

CHAPTER 34

USING THE COMPANY'S JOB OPENING SYSTEM TO YOUR BENEFIT

Using your company's job opening system (JOS) to your benefit is one of the most important things you can do for career development. The JOS is the means by which companies inform their employees of the jobs that are available in the company. Are you aware of the JOS in your company and how to use it to your benefit? If not, you could already be missing an opportunity for advancement. In this chapter, we will explore how you can benefit from your company's JOS.

Typically, the personnel department in most companies post all job openings. The company does this because most often, the best candidate for the new position is someone already in the company, which could mean less time and effort than training a person from outside the company. So you, as an employee, often stand a better chance of advancement than an outsider.

Often the job openings are posted on bulletin boards, or accessible through the company computer network. Do you read these listings? It amazes me how many people will read the daily sports, financial, arts, or the comics sections, but hardly ever look at the company's job opening listing. To get ahead you must read the company's job opening listings continuously. You can never tell when a better opportunity will present itself. In addition to keeping abreast of the job market internally you should also be continuously looking outside the company. Study and read all the job ads you can. You may even want to contact some professional search firms to do some searching for you.

THE IMPORTANT THINGS YOU CAN LEARN FROM READING THE COMPANY JOB POSTINGS

Job ads will provide you with a wealth of knowledge about the job market and your chances for advancement at any given time. By studying the company's job ads you can quickly tell which divisions are hot and hiring. You can also tell which divisions may be having difficulties since they have no openings. How is your division doing? Is it hiring? Chances for promotion are significantly enhanced if you are working for a division that is hiring.

Study the job listings further. Do they identify the job level, type of engineer required, and the pay level? The job ad should identify the experience and background they are looking for. The background sought by the majority of the job ads indicates the background you may need to get ahead in your company. If all the openings are for chemical engineers and you are a mechanical engineer you may have a difficult time advancing. Compare the salaries being offered in the ads to your job level. How does the pay compare to yours? If you are getting underpaid and it's important to you to move to obtain more money, then it's time to move on. If the pay is comparable and you are satisfied, there is no reason to move.

Determine the salary being offered for the jobs one level above yours. Would you like a raise and a promotion? How will you find out if you qualify unless you go for an interview? Remember, your supervisor may be limited in the salary increase they can offer you. However, it may be easier for a different supervisor to give you the raise you want simply because you would be a new hire to the department.

Study the job ads to determine which divisions have openings and what products you would be working on. Which product line is hot and undergoing rapid development? What divisions and products are not growing? This is easy to tell by lack of job ads. Is there any chance of transferring to a new division or product and pick up a promotion in doing so?

► **Career Tip.** Read the job postings weekly, but be discreet and keep it to yourself.

A Word of Caution About Company JOS Ads. Most companies have internal policies regarding promotions. One of these policies is that if a supervisor intends to promote an employee to a new level, they must have a need and a position open for that grade level. The company wants to put the best person into that position, not just the one the supervisor wants. Therefore, they require that the supervisor post a listing for the position and interview all possible candidates. The intent is to get the best possible candidate for the position.

► **Career Tip.** When you find a job opening that interests you, find out everything you can about it before applying. Who posted it, the lead engineer

on the project, the type of work, and other people in the group who might apply.

What this means is that often a JOS listing will be posted with someone already in mind. Most engineers are unaware of this policy and therefore think they stand a good chance of getting the job. If you are responding to a JOS listing, do some research first and try to find out if there is someone already in mind for the position. The obvious question to ask the supervisor when you are interviewing is, “is there anyone presently in your group that is interviewing?” Is that person more than likely the best candidate and is it a “done deal?”

In addition to reading your own company’s job listings, you should constantly be checking what your competitors are doing through job listings. Are they hiring? What type of people are they looking for? What are they willing to pay for employees with a similar background? What are the competitors’ growing and expanding divisions and product lines? Are they looking for your background and experience level or some other type? Most of these questions can be answered through studying the job listings. All this information is very important for career development.

