CAREER MANAGEMENT involves taking a close look at yourself and your employer on a regular basis. In order to reach your career goals, you should first know yourself (i.e., skill set, strengths, weaknesses, interests, goals and what kind of company suits you best). Stay on track by keeping an eye on the dynamic work environment of your current employer.

The purpose of assessing your employer is to (1.) examine trends and direction of your company, (2.) measure your level of job satisfaction, (3.) determine what you would like to change or negotiate with your employer and (4.) evaluate features of working for your employer versus other potential employers.

Before deciding to move on to a new job, be sure to stay focus on your current job and responsibilities and make the most of it. Avoid knee-jerk reactions to negative changes with your employer. Focus on the big picture. A negative development might only be temporary, which may not affect your future as much as initially thought or could be a negotiable issue.

Although it is impossible to use precise numbers to measure job satisfaction, below is a scoring system to use as a guideline and reference point, along with 10 employer-assessment categories to examine and determine for each item (1.) the level of importance to you and (2.) how you grade your employer.

To score yourself on job satisfaction, assign numbers as follows:

- **Importance Level:** 1 through 10 for each of the 10 categories (use each number once with 10 being most important).
- **Employer Grade:** 1 through 5 for each category (5=excellent, 4=above average, 3=average, 2=below average, 1=poor).
- **Total Score:** Multiply each level of importance score by the corresponding employer grade. You will have 10 scores to add up to reach your total score (e.g., if Position Held is most important to you of the 10 categories and you grade your employer average in this category, one of your 10 scores would be 10 x 3=30).
- **Zero Category:** If you are definitely looking to leave your employer because of an item that is unacceptable (e.g., you are in a temporary role below your capabilities), grade your employer 0 in that category. This means that even with other high scores, you will depart the company unless that issue is resolved.
Some items can always be negotiated with your employer, although the best time to negotiate is when you are being hired or promoted. Obstacles to negotiation typically are (1.) written company policies and (2.) equity among employees. If you are valued by your employer, a solution can often be worked out if your request is reasonable. When negotiating, emphasize positives and stress that you see a long-term future at the company. Avoid negotiating by searching for another job and using that as leverage.

**EMPLOYER-EVALUATION CATEGORIES**

Below are 10 employer-assessment categories, along with questions to ask yourself, as well as potential areas for negotiation:

1. **Position Held**
   - Clearly written job description?
   - Using the majority of your skill set?
   - Enough challenges?
   - Enjoying daily tasks?
   - Meaningful work that makes a difference?
   - Too much pressure or deadlines?
   - Sufficient resources (e.g., personnel, data, equipment)?
   - Working excessive hours?
   - Acceptable amount of travel?
   - The role you envisioned for yourself?

   By discussing with your immediate boss, you can often negotiate a shift in daily duties by proving that it makes sense (e.g., it would increase your productivity). The same reasoning applies to negotiating an adjustment in hours or travel.

2. **Job Growth**
   - Internal promotion policy and history?
   - Capable of doing more than your current job?
   - Recent increase in responsibility?
   - Visibility of your role?
   - Skills and future potential recognized?
   - Feedback from the company about your future?
   - Career goals attainable in 5-10 years?

   If you feel that you are overdue for more responsibility or a promotion, negotiate successfully by (1.) meeting with decision makers, (2.) presenting your goal, (3.) proving you are deserving, (4.) obtaining management opinion and (5.) agreeing to an action timeline.

3. **Top Management**
   - Overall leadership style?
   - Recent management changes with new focus?

   In a company where the top management style is out of touch or where you feel treated unfairly, it can be difficult to negotiate changes. However, you can work on changes in business practices one at a time (e.g., STLE support) via a suggestion box or discussions with your boss or top management.

4. **Current Boss**
   - Clear goals and guidelines?
   - Realistic expectations?
   - Micro-management?
   - Credit given to you when deserved?
   - Progress impeded by your boss?
   - Management style brings out the best in you?
   - Fair and accessible?
   - Sufficient communications?
   - Regular written performance reviews?
   - “Yes man” to top management?
   - Your efforts supported to top management?

   Resolve issues directly with your boss, if possible. If the situation becomes intolerable, approach top management with strong documentation of problem areas and attempt to gain support of other subordinates with similar issues. Be careful about being too critical if your boss has clout.

5. **Security**
   - Received bad performance reviews?
   - Risk of being let go because of age, salary, seniority or company politics?
   - History of company layoffs and who is laid off first?
   - Company turnover history?
   - Company financial stability?
   - Company ownership changes?
   - Company merger rumors?
   - Company actions signaling a buyout?
   - Employer recently acquired?
   - Employer has purchased another company?

   Heighten your job security, especially during mergers,
ownership changes or management changes. This can best be accomplished by maintaining a high performance level, being a team player and aligning yourself with top management (without sacrificing principles).

6 Company Status
- Solid industry reputation?
- Responsiveness to customers?
- Industry competitive standing?
- Leader in the field?
- Innovation and technology?
- Growth history over past 5-10 years?

7 Company Culture
- Aggressive or conservative company goals?
- “Old school” or contemporary strategies?
- Positive employee interactions?
- Group decision-making?
- Your values in line with company’s values?
- Older or younger workforce?
- Ethical business practices?
- Information received by emails, memos, group meetings or word-of-mouth?
- Transparent about company problems?
- Long work hours expected?

Company culture does not change quickly and will usually occur only with a major ownership or management change.

8 Work Environment
- Team atmosphere?
- Enough privacy?
- Employee morale?
- Relaxed atmosphere?
- Comfortable areas for breaks, eating and socializing?
- Enough workspace and lighting?

It is possible to negotiate a change in physical workspace (e.g., more lab bench space) if you can prove it will increase your productivity.

9 Location
- Reasonable commute?
- Living in a location you want to stay long-term?
- A specific area of the country you would love to relocate?

If you have a long commute, attempt to negotiate work-from-home time or a four-day work week.

10 Salary/Benefits/Perks
- Competitive salary?
- Fair salary increases?
- Financial rewards for high achievement?
- Merit salary increase policy?
- Equitable bonuses and commissions?
- Negative incentive plan changes?
- Company expenses reimbursed?
- Car or car allowance provided?
- Health insurance needs covered at a reasonable cost?
- Retirement/pension, 401-K/profit-sharing plans?
- Life, disability and long-term care insurance coverage?
- Tuition reimbursement policy?
- Personal vacation time?
- Fitness or day-care facilities?
- Other valued perks?

Check that your salary is competitive for your experience and performance level. Research average compensation by reading industry articles and surveys, as well as talking with co-workers and competitors. If your compensation is below average, substantiate this to your employer and present your salary request. Ask for an above average salary if you are a top performer (quantify your contributions). If equity is an issue, request a higher pay grade or new bonus incentives.

Within the benefits category, you can often negotiate additional perks, tuition assistance or time off, especially with a smaller company.

For employer grading, 275 is the top score (5 for each category), 220 is a solid above average score (4 for each category) and 165 is average (3 for each category). At 165 you should definitely be able to improve yourself by changing jobs. At 220 you need to be careful that you are significantly improving yourself when making a change.

You will realize when key elements are missing from your job. The scoring system should reinforce your feelings, give you greater perspective and help you compare your employer with other companies. A prospective employer has greater unknowns, but company research and thorough interviewing should enable you to grade the company and increase your chances of making a worthwhile job change.

I hope your employer makes the grade with a clean bill of health!

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