The physicist’s guide to raising your profile

For members already in employment
The physicist’s guides are written to assist anyone with a background in physics regardless of what stage they are at in their career – this could be in education or employment.

These guides are unique because the writers have taken into account the skills and abilities that someone with a physics training or background has, so they are specific and relevant to physicists.

We hope that these booklets will be of assistance when you consider your career-development plan.

The IOP wishes you the best of luck in your career. If you require any further information or advice, e-mail members.careers@iop.org.

Other careers guides in this series can be found at www.iop.org/careers.
To continue progressing in your career – be it in your current organisation or elsewhere - you need to ensure that you stay on the “radar screen” of more senior managers and potential employers.

This guide gives you tips about how you can do this.
Introduction

Your annual appraisal may be coming up soon or you know that you are being considered for a promotion or a pay review. At these times you may focus more on making sure that you are creating a good impression at work by putting in the extra effort.

However, how you think and behave at work on a daily basis is what people really notice.

The impact you have on your colleagues, the impression you make on your manager and what the most senior people in the organisation notice about you. You may be very competent in your job, focused on the task at hand and always achieve what you are asked to do. However, getting the job done well is not all that matters if you are to progress in your organisation.

Do you remain positive and enthusiastic even in difficult times, or do you withdraw, complain and blame colleagues when things don’t go well? Are you approachable and willing to share your expertise and skills with others? Are you taking full advantage of the new opportunities open to you in times of change? Are you putting yourself forward for more projects or suggesting ways in which you can add more value to your organisation?

Sometimes we can get stuck in a pattern of thinking and behaving that hinders our progress. With the right attitude and commitment you can improve your image, become noticed and attract more opportunities to yourself, which will enhance your personal and professional development, as well as your career prospects.

This leaflet gives you some examples of how to take advantage of situations that occur in the ever-changing workplace and tips on what you can do to raise your profile to enhance your career prospects.
**Case-studies**

Stephen joined Global Banking LTD 15 years ago. He has had several internal moves since then but feels that he has got as far as he can with his current employers and is thinking about changing jobs. He has taken advantage of the company’s mentoring scheme and decided to talk to his mentor about his concerns with regard to his lack of progression and uncertain future in the company. Stephen’s mentor gave his concerns some careful thought and came back to him with several suggestions. One of them was a possible secondment opportunity with a client organisation in the US. Stephen has now applied for this position.

Louise has been with Computer Tech for six months. A project has arisen in her department that requires advanced skills in using a particular software package. Louise is concerned, because someone else in her department has been given precedence in managing the project, despite Louise being an advanced practitioner in using the software package. This skill was listed on her original application and when Louise mentioned her qualification and experience to her manager, she was surprised by his response: “but I didn’t realise you had this.”

Alison is aware that her manager will be taking a six-month sabbatical. Working in a team of six people, Alison is the next most senior person in the group. Her manager has told her that the company are thinking of recruiting a temporary manager. Alison would really like to take on this role because she wants to develop her management experience but she is nervous about moving into a management role, particularly with regard to how much extra responsibility this will involve. She is disappointed and thinks that if the company is considering recruiting someone from outside the organisation then they must feel that she is inadequate for this role. Should Alison put herself forward and offer to hold the fort while her manager is away?

These examples reflect the types of scenario that can impact workforce dynamics and morale. Scenario one demonstrates what can happen when you take charge of your career, while the responses of the individuals in scenarios two and three illustrate the uncertainty that doing nothing can cause. This leaflet, produced by the IOP, gives you some tips on how to handle these kinds of situation, and to manage your career more successfully so that your organisation is aware of what you can do and you can take advantage of the opportunities being presented to you.
You are in control of your career

“No matter what point you are at your career – just starting, mid-career or looking towards slowing down you are in control.”
No matter what point you are at your career – just starting, mid-career or looking towards slowing down – you are in control. With greater global economic, political and social uncertainty and with accelerating changes in technology, very few jobs last for more than a few years, so you cannot depend on your current organisation to keep you employed in the long term. Have you considered how you want to take your career forward outside your current organisation? What are your career plans for the future? Should you take a further qualification or do you want to change direction? You need to plan for your development and career progression. The rest of this guide focuses on how you can take control of your future by employing methods that suits you and your situation.