The next question that usually arises is “What do I do if I find something?” The answer is straightforward—check it out. You should check at least once a year for other job opportunities through some type of job interview. This is important for three reasons. First, it will keep your interviewing skills sharp and your resume updated. Second, it may result in a better opportunity. Third, you may find out that your job is not so bad after all. In any case, you benefit from the experience and lose nothing.

MANAGING YOUR PRESENT SUPERVISOR WHILE INTERVIEWING

Most people react to the reasons for pursuing career advancement listed above with “That’s great, but if my supervisor finds out, I’ll lose my job.” If this is really the case I highly recommend that you make a change immediately. You do not want to be working for this type of person. If your supervisor does find out that you are exploring new opportunities, there are several things you can say that should result in benefiting your career. First, you can say that you are happy to be working for him or her, but you heard of this wonderful opportunity and thought you would just check it out. You are happy with your present position but the opportunity sounded interesting and you were going to check to see what it involves.

Or you might respond with a compliment to your supervisor. You can compliment them by pointing out that the only reason you are looking is that they have done a great job developing you, and the only reason you stand a chance for a better opportunity is due to their excellent training and development!

► **Career Tip.** You have to have a strategy for communicating with your present supervisor during the time you are interviewing for a new position.

Still another approach is to be frank and open if you are unhappy with your present position and rate of growth. Tell your supervisor that you do not see much opportunity in the group and you feel that you must explore the options. They can react in one of two ways to this. One way might be by informing you that there is not a lot of opportunity in their group for you and you that should probably look elsewhere. In this case, you have found out some very valuable information about how your supervisor perceives you and what your real chances for advancement are by staying in the group. Therefore, you have made the right decision to search for work in other places (Figure 34-1).

One objection to your wanting to leave by your present supervisor is the fact that there may be no obvious replacement for you. You are leaving your present supervisor with a problem. There are several methods to overcome this objection. First, identify potential candidates who can replace you. Or offer to stay and train your replacement so the transition goes smoothly. Another action is to help write up a job description and duties for the next person.

The second way your supervisor might react is to express concern and describe how valuable you are and how they would like you to stay. You have now opened the door to further discussions about your chances for advancement. Use the opportunity to express what your future career objectives are, and hopefully, the two of you can work out a plan to get you what you want. In other words, use the opportunity to start planning your next promotion together. If you have a good rapport with your supervisor, you might point out that it's easier for them to give you the raise or promotion than hire a new person and spend time training them.



FIGURE 34-1 Managing your present supervisor while looking for jobs.

► **Career Tip.** Identify and train your replacement, if possible, to make the transition easier.

Regardless of what your supervisor says, continue to seek out new job opportunities. If the new opportunity is within your company, make sure you inform your supervisor before you talk to the person doing the hiring. It is professional courtesy to inform your supervisor about the opportunity. Don't let them find out from someone else. It will only end up hurting you.

There is a need for discretion when you are looking around. If you decide to go job shopping, keep it a very low profile activity. If you are too visible and start interviewing in too many places this can backfire. Your supervisor will quickly find out from other people what you are doing and want to know why. It does not help their career if you are highly visible while you are checking out other opportunities. Do not volunteer any information unless you are asked directly. Don't discuss your plans with coworkers; they may leak the information to others. For this activity, low profile is the way to go.

When you go for the interview, you should have some good answers to some very difficult questions. The first question is usually, "Does your present supervisor know that you are interviewing?" A very good answer to this question is that your supervisor does know and they do not want to stand in the way if this is really a good opportunity for advancement. The second is, "Why do you want to make a career change?" One way to respond to this is to say that you are looking for a better opportunity to grow. Whatever you do, do not speak negatively about your present position or supervisor. Anything that you say about your supervisor or group could be shared all over the company.

► **Career Tip.** Remember that soon after you leave the interview the hiring supervisor is going to call your present supervisor.

