



Sloan Career Cornerstone Center

Profiles of Mechanical Engineers



Dale Pankow

**Technology Leader
Procter & Gamble
Cincinnati, OH**

Education:

MS, Mechanical Engineering, University of Illinois
BS, Mechanical Engineering, University of Illinois

Job Description:

Technology Leader, providing expertise within product development and manufacturing groups, in areas such as process engineering, packaging, distribution, and robotics.

Advice to Students:

"It's important for M.E. students to be aware of their options for work in technical engineering, research & development, sales, and management."

Comments:

"Much of my work involves the business side of the company, which puts me in touch with sales, research and development, and with the finance people."

Video Transcript 1:

"Procter & Gamble is my first job out of school, which was about three years ago. I just recently was promoted. So, my first job was as a product technical engineer, and my second role with Procter & Gamble was as a technology leader. A technology leader is actually what we call a second level manager. And, usually, what it means by technology leader is you do have an expertise in one technology, whether that be packing, distribution, or robotics."

Video Transcript 2:

"It wasn't that tough of a transition. Probably the biggest thing is, now, all of a sudden, everything's real. It's that realization that when you do that calculation, and you make that recommendation, it's going to be real. And it's really going to make a change, out there in the manufacturing site. And so you're really expected to deliver whatever that is."

Interview:

Pankow: One aspect of my job that I really like is that perhaps 60% to 70% of it is engineering. Much of my work involves the business side of the company, which puts me in touch with

"Profiles of Mechanical Engineers"

Prepared as part of the Sloan Career Cornerstone Center (www.careercornerstone.org)
Source: "Careers for Mechanical Engineers" © American Society of Mechanical Engineers

sales, research and development, and with the finance people. So, my typical day, right now, is probably going to look very different from three months from now. And it can vary -- right now I spend a lot of time in the office, working on technical documentation. Now, very shortly, I'm going to be spending most of the time working with vendors. Which means I'll probably be on the road working with an engineering design house. So, I'll be spending probably most of my time either at some other local offices, or traveling to these meetings.

Q: Your official job title and the company you work for?

Pankow: My name is Dale Pankow. I am twenty-six years old. I work for Procter & Gamble as a technology leader.

Q: What does a technology leader do?

Pankow: A technology leader is what we call a second-level manager. And usually what it means is you have an expertise in one technology, whether that be packing, distribution or robotics. And, at that time, you're at least a regional expert in that topic. You're able to work on projects and be a resource for other projects, and lead teams related to whatever technology you are knowledgeable in.

Q: Is Procter & Gamble your first job out of school?

Pankow: Procter & Gamble is my first job out of school, which was about three years ago. And I just recently was promoted. So, my first job was as a product technical engineer, and my second role with Procter & Gamble was as a technology leader.

Q: What was the progression?

Pankow: It was a very natural progression. The first promotion is based on leadership skills, and expertise in a technology. And when I came into Procter & Gamble, I started out on a large project. I very quickly gained experience in the technology, and got very grounded in it -- it was actually a distribution project. So, I got to be an expert on the technology there. And gradually, as we moved to the next project, I took a greater leadership role, and then it was very natural that I could go into any technology.

Q: Do you use the technical background you learned in school, now, in your job?

Pankow: I do use my educational background, but it's not as much as I initially thought I would. Very seldom do I use a particular class, where I pick out like thermodynamics -- "I'm using thermodynamics for this project." Or do I pick up and go, "OK, I remember that formula; I'm using this formula to solve a problem." Most of it is using the engineering skills that you learned throughout college, which are probably methodological. Making sure you know the right questions to ask, to penetrate the topic, to be data-based in your decision making. To be able to take data, to be able to analyze it, and draw conclusions from it. So, it's a lot more of what you would call "processes" that I use from my educational background.

"Profiles of Mechanical Engineers"

Q: Tell me a little bit about your college life.

Pankow: I definitely enjoyed college. I started in mechanical engineering. Completed my bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, and went on to get my Master's. If you asked me, going in, freshman year, if I was going to get my Master's, I would have probably said, "Not a chance; four years is plenty." But I hit that four-year mark, and I still wasn't a hundred percent sure where I wanted to go in industry. I still felt that I was gaining a lot of field knowledge, in college. And, so, I decided to go get my Master's. And that helped prepare me by getting some experience with industry, with my graduate work -- to help me know where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do, after graduation.

Q: Were you in school five years?

Pankow: I went to school for six years.

Q: And how did you happen to get hired by Procter & Gamble?

Pankow: The University of Illinois is where I went to college. And they have a very good placement program, where they bring companies in, and there's interviewing schedules set up. And that's how I got my first interview with Procter & Gamble. But working with Procter & Gamble recruiting, through various interviews, I started to get to know the company and the products they produce. I did have some friends that had knowledge of what Procter & Gamble was about, and some experience of how they treated their employees. And, so, all that turned out positive, the interviewing went well, and it was, apparently, a "win-win" on both sides. So, I was very happy.

Q: How do you spend a typical day? What's a typical day for you?

