

Q: Is the requirement to have a degree for promotion up to including GS13 no longer a requirement? If not, is this affecting our ability to recruit?

A: Some positions within the Center do require a positive degree in accordance with OPM qualification standards. In those instances, a candidate must possess a degree in order to be minimally qualified. For those positions which do not require a degree to be minimally qualified in accordance with OPM qualification standards, a degree is valued, but not essential to be selected for the position. Education is only one aspect of the ranking process when being considered for a promotion. When making hiring decisions, the Center consistently values candidates' experience, education, professional development and leadership capabilities. These values hold true regardless of which AFLCMC functional is hiring, or position a candidate is being hired to. Valuing these four tenants across the Center ensure consistency among AFLCMC functional hiring practices and supports the Center in recruiting and retaining the best talent to support AFLCMC's mission.

Q: The AFMC Virtual Protocol Network (VPN) is struggling. With the number of employees' teleworking for facility issues at Tinker and the direction to implement teleworking, AFMC VPN capacity and reliability must be improved.

For example, we have been unable to connect to the Wright-Patterson APC VPN over the past several weeks which forces us to try to connect to the Scott AFB or Andrews AFB APC VPNs. Both of these kick us off after just a few minutes. We lose upwards of 50% of our productive time having to log back in 15-20 times each hour. Supervisors cannot deploy an effective telework program without sufficient resources for network connectivity. Can we grow the AFMC VPN so that each site, or at least the three main complexes (Robins, Tinker, Hill) have their own reliable VPN?

Q (Related): While attempting to use telework as a retention benefit, when will the VPN connectivity issues be resolved so that our workforce can work remotely?

A: A large VPN upgrade, EURAM (Enhanced User Remote Access Modernization), is on track for deployment this spring via a new VPN client. The VPN upgrade will go into production able to handle 5 to 10 times as many connections, with room for expansion.

For now, a couple of Tips:

1. Client hardware performance can affect your ability to stay connected to a VPN. If you are getting disconnected, open Task Manager to the Performance tab. If the graphs show over 80% RAM or consistently above 80% CPU, closing out some programs may help.
2. While the nearest APC provides the shortest network path to core resources, other VPN endpoints may perform better during periods of high congestion.

Q: With all of the VTCs, when are we going to invest in better technology?

A: Currently, XP-OZI has an active effort to provide AFLCMC a modern VTC bridging infrastructure, which will allow AFLCMC Personnel to join conference room VTCs from their desks via MS TEAMS.

Q: At the last Supervisor All-Call Ms. Watern mentioned the possibility that the Tiers inside the NH Bands may go away, please advise what the current status is.

Q (Related): When is AFLCMC removing tiers in AcqDemo?

A: AcqDemo continues to evolve as a personnel system and has flexibility to change. Future changes to AcqDemo will be discussed at the AFMC Executive Director forum in late February 2020. The Center is committed to communicate changes and maintain an open dialog to ensure employees understand rationale and impact of modifications to the system.

Q: Who can I call if I think I have a toxic leader?

A: Several resources are available to employees who believe they are being unfairly treated in the workplace. Resources include the employee's chain of command, servicing Employee/Labor Relations Office, and/or Equal Opportunity Office as appropriate. Determining the most appropriate way forward may depend upon the nature of the situation. In all cases, the servicing Employee/Labor Relations Office is available to assist with providing guidance and advise employees on the appropriate steps to take to resolve unfair treatment in the workplace.

Q: There's a perception the promotion selection process lacks transparency and objectivity. Thoughts on overhauling the process?

A: In AFLCMC we ensure that merit system principles captured in public law, such as "recruit, select and advance on merit after fair and open competition" and "treat employees and applicants fairly and equitably" occur through an environment of transparency. An overhaul of the promotion selection process in AFLCMC would run the risk of violating the principles captured in 5 U.S.C. 2301(b). When making hiring decisions, the Center consistently values candidates' experience, education, professional development and leadership capabilities. These values hold true regardless of the AFLCMC functional hiring or position a candidate is being hired to. These tenants support AFLCMC functionals in executing fair and equitable civilian hiring selections for both reassignment and promotion opportunities. While there is no plan at this time to overhaul the promotion selection processes in use by AFLCMC functionals, the Center will continue to uphold the Merit System Principles, captured in public law, to ensure selection and advancement are based upon relative ability, knowledge and skills, after fair and open competition.

Q: How do you deal with an employee who constantly argues with fellow employees? We've done MFRs and counseling.

A: The specifics will vary because every situation is unique, but in general: try to ascertain and address the root cause(s) of the arguments, try mentoring, and consult your Employee/Management Relations office concerning possible disciplinary measures.

Q: When hiring a supervisor, is the current process using generic questions the most effective way? Would interactive interviews with conversation be more effective?

A: There are several effective ways to conduct a candidate interview when filling a vacancy such as one-on-one, panel, and behavioral. Any type of interview is effective as long as they adhere to merit principles and avoid prohibited personnel practices as outlined in 5 U.S.C. 2301(b).