After you leave the interview the hiring supervisor is going to call your present supervisor. How your present supervisor responds can immediately make or break the opportunity. If you are on good terms with your present supervisor and they think highly of you, they may respond with "You are a great employee and I don't want to lose a person like this." If your supervisor says this, it will probably make the hiring supervisor want you all the more. If they respond with "You are a marginal performer," this can end the opportunity immediately. The point here is "Do you know how your supervisor will respond?" If you don't, you are taking a big risk. You should know how your supervisor is going to react before you spend time interviewing (Figure 34-2). Therefore, keeping on good terms with them during this whole process is essential.



FIGURE 34-2 Interviewing for the new job.

If you are already on poor terms with your supervisor this can be extremely good or bad for you. Sometimes I've seen supervisors go out of their way to help an employee get a new position when they are on poor terms. The supervisor wants to get rid of the employee, so rather than fire the employee, the supervisor finds new opportunities for them and may even pass along great recommendations about their performance. The hiring supervisor receives a glowing report about the applicant's past performance and hopefully will be encouraged to hire you.

On other occasions, I've seen the supervisor take a different approach. They use the opportunity to get even. Due to poor relations, the supervisor will purposely underrate the employee's past performance and spoil any opportunity for advancement. If you have poor relations with your supervisor, you might want to ask them how they would react before you go through all the effort. Watch their reaction. If they are giving you the "disgruntled" response you will have to deal with it and cannot ignore it.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM A JOB OFFER

Even after you get a job offer, your work is not done regardless of whether the offer comes from inside or outside the company. In either case, the ideal situation is to get your present supervisor to make a counteroffer in the hopes of keeping you. You should inform your supervisor of the new offer. Explain why it appeals to you, and why you intend on leaving if a counteroffer is not provided. The intent here is to try to get an even better offer out of your present supervisor, if what you really want is to stay in your current position.

It is surprising how fast some supervisors can move and what they can counteroffer when they know they are about to lose one of their key performers. Ask them to at least match it. Sometimes another offer is just what is needed for building a case for promotion with your supervisor. If someone thinks you are promotable, why shouldn't your present supervisor think so also? Sometimes this is all that is needed to push some

supervisors into action. It hurts their ego to know that someone else in the company is trying to steal away their people.

If you get your supervisor to counter the offer, your efforts are still not finished. Take that offer to the new supervisor and find out if they can offer more. Your goal is to get both supervisors to offer the absolute most they can. You repeat this process until both supervisors can no longer offer any more, at which point you have gained the most out of the process.

Some engineers feel this unethical, to which I say look at other professions, athletes in particular. Athletes even go as far as hiring agents to negotiate job opportunities for them. Actors, actresses, lawyers, and nearly every other profession do the same thing. Knowing how to negotiate is essential for career advancement.

WHICH IS BETTER—INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL OFFERS?

When the best and final offers are in, you need to consider other aspects before you make a job change. If you change jobs for a promotion and stay within the company, this is the best of all possible worlds. By staying within the company you keep your vacation benefits, seniority, and retirement benefits. Studies have shown that an engineer who stays with one company until retirement, in most cases, will retire better than someone who has changed jobs. This is the case even if the person changing companies has had larger pay raises.

Remember, when you leave a company, in most cases, you lose your vacation benefits and retirement benefits. Leaving the company may also cause you unexpected expenses you never planned on. For instance, if you have to drive further to work, or move out of state, there are additional expenses you will incur. There will be costs to change your car insurance, place of residence, and real estate fees, just to name a few. Do you have any of the raise left after you pay all the new expenses? How will your retirement benefits be affected? For example, a 3% raise inside the company may be equivalent to a 6% increase outside the company.

Another point one must consider is that in the new company you will be starting all over and should not expect a large raise anytime soon. It will take you over a year to re-establish your position and your performance. If you get a raise when leaving, make sure it's large enough because it may be a long period of time before you get another one.

