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# Who Should Climb the Ladder?

## How to Determine Who Is a Good Promotion Candidate

It is a rare manager, who, in the length of a career does not wonder how a boss or a peer got their current position.

Perhaps that is what led management guru Peter Drucker to say, “The attempt to find “potential” is altogether futile” (in his book *Management Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*). In fact, Drucker goes on to say that trying to pick out good future managers in a field of candidates is less likely to succeed than just taking every fifth person in the organization.

These situations give us pause to think of Peter’s principle; “Everyone rises to their level of incompetence. The only reason our system does not collapse is that not everyone reaches their level of incompetence at the same time!”

Most managers want supervisors who will get the work done, who will find creative solutions to problems, who will save the company money, and who will develop employees to their fullest potential.

The phrase “Don’t do as I do, do as I say” will not be found on the lips of a strong supervisor candidate. Performance counts, not talk. The successful future manager’s motto is “Do as I say, *and* do.”

So how do you decide? How do you figure out amongst those fresh, eager faces who will ultimately be the best new supervisor? Who will eventually make their way into top management?

While there are no guarantees with anyone, there are ways you can assess individuals to help make your decision of whom to promote the most intelligent one possible.

The assessment process is comprised of three basic steps;



- 1) Review the candidate's work record.
- 2) Interview the candidate.
- 3) Interview the candidate's internal and external customers.

This assessment process is complex and will require considerable effort to complete, but will yield supervisors more likely to succeed in their new careers.

## Review the Candidate's Work Record

The place to start evaluating the potential of a candidate is their current work record. The best reflection of what a person will do in the future is what they have done in the past.

Examining the following four areas will help make the first cuts:

**1) Attendance record.** Review the candidate's attendance record. Look for consistency. Look for illnesses that appear on Mondays and Fridays. Look for people who are on time. The supervisor will be an example for the group they supervise, so if you want a strong work ethic of responsible people, start with a candidate who has a good attendance record and a strong work ethic.

**2) Prior performance reviews.** Review the candidate's prior performance reviews. A strong candidate will show continual improvement.

The performance review is another place to look for inconsistency. Does the person do well for a year and then poorly for six months, and then get fired up again? There may be a good reason for cyclical work performance; like a difficulty at home with the family. Make sure you understand the situation and are confident that the candidate will be a consistent performer in the future.

**3) Growth in job skills.** A strong supervisor candidate is one who continues to improve in their current job. They ask questions seeking to expand their knowledge of the business. They look for ways to improve that are beyond the scope of their current jobs.

This characteristic may be among the most important for our future managers. At the rate we are increasing the knowledge base in our society, an employee who thinks that their education stopped with their trade school, or their college degree will be dead weight in a matter of months in some industries, a few years in others.

**4) Ability to get along with peers.** A big part of the new supervisor's job will be getting work done through others. A good indication of this ability is how they get along with their peers. This is not simply a question of "Are they liked?" but more importantly, "Are they respected?" Look for candidates who not only are well liked but have also won the respect of their peers.



## Interview the Candidate

If you have the responsibility of promoting someone to the supervisory level you need to make sure that they have the interest and the skills to do the job. The best way to do that, in addition to reviewing their work record, is to interview them for the job. (You wouldn't offer a job to someone just from reading a resume, would you?)

The promotion interview can take place all at once or over a period of days. If you cover the following six elements, you will increase your chance of selecting the right person the first time.

**1) Make sure the person is interested in supervision.** It is not true that every individual who does good work in their jobs wants to be promoted. Do not make this assumption!

Talk to the candidate about their personal and career goals to make sure that they want the responsibility of supervision and that they thoroughly understand the effect this increased responsibility will have on their lives. Too often a talented worker accepts a promotion at the encouragement of their manager with the lure of "more money" when they don't even want the responsibility.

If a person is not motivated to be a supervisor, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for them to assume this responsibility and be successful over the long haul.

**2) Explain reasons for the promotion.** A promotion candidate needs to know why they are being considered for additional responsibility. Don't assume that they know why. They may, but tell them anyway. People need to hear from their bosses why management has the confidence in them to consider them for a promotion.

Tell the individual what skills they have demonstrated that are important to a supervisor's job. Talk about their demonstrated leadership characteristics. Discuss their skill levels at their current work. Explain how their ability to work with others will be important in their supervisory roles.

In other words, discuss all the success criteria you have established for a supervisor and how this candidate meets those criteria.

**3) Outline new responsibilities.** To supervise effectively, one must be able to plan, organize, direct, and control work processes. This is significantly different than the worker who is responsible solely for the completion of a task. The candidate needs to understand and accept the responsibility for managing the people involved in the production of the work, as well as the work itself.

The key to success in this area is the ability to communicate effectively. A good supervisor must be able to listen well, provide clear instruction, show genuine interest in the employees, and be



aware of their needs. Reduced productivity and increased turnover are guaranteed if the supervisor cannot communicate effectively.

**4) Determine their views on supervision.** Spend some time with the candidate discussing their views about supervision. After all, a worker's ideas about supervision have been molded mostly by the people they have supervised them. Ask how they view the role of supervisor as different from that of the worker. Ask what they consider as being good and bad characteristics of a supervisor and why.

This discussion will not only provide food for thought for the candidate but will also give you valuable clues as to their current state of readiness for the supervisor's role. It is also an indicator of strengths and weaknesses in their initial weeks on the job.

**5) Discuss to whom the new supervisor will report.** In these days of matrix management, the question of who you report to is not as simple as it might once have been. The candidate needs to understand who they are accountable to and for what.

The candidate also needs to understand the "system"; who will give the performance appraisals, who is to give assistance solving problems, are communications expected in writing or in person, and what type of relationships are expected with the peer group of supervisors?

**6) Discuss the people who will be the new supervisor's responsibility.** Remember, the supervisor is responsible for managing the people doing the work, so they need to understand the strengths and weaknesses of those who report to them. The new supervisor will also need to know how the group performs; are they a cohesive team or a group of individuals with private agendas? Also, the supervisor needs to learn about each worker's background, their family, and their aspirations.

## **Interview the Candidate's Internal and External Customers**

The best way to find out how the supervisor candidate works with people is to talk to their internal and external customers. The most obvious group is their peer group.

But many others can provide valuable insight into the potential of an individual. Talk to other people who have contact with the candidate like supervisors or workers in other departments. If your candidate has contact with customers or suppliers, ask for their feedback.

## **One Final Thought**

To anyone who has spent time as a supervisor and risen into the ranks of management, none of this is rocket science.



Yet, mistakes are made time and time again selecting new supervisors. Employees gathering in the break-room wonder aloud, “How in the world could they have selected this idiot to be the new supervisor? He doesn’t have the sense of a housefly?”

The job of finding and developing talented supervisors will forever be a difficult task for management. Even the diligent manager who follows each of these guidelines is not guaranteed success. People are not always what they seem. People change. Businesses change. The person who is just right for the job this year may be inadequate in the next decade.

Nonetheless, it is up to you to separate the wheat from the chaff, and in doing so, find the supervisor that may one day become the president of the company.

If you are still having trouble deciding on a candidate, consider Paul’s instruction to Timothy regarding the selection of overseers in 1 Tim 3:2-4. In describing the characteristics of a good overseer, Paul used words like temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, and free from the love of money.

If you think about it, these are traits that should apply to all of us, all the time. Make it a point to review this list every morning. It will help keep you focused in the right direction.