

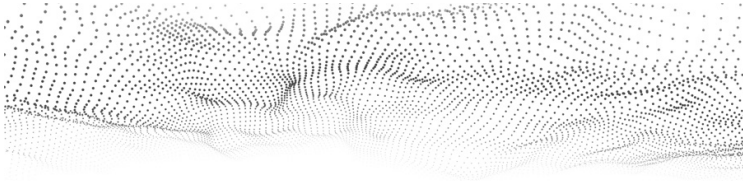
CHAPTER 2

CROSSING THE FINISH LINE

Accelerating Your Career in the
New Digital-Technical Workplace

(SECOND EDITION)

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CHAPTER 2

Outstanding Performance is Your Ticket to the Game

Remember, no one is irreplaceable. Outstanding performance is your entry ticket into the high-stakes game of getting to the top and staying there. Typically, people on this fast-track, but often perilous, road to the top must perform at least 20% better than everyone else—and that is particularly true for women and people of color. Your performance is key in building your brand or image, gaining exposure and visibility, and thus attracting necessary mentors and sponsors. Performance is your ticket to the game. Let's look at what contributes to outstanding performance at the entry level, mid-level, and senior levels of most organizations.

Outstanding Performance at Entry Level (Independent Contributor, Supervisor, Manager)

Most new employees enter the workforce as individual contributors. That is, they have no one they manage, no direct reports or subordinates. They are responsible only for their own work. As a new employee, regardless of your level, you are expected to demonstrate:

- ◇ A good work ethic—arrive early and leave late

- ◇ An ability to quickly learn and comprehend new information
- ◇ An ability to make effective use of new information to deliver results
- ◇ A proficiency with technology to more efficiently and effectively deliver results
- ◇ An understanding of the standards and expectations for high-quality work
- ◇ An ability to form the necessary relationships to deliver outstanding work
- ◇ A commitment to deliver *what you promise when you promise it*
- ◇ Increasing expertise in a particular area
- ◇ A willingness to take tough jobs without complaining
- ◇ The ability to be a good team player
- ◇ An understanding of the rules the game
- ◇ An ability to lead others and follow as necessary and appropriate
- ◇ A consistently high level of integrity and good judgement

When you are first hired after high school, college, or graduate school, no one has any real sense of what to expect from you or what you can actually accomplish. Thus, your first five years or so of work are the time you demonstrate your ability to add value to the organization. That means if you can do nothing else, you work very, very hard. You take on the assignments given to you without complaining and you deliver what is expected of you and a bit more. You deliver on time and on budget and you learn from your experiences. You become your boss's go-to person anytime they need someone to count on to do an exemplary job. Along the way, you work on the things that really matter to your boss and learn as much as possible about the core work of the department. By core work I mean the most critical work your department is expected

to deliver. Demonstrate cultural competence by fitting in with the way things are done in your department. Dress and act the part. Develop relationships that enable you to deliver outstanding results and that also make your work environment more enjoyable. Treat your boss as your number one customer.

When you become a supervisor or manager, the expectation is you can not only deliver outstanding results for your own assignments, you can also ensure everyone in your department delivers outstanding results as well. You are thus capable of getting great work done through others.

**Outstanding Performance at
Mid-Level (Senior Manager,
Director, Senior Director, Vice
President)**

As you progress in your organization to the mid-level ranks, you are expected to demonstrate:

- ◇ Increasing expertise in an area valuable to the company
- ◇ An ability to consistently deliver outstanding performance
- ◇ An ability to both manage and lead others
- ◇ An ability to easily move between being a team leader and a team member
- ◇ An understanding of the rules of the game and ability to play the game well
- ◇ A willingness to embrace change
- ◇ A willingness to make personal sacrifices without whining
- ◇ Ability to prosper during tough business cycles
- ◇ Political, organizational, and social savvy
- ◇ Loyalty and commitment

- ◇ Ability to discern and work on things that matter
- ◇ Ability to effectively work anywhere in the United States and most places around the world
- ◇ Ability to work across time zones
- ◇ Ability to work cross-functionally
- ◇ Interpersonal savvy
- ◇ A willingness to live, sleep, and breathe the company
- ◇ Resilience—immense capacity to keep going after a bump

As you move up to higher levels in an organization, the list of expectations increases with new knowledge and skills to demonstrate. The mid-level is where the sorting-out process begins in earnest. Organizations begin to ask: Who seems to have the potential to get to the top? In whom should we invest our training and development dollars for future success? Mid-level employees are given assignments of increasing complexity and importance to the success of the business. You may begin to manage more than one department and/or more than one function. You may take on management of employees in one or multiple geographies both in your country and abroad. At this level you are judged not only on your ability to manage day-to-day processes, but also by your ability to lead, to motivate and to inspire as well. By the time you reach the level of Vice President, you are likely “on the radar screen” of very senior leaders above you in the organization. They will want to know your long-term potential. How far can you go in the enterprise? How much can your organization stretch you? How can you best assist the company in the accomplishment of its short-term and long-term objectives? Are you a player?

**Outstanding Performance at
Senior Levels (Senior Vice
President, Executive Vice**

**President, President, Chief
Operating Officer, Chief
Executive Officer)**

When you progress to the most senior levels of your organization, you are expected to demonstrate:

- ◇ Loyalty and commitment
- ◇ Strong leadership skills
- ◇ Cross-cultural competence
- ◇ Ability to effectively manage multiple functions across multiple geographies
- ◇ Good business etiquette
- ◇ Social savvy
- ◇ Willingness to devote 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7) to the job
- ◇ Ability to make rules that form an appropriate culture for accomplishing goals and engaging employees
- ◇ Willingness put what's best for the business first
- ◇ Ability to drive your team to success
- ◇ Ability to anticipate and "see around corners"
- ◇ Ability to drive change to transform the organization as necessary for continued success
- ◇ Willingness to stand apart, buck convention, be unpopular

At the most senior levels of most organizations you are pretty much "owned by the company." You are on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including holidays and vacations. You eat, sleep, and breath the company. You are at the top of the pyramid and expected to make the rules and enforce them. Both you and your family are considered representatives of the company and must be smooth, polished and non-controversial. You must demonstrate

cultural and social savvy. And you must deliver, deliver, deliver. In return, you have visibility, exposure, opportunities, access, experiences, and financial resources most people only dream of.

Your Organization's Performance Management System

I can assure you, if your company is still in business, the performance of all employees is being evaluated in some way on a periodic basis. It may be formal or informal, good or bad. The purpose of a well-developed performance-management system is to clarify the results employees are expected to deliver and how they should behave to achieve those results. In smaller organizations, this may take the form of one or more casual conversations about your duties, due dates, and your boss's expectations regarding the way you behave in achieving your results. In larger organizations there is often a formal performance management process or system in place which may include goal setting, development planning, self-appraisals, and mid-year/end-of-year performance appraisals. I can assure you, if your company is still in business, the performance of all employees is being evaluated in some way on a periodic basis.

With very few exceptions, no one gets ahead with lackluster or mediocre performance. People who consistently deliver results, regardless of the challenges or circumstances, typically get ahead. Your successful performance will garner the relationships and visibility you need for promotion to the highest levels. And there are techniques you can use to ensure that your performance is perceived as outstanding. It all begins with your commitment to outstanding performance in your current job.