

Your manager's response to your questions will help lift off the blinders and provide guidance for your career advancement. You now have a clear vision of the formal criteria you must meet for career advancement.

The guidelines are usually written in such general terms that anything defined specifically is really what your manager thinks you need to do. Ask as many open-ended questions about the guidelines as you can. The reason for this is that any answer given you will define the criteria. Hopefully they will be describing exactly what they believe you have to do to get the raise or promotion.

Most managers will not feel apprehensive about discussing this with you in a relaxed, nonformal setting. If you wait until job review to have this conversation, it will be too late and too formal. Your manager may be as nervous as you are in a formal job review and may feel you are trying to second-guess them. You must have this conversation well in advance of your job review. This way your manager will not feel like they are being put on the spot and you will have enough time to demonstrate the performance needed before the formal job review. In any case, make sure you listen and ask them to clarify anything you may not understand. The more they talk, the clearer the picture you have of the formal criteria you must meet. Take as many notes as you can and be sure to review them often.

Most engineers believe that the minute they are performing at a level above theirs the company will immediately promote them. It is very discouraging for them to find out that this is not the case. The engineer must go through a formal promotion review process and be assessed “ready for the promotion.” In larger corporations this formal promotion review process often takes months and may involve a multitude of other people. Therefore, the third group of formal criteria you must be aware of in your company is the promotion review process.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROMOTION REVIEW PROCESS AND USING IT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

The formal promotion process identifies the steps your manager must go through to get approval. For the lower levels on the engineering ladder, this process may just involve your manager and their superior. As you move up the engineering ladder, the promotion process becomes more complex and may include promotion review boards made of several people as well as the use of company totems. For career advancement, you must have a clear understanding of the promotion process for your company.

► **Career Tip.** Learn everything you can about the promotion process for your company.

To help you better understand the steps companies go through to promote someone, I will describe two examples that represent what most companies follow for promoting people. These processes are generalized in nature but show the dynamics that may be occurring in your company; this should help you to identify and understand your company’s process.

To aid in this discussion, I have diagrammed the spheres of influence often involved in the promotion review process. Figure 17-3 shows the spheres of influence you need to be aware of in the promotion review process. The sphere at the bottom is you, the next highest on the ladder is your immediate lead engineer, and above the lead engineer is your manager. Above your manager are their superior or manager as well as the company totem and promotion review board.

I have drawn the spheres in relation to how you most likely perceive them. Your lead engineer has the responsibility for assigning the daily tasks and doing most of the interfacing with you; their responsibility is to take care of most of the problems. Your supervisor simply has too many people reporting to them to spend the amount of time that they should with everyone. Therefore, your supervisor calls on the help of the lead engineers to hand out assignments and make sure everything is being accomplished.

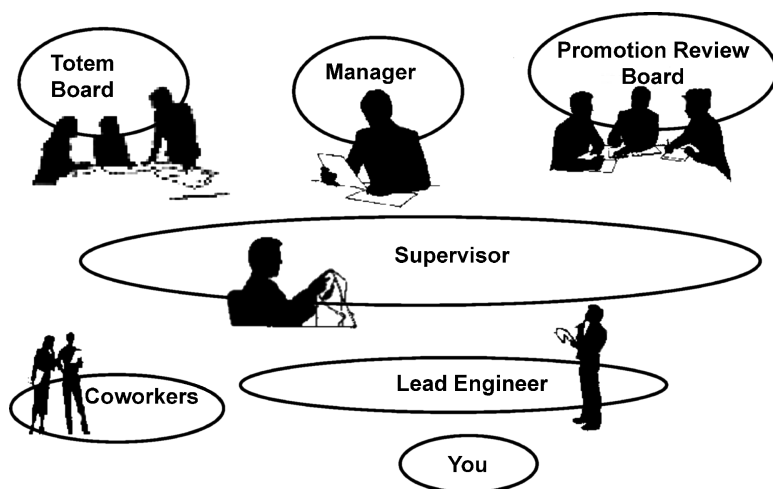


FIGURE 17-3 Promotion review process and spheres of influence.

Behind your supervisor are three spheres you need to be aware of, usually these spheres are not very visible to the engineer. However, knowledge of their existence is a must for career advancement. The first sphere is your supervisor's superior or manager. The manager must approve all the raises and promotions your supervisor requests. In addition to your manager, there are two other spheres: the totem board and the promotion review board.