► **Career Tip.** Remember there is more than a simple pay raise involved when leaving the company. You have to decide for yourself if the move is worth it or not.

If you are lucky enough to be offered a new opportunity in or outside the company, make sure you give your supervisor at least a chance to match it—if you would still like to continue working in the same group.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR SUPERVISOR TRIES TO BLOCK YOUR MOVE

If your present supervisor tries to block your move you have several options (Figure 34-3). First, try to get your supervisor to agree to a convenient transfer date some time in the future. Let your present supervisor know that you are not going to leave the group high and dry. You should be able to work out some gradual transfer plan. If your supervisor continues to fight what you can do is point out what your reaction will probably be over time. At first, you will continue to work hard, but after a while you will probably lose interest. It's hard for you to give it your all when you gave up a promotion and raise simply because your supervisor didn't think you deserved it. Try to make them see that holding you back is not good for them, you, or for the company in the long run. Another idea you might try is to volunteer your help in finding and training your replacement. This always makes the transition easier.

► **Career Tip.** In all discussions focus on what is best for the company and for your career.

Finally, if necessary and as a last resort, you can escalate the problem to higher levels of management or Human Resources. This has to be done with tact and careful attention on how this will reflect upon your present supervisor. Resentment and blame on your part will come off badly and other people may step in to block the move. You need to unite these resources behind you, and at the same time, cast your supervisor in a good light. Your intent is to establish and create a win-win situation and do what is best for the company, and your career. In all discussions, keep the focus on what is best for the company and for your career and not just what you want.



FIGURE 34-3 The blocking supervisor.

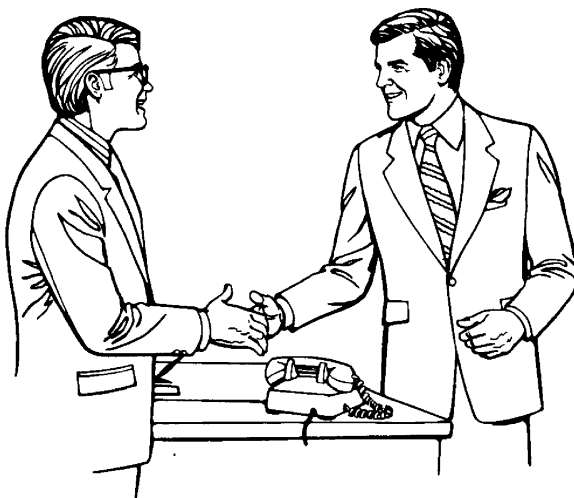


FIGURE 34-4 Always leave on good terms.

ALWAYS LEAVE ON GOOD TERMS

If you do accept a raise and promotion from elsewhere in the company, there are several things you must do. First, make sure you thank your present supervisor for all past help. Point out all the good things your new supervisor liked and how you qualified for the new position in part due to the fine effort your old supervisor did in developing you. Never leave on bad terms; it will only come back to haunt you later (Figure 34-4).

► **Career Tip.** Never leave on bad terms; it will only come back to haunt you! You may miss future opportunities.

SUMMARY

In summary, using your company's JOS to your benefit is important for your career development. The JOS allows you to compare what you are making to others in the company. The JOS is the first place new jobs are usually listed, and by constantly reading the ads you will be aware of the latest opportunities. In addition to reading your company's JOS, you should be reading the trade journals for job ads, Internet job sites, and salary surveys. This information will reveal what people outside the company are making as well as give you insight into what the competition is doing. When you consider taking jobs outside the company take into account all the new expenses you will incur and how your benefits are affected. And, finally, if you decide to make a move, leave on good terms; do not burn your bridges behind you.

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 Find out how your company JOS works.
- 2 Study the ads. Do you know all the codes? What do the ads tell you? Which divisions are hot, which are not?
- 3 Review some Internet Job Ads. Study them. What are they looking for and how much are they willing to pay?
- 4 Pick one JOS listing and go on an interview.