Keep looking for opportunities to develop
The employment sector, organisations and their needs are continuously evolving, so you are frequently presented with chances to develop your skills and expertise with your current employer. You need to be prepared for change and ready to seek out the opportunities in these changes. This often involves taking on new responsibilities and additional work, and learning new skills. Seize these chances to grow and develop. Ask yourself: “will this opportunity allow me to develop new skills and expertise? Will it help take my career in the direction I now want to go?”

Take stock of your own skills and knowledge – not just your technical skills and expertise, but also your management and leadership potential, your interpersonal strengths, your financial awareness and your ability to think strategically. Which of these would you like to test out and develop further, and what new skills and knowledge do you want to gain? Internal or external training courses are invaluable but nothing beats learning on the job.

Get involved
You can raise your profile and get to know more people in the organisation by getting involved in inter-departmental projects, work-related or charitable/social activities. James helped to organise a quiz, which became an annual event. This was a very departmentalised organisation with many people working alone for much of the time. By doing this he became well known and his contribution was noticed by senior managers. This led him to receive an offer for another position in a different department.

If you have specialist knowledge, which you would like to share with others, don’t hold back. For instance, you can write an article for a trade publication (this does not need to be work-related) or to appear in the company newsletter. If you are really determined then deliver an internal presentation on a development in your work.

Offer to help out at recruitment days or on induction programmes for new recruits, and seek out activities for graduates because they could lead to a change of career in to recruitment, training and development, employee relations, etc.
Keep your CV fresh and up to date

Your CV is a key marketing tool for you to update on a regular basis. There may be an internal promotion that you wish to apply for or a fantastic opportunity from an external organisation. Whichever you decide, be sure that your CV correctly promotes your level of skills and experience. Also consider what you describe yourself as professionally. How would you describe what you do to others who know nothing about your job or your organisation? How do you add most value to your employer?

If you were to move to a new job now, can you explain your key strengths? Can you give examples of your most significant achievements in your current role? What skills and knowledge do you have that are transferable to a new role in another organisation and even to a new sector?

Are you emphasising these and expressing them clearly in your CV? Your CV needs to be ready in the event of an unexpected internal or external move. Information and advice about how to write a CV can be found at www.iop.org/activity/careers/careers_university_and_beyond/Resources/You_CV/index.html. For information on the CV-checking service and other careers related services provided by the IOP, visit: www.iop.org/career and click on ‘Careers: University and Beyond.’

Networking

In large compartmentalised organisations it can be easy to stay in your team or department and not to have much contact with people in other areas of the organisation. Have you become settled in a comfort zone where you only deal with a few people on a day-to-day basis?

What can you do to break down some of these barriers? There may be other functions that interest you and you want to find out more. You can request to spend time in another department or be seconded to one. The people in your organisation are also a good source of career guidance and information. How about meeting someone who is doing a job that you would like to move to in the future? How did they get there?

A coach or a mentor can help

If there is a mentoring or coaching scheme available, take advantage of it. In addition to discussing issues that are relevant to your career progression, your mentor or coach may have contacts inside and outside the organisation. These can often lead to job offers or new roles. You can also improve and develop your own people-management skills by offering to coach or mentor a new recruit to the organisation. The IOP offers a mentor-matching service for its members. http://www.iop.org/activity/careers/Mentoring/index.html.
Before you look outside the organisation

Is there something else that you would like to do in your organisation? You may have an idea for a new product or service, a piece of research, or a way to improve systems and processes. This could be a short-term or a longer-term project. Put together a proposal for discussion with your manager and other stakeholders, making sure that you spell out the benefits for both you and your organisation. Also be alert to internal opportunities and ask colleagues and friends to let you know when a job arises.

Make use of your appraisal process and, where appropriate discuss with your manager what skills you would like you would like to develop. By considering your own development and your future career direction, you can come up with options that might may appeal to your organisation and give you the additional experience that you are seeking. You can also speak to human resources or with people in authority in other parts of the business if these interest you. Wherever possible, keep your line manager informed.

If you want to progress in your career, hard work is not enough. You need to stay aware of what is happening in other parts of the business, be ready to adapt to change and keep your skills and knowledge up to date. Look out for new ways to add value to your employer and to show what you can offer. Remember to maintain your network of contacts internally and externally.

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Find out more...

More information can be found at www.iop.org/careers.