Pankow: It's kind of hard to say a typical day. Depending on what part of the process we're on, your typical day looks very different. So, my typical day, right now, is probably going to look very different from three months from now. And it can vary -- like, right now, I spend a lot of time in the office, working on technical documentation. Because we're kind of in the middle of a project, right now. The design phase. And, so, we're heavily working with vendors to look at equipment, trying to do option analysis, things like that. And most of my time is spent in the office. Now, very shortly, I'm going to be spending most of the time working with vendors, which means probably on the road, working with them. Working with an engineering-design house. So, I'll be spending probably most of my time either at some other local offices, or traveling to these meetings. And then, during the final phase of a project, you're spending a lot of time at the plant. So, you're at the manufacturing site, solving problems, sorting out the equipment and such. So, it's kind of hard to say that -- what is a typical day, because it varies from month to month and -- depending where you are in the project cycle.

Q: What kind of roles do you have in the company?

Pankow: I work on several teams. The base team that I work with is made up of various different kinds of engineering -- from controls, to electrical, to civil -- information systems. As well as the contacts from our manufacturing sites on the team. There are project managers. And, so, it's a very broadbased team to be able to deliver the type of projects we're delivering.

"Profiles of Mechanical Engineers"

Q: What about the marketing? Do you like that or not?

Pankow: One aspect I really like about my job is that only maybe sixty or seventy percent of it is engineering. A lot of it is more business. And what I mean by that is, we work a lot with sales, we work a lot with research and development. With finance. To be able to make sure that the engineering we're doing makes sense to the rest of the company. And, so, a lot of times, it's making that balance between what Sales requires and what we can deliver. So, it's working on a lot of the business aspects, as well as the engineering aspects.

Q: What kinds of engineering problems do you work on?

Pankow: We have a current piece of equipment that's producing quality product ninety-nine percent of the time. We want to take that to ninety-nine-point-five percent. and identify what needs to be changed. And work with the appropriate people to get it changed. Then make sure that you record the results, and make sure we deliver the changes as required. That might be one kind of project. Another project -- right now, we're producing a package that's size "two-liter." We want to do a whole new different package that's a four-liter size. What does that mean? Does that mean we have to put in a whole new line, a whole new system? Does it mean modification of the current system? So, it could be, "OK, here's the end product. We know what we manufacture today. Define the plan to get us from what we have today to be able to produce this new product."

Q: How much time would you say that you spend working? How many hours per week?

Pankow: I spend probably about fifty hours a week. Generally, I get into work about seven-thirty. Work 'til about five, five-thirty. It's all your personal drive. There's very little direction given to me to work overtime, or transitional hours. That's all personally driven, so that I can feel like I'm doing a good job on the job that I've been assigned to.

Q: Going from an academic environment to your work. What was the transition like?

Pankow: It wasn't that tough of a transition. Probably the biggest thing is, now, all of a sudden, everything's real. It's really easy, in college, to do problems -- to do work problems and go, "OK, the right strength that you need here is "X." Or, you know, something like that. But, now, it's that realization that when you do that calculation, and you make that recommendation, it's going to be real. And it's really going to make a change, out there in the manufacturing site. And so you're really expected to deliver whatever that is.

Q: What about professional certification?

Pankow: I took the engineering training test, while in college, or just finishing up college, and I did pass that. I've recently been thinking about getting my professional engineering license. It's something I had intended to do. Right now, it's something that I'm exploring. I want to talk to some other professional engineers, and look at my long-term career and say, "Does it make sense for me to go back, put forth that effort, to get the PE license?"

"Profiles of Mechanical Engineers"

Q: Tell me about the work environment.

Pankow: I work in a technical center. And it's relatively casual. Generally speaking, we wear slacks and shirts. Sometimes a tie, depending upon if you have a meeting that day or not. Many of my colleagues are my friends outside of work. I enjoy going to our company picnics, because it's nice to see the people you work with. And, we all go out and do lunch together. It's sad when somebody leaves, moves to another area. It's very friendly.

Q: Do you project any international assignments for yourself?

Pankow: Within Procter & Gamble, there is a large opportunity for international assignments. And that's both in the case of a long-term change, or a two-year or maybe a year assignment in another country. You gain that experience of working with a diverse group. They gauge your experience of what you've learned from the United States sites. I haven't had that opportunity, yet. I look forward to it.

Q: Do you find it difficult to balance personal life and your work life? And what are the boundaries there?

Pankow: You always have to keep things in perspective. In some sense, I mean, it's kind of work hard and play hard. I put in fifty hours a week, and I very much try to say, "I'm going to spend my work time thinking and doing work, and spend the necessary time there -- spend maybe an hour or two, later at night, staying at work, finishing up, doing a good job." But then, when I go home, probably that work stays at work. And it's time to do those things that I enjoy.

Q: What do you like to do with your time?

Pankow: Sports. Definitely. I love to play racquetball. I love to play volleyball. Just simple things like seeing movies. I enjoy fishing. All those kind of things.

Q: What is the best part of your job, then?

Pankow: The best part of the job is the people I work with. You know, your job is interacting. And, so, you've got to enjoy the people you work with -- these people here are fantastic. They're all very professional. They're all very good at what they do. And they're people, as you work with them, you get to be friends. And, so, I look forward to coming in to work, just saying "Hi" to people in the hallway, or having meetings, and discussing work and our personal lives, at the same time.

Q: What's a down side?

Pankow: The down side of my work is -- in order to deliver some of the projects, or all the projects, it's a real balance between cost, schedule and quality. Usually, if you want something faster, you've got to pay more for it. If you want it cheaper, you may not get the quality you want. And, so, we're in a kind of a middle position, where we're trying to balance all that.

"Profiles of Mechanical Engineers"