The totem board is usually comprised of second level managers and possibly directors. The purpose of the totem board is to compare and rank the performance of all the engineers in the company. The managers meet and rank the performance of all engineers relative to one another. You can think of this as similar to class ranking. Totems are usually done once a year. Usually, the top-ranked individuals in the totem are the first to be promoted. The bottom ranked employees are put on improvement plans or laid off.

In addition to learning about the ranking process, do you know what your rank is for the grade level you are in? One simple way to know, is to ask your supervisor. While most supervisors will not tell you your exact rank, you can ask which quartile are you in? First, second, third, or fourth?

The promotion review board is usually made up of a cross section of people in the company. The board may contain senior staff engineers and upper level managers and Human Resources personnel. The purpose of the promotion review board is to review each candidate for promotion and determine if they fulfill the criteria established. The promotion review board is a nonbiased third-party group whose function is to ensure that each candidate meets the criteria. Usually, your supervisor and their manager present to the review board on your behalf the reasons why you deserve the promotion. The review board evaluates the merits of your case and makes a decision based on the evidence presented.

Lower Level Engineering Promotions

To understand all the dynamics involved in getting a promotion, let's first review an example of a lower level promotion where only your supervisor and manager are involved. Generally, for a lower level promotion only your supervisor and manager need to decide that you are ready. The first thing your supervisor does is to check with the lead engineer about your performance. How do you get along with your lead engineer? Do you support the lead engineer and follow their direction? Or are you on poor terms with the lead engineer and constantly in disagreement? What do you think the lead engineer's recommendation will be about you? Correspondingly, do you have enough visibility so that your supervisor can see that you are ready for a promotion or does the lead engineer do all the interfacing? This is a delicate situation you must keep in balance. You must follow the direction provided by your lead engineer and get visibility with your supervisor. Going around your lead engineer and always directly interfacing with your supervisor can cause problems; you can hurt your chances for a promotion by doing this.

Try to maintain a balance in this situation. Make sure your lead engineer is always aware of what you are doing. If you have to discuss things directly with your supervisor, make sure the lead engineer knows why you are doing this. On the other hand, if your lead engineer is not giving you the chance to report your progress to your supervisor, discuss the situation with the lead. Try and get them to allow you to report progress at least once in a while. Every lead engineer and supervisor differ in how much interfacing they allow the junior engineers to have.

► **Career Tip.** Make sure your lead engineer and supervisor know what you are accomplishing on a weekly basis.

Once the supervisor and the lead engineer decide you are ready for a promotion, then comes the job of convincing your manager. The supervisor usually carries forward a recommendation for your promotion. You must keep in mind that the manager may have anywhere from 30 to 50 engineers reporting to them and at any given time, four or five of those engineers may also be up for promotion. What will make the manager approve your promotion over others? This is the question, or problem, you must address.

The dynamics involved in obtaining the approval for your promotion from the manager will depend upon several things. First, does your performance warrant a promotion? Second, what is the relation between your supervisor and manager? If they have a poor relationship, it could be years before you are promoted. Third, who else is up for promotion? Often, a limited number of promotions are allowed at any given time due to budget constraints. Is this the first time you have been nominated? Are there others

who have been waiting longer? And, finally, how well does your manager know you? If you have never met, you can rest assured they do not know you and, consequently, unless your supervisor does a wonderful selling effort, you will most likely not get promoted.

Higher Level Engineering Promotions

Now let's look at the dynamics involved in a higher level promotion where your manager must utilize the totem board results and present your case to the promotion review board. What happens here is that the manager, with the help of your supervisor, prepares a small brief or summary as to why you deserve a promotion. The brief contains a description of your accomplishments and shows how you meet the criteria for promotion. In addition to the brief, your ranking on the totem is reviewed. This is a check and balance process. If you meet the criteria then you should be performing at the top of your grade and ranked accordingly. If you are ranked at the top of your grade then your performance should normally meet the criteria for promotion as defined by the promotion review board. If you're not at the top of your rank or do not meet all criteria then your chances for getting the promotion approved are not good.