Q: Is there a mechanism to increase member's pay/series who's been in the position for more than 5, 10, 15 years?

A: For GS employees there are two methods their salary can be increased over a period of time while remaining within the same position. The first method is through recurring step increases (also referred to as within-grade increases). Step increases are periodic increases in a GS employee's basic rate of pay from one step of the grade to the next higher step of that same grade. To be eligible, employees must meet the following three requirements established by law: performance must be at an acceptable level of competence (i.e. most recent rating of record must be at least Level 3, "Fully Successful"; employee must have completed the required waiting period to the next higher step; must not have received an equivalent increase in pay during the waiting period; must occupy a permanent position or one that that does not have a time limitation of 1 year or less. Eligible employees must wait 52 weeks for advancement between steps 1, 2, 3 and 4; 104 weeks for advancement between steps 4, 5, 6 and 7; and 156 weeks for advancement between steps 7, 8, 9 and 10.

The other method a GS employee's salary may be increased while remaining in the same position is associated with the appraisal cycle and called a Quality Step Increase (QSI). A QSI is a faster than normal step increase used to reward employees at all GS grade levels who display high quality performance. For an employee to be eligible for management to reward them with a QSI during the appraisal process, the employee must be below step 10 of their grade level; have received the highest rating available under their performance management system; have demonstrated sustained performance of high quality; and not have received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.

AcqDemo employees have the opportunity to advance in pay annually during the Contribution-based Compensation and Appraisal System cycle. Depending on current salary and level of contributions to the mission, employees may be eligible for a Contribution Rating Increase which increases the employee's basic salary level to align their rate of pay with their level of their contribution in a position.

Q: There is probably <1% of employees that are poor performers, but have a negative impact. Are there any plans to make the removal process of poor performers easier?

A: At this time, Title 5, Section 432.104, Code of Federal Regulations, and AFI 36-704, Discipline and Adverse Actions of Civilian Employees determine actions appropriate for handling poor performance. Employees under the DPMAP system may be placed on a Performance Improvement Plan, while those under AcqDemo may be placed on a Contribution Improvement Plan. Failure to improve performance under either system within the specified time frame may result in removal from the position.

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Supervisors must first consult with the employee's servicing Civilian Personnel Section's Labor and Employee Management Relations Office for guidance when an employee is performing inadequately.

Q: The biggest frustration that we have within AFLCMC is how long it takes to fill vacancies. What is AFLCMC doing to decrease hiring timelines?

A: Civilian hiring remains a top priority for both the Air Force and AFLCMC. While the time to process a civilian fill action has decreased by nearly 50 days over the last two years, we recognize this does not account for all the time spent on filling jobs. AFLCMC is committed to develop a standardized civilian fill process with an accurate accounting of the time spent in each phase of the process so we can determine exactly where we have inefficiencies that need to be addressed. AFLCMC/DP is leading this initiative and just completed a Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) event in February that will be followed by the development of an IT solution that will allow us to systematically measure “pre-hiring” activities. Combined with the fill action process, AFLCMC will be able to measure the entire time to hire a civilian; something that has not yet been accomplished by the Air Force. The data collected on the pre-hiring activities will allow the Center to deep-dive any problem areas so that we can modify internal policy and procedures all so that we can speed up the hiring process.

Q: Is there a review of expanding the use supervisory offset pay to incentivize people to be supervisors?

A: Supervisory and Team Leader differentials can be used as a tool to incentivize and compensate supervisors and team leaders. However, they are not automatic by virtue of holding a supervisory or team leader position. Certain criteria, to include organizational level and scope, difficulty and value of the position, the level of difficulty in filling the position, and salary inequities between supervisors/team leaders and non-supervisors/non-team leaders, need to be met in order to substantiate the differential. In addition, the personnel action that moves an employee to a supervisory or team leader position must not result in an immediate increase in pay when clearly the employee assumed additional responsibilities (such as going from a non-supervisory position to a supervisory position), or the level, scope, difficulty, or value of the position to the organization has been determined by the functional to warrant such an increase. As this flexibility was recently adopted, AFLCMC will include the level of use and amount of differentials in its annual assessment of the AcqDemo program to evaluate if the differentials are meeting their intention of attracting, retaining, and motivating high-quality supervisors and team leaders.

Q: Promotion selection lacks transparency and objectivity. In short, the perception is, who you know outweighs what you know. Plans for overhauling the process?

A: In AFLCMC, a transparent and objective promotion selection process underpins our adherence to merit principles captured in 5 U.S.C. 2301(b). Since we are following merit principles today, there is no reason to overhaul our process. When making hiring decisions, the Center consistently values candidates' experience, education, professional development and leadership capabilities. These values hold true regardless of the AFLCMC functional hiring or position a candidate is being hired to. These tenants support AFLCMC functionals in executing fair and equitable civilian hiring selections for both

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