

HOW TO MAKE A CAREER SWITCH FROM ENGINEERING TO MANAGEMENT

Summary: Learn how to make the switch from engineering to management in this article.



Question: I am the lead engineer in an operations group and am halfway through an M.B.A. program, but I would like to make a change. My interests, in order, are getting into a management job with the same company, making a career move to a finance-related job, or moving to an operations or engineering post with another company. How can I make these dreams a reality?

Answer: Focus on your stated preference, a management position with your current employer, and keep the other two options as backup plans. Do some digging to find out how others have moved into management with the company. Some companies have a structured program for preparing and advancing "high-potential" employees. The formal steps to management may consist of a combination of leadership-type training with defined assignments or rotational responsibilities.

The informal or unspoken requirements are less obvious but equally obligatory—like being in with a power clique, enjoying the blessing of a senior manager, or participating in certain sanctioned and symbolic social events (golf, lunches, etc.). Take your cues from both the successful incumbents and those who didn't make it. Overlooking the informal paths to power can derail your progress. To avoid an early demise, it helps to have a respected champion in high places. At the very least, get a read from your manager or a trusted colleague on your fit in the culture and your reputation within the organization.

If you decide to move to your second choice, shifting your career to finance, expect to take a temporary step back to build your career in a new field. Revise your resume to reflect your new objective and broaden your network by getting involved in relevant professional associations.

Your third choice, staying in your field but moving to another company, means laying the groundwork for a proactive job search while still on the payroll with your current employer. Be sure to carve out scheduled time to focus on your search. Whether you work on it during lunch hours or take vacation days, maintain your work performance as you seek your next opportunity. Identify your target list of employers, update your resume, practice interviewing and start making connections.

See [Ten Steps to a Successful Career Change](#) for more information.