Once you understand this process, you will quickly realize you must know two things. The first is where you stand on the totem and the second is what the board's criteria are for promotion. Determining what both of these are may seem impossible, but it is doable. Finding out where you rank in the totem, or in relation to others, takes tact and patience. Your manager knows where you rank in the totem and does not like to tell anyone. Therefore, you may have to do a little fishing. Find out when the last totem ranking occurred and when the next is scheduled. If your company does not use a totem then you must explore how the company ranks engineers. Your supervisor should have this information. Most supervisors will share with you how and when ranking occurs. The next thing you must find out is where you stand on the totem ranking or in relation to others being considered for promotion. The best approach is simply to ask. Most supervisors will inform you that this information cannot be shared. You might find out something by asking what quarter you are ranked in: the top, upper middle, lower middle, or bottom. Your manager may share this piece of information with you since they are not telling you the exact rank. If you are in the top quarter, you're in great shape. If you're below the top quarter, you have your work cut out for you.

The second action is to find out the criteria used by the promotion review board to determine if someone is ready for a promotion. Sometimes this information is closely guarded and sometimes it is readily available. The first place to start asking is your supervisor. If your supervisor has the information and shares it with you, you are in great shape. Study it and determine where you exceed, meet, or fail to meet the criteria.

► **Career Tip.** Find someone in the company who was recently promoted to the level you want to be and network with them to discover their experiences!

The next place to check is with someone who was just promoted to the level, which you are looking to get promoted to. Chances are they did not make it on the first try and needed to do some additional things to meet the criteria. By talking to others who recently received a promotion you can get a pretty good idea of what the promotion review board criteria are or what is involved in the promotion review process. If you do not know of anyone, check with personnel and find out who in the company was just promoted. People who were just promoted are usually glad to share this information with you. They know how hard it can be to get promoted.

The important point here is to check all the available sources you can about the promotion process. The promotion process will vary from company to company and manager to manager. It is a waste of energy and time to go after the promotion blindfolded. You can literally remove part of the blindfold by doing research on the promotion process used in your company. Your challenge is to find out all you can about the promotion process in your company, and what the formal criteria are that you will be judged against. The information is all there. It's up to you to do the legwork and find it.

SUMMARY

Your manager and other upper level superiors are evaluating your performance every day. In every company, there are formal criteria by which you are judged. You must understand the formal criteria for successful career development. The formal criteria are usually well-defined and documented.

The formal criteria are manifested in three ways. The first is through the job performance review process. This is usually a yearly assessment and review of your performance as determined by your supervisor in meeting the company expectations. Understanding this process and the form used is a key element for career advancement.

The second is through the job performance criteria, which is the performance expected of engineers at each level in the organization. The third way is through the promotion review process. The promotion review process and actions your supervisor has to follow to get you a promotion are usually well-documented and strictly adhered to large corporations. In smaller companies this formal criteria may not be as well documented. Your career advancement will depend on you understanding all three of these and knowing what actions you need to take to show that you are ready for the next promotion based on this formal criteria.

If you are in doubt about any of the formal criteria the best person to seek help from is your supervisor. Sit down with your supervisor, clarify the

formal criteria by which you are being measured. Use the tools suggested in the chapter to help you identify the formal criteria and any potential improvement areas. Next visit with your mentor, they should be able to help you also.

Have you identified any career actions you want to take as a result of reading this chapter? If so, please make sure to capture these ideas before you forget by recording them in the notes section at the back of the book.

ASSIGNMENTS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

- 1 Study the forms your company uses for job appraisals or job reviews. Do you understand each block of information and what it means in terms of your performance?
- 2 Who signs off on your job appraisal? Do they know you?
- 3 Make a list of all the things you were critiqued on during your last job appraisal and identify something specific you can do for each one to show improvement.
- 4 Does your company store job definitions and performance criteria on a website? Review the criteria for the level you are and the next level you aspire to achieve.
- 5 Meet with your manager and discuss the criteria you are expected to meet for your present job level as well as the performance expected from you for the next level. (Remember the cheat sheet.)
- 6 What is involved in the promotion review process for your company? Are totems or rankings used? If so when do they occur and what is your rank? Is a promotion review board used? Who are the members? What criteria are they using?
- 7 How do you find out who was recently promoted? (Hint: Human Resources has all this data.)