



## Managing Career Paths

Assisting employees in reaching their fullest potential

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*“The traveler that resolutely follows a rough and winding path will sooner reach the end of his journey than he that is always changing his direction, and wastes the hour of daylight in looking for smoother ground and shorter passages.”*

~Samuel Johnson

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The road to success is rarely a smooth, straight path. In fact, the career path of the Gen-Xer and Millennial employee is much more complex than the journey of the stereotypical early-Boomer employee who moved along a linear path for 30 years and stopped in the break room for a piece of cake and a gold watch before leaving to retire on a corporate pension. Now, before all you early-Boomer retirees contact me to tell me you never got a watch or a pension – remember I said, *stereotypical* and I am merely trying to point out that times have changed.

To clarify the difference between past and current career paths, let’s compare an early-Boomer with a Millennial employee. An example of the career path of an early-Boomer may have looked like this:

Financial Analyst → Senior Financial Analyst →  
Manager → Director → Vice-President of  
Finance → Chief Executive Officer

The career path of a Millennial may look something like this:

Begin in operations → Transfer skills learned in operations to a different role → Move onto something different

Though they are different, both are the product of career development. The previous issue of Measured Success! covered talent management strategies, including performance management. In this issue, we’ll examine one component of the performance management system, career development.

Career development includes managing the talent within an organization and helping employees create a relevant career path. What makes a relevant career path? Simply said, a relevant career path aligns a demand for talent with the supply of available people. It is important to create a relevant career path because, unlike the previously mentioned linear path, today’s career path zig-zags along a technology-savvy base while incorporating time to acquire new skills and competencies and nurture relationships and personal interests.

It is easy to see the zig-zag pattern of today would require some purposeful management, including coaching, corrective guidance, and performance feedback. Supervisors, in addition to completing the usual performance appraisals, need to regularly communicate to employees a vision of where the division is going, define the role of the employee in that vision, outline the responsibilities included in the employee’s job description, and provide a sense of how the employee will reach newly set career goals.

To adequately manage the talent within an organization, corporations may implement talent management strategies using a talent management committee to encourage current employees to “address their skills and knowledge gaps as a complement to their external talent acquisition efforts.”<sup>1</sup> The ultimate goal of the talent management committee is “to make strategic investments that put the best people in suitable roles at the right time to drive performance.”<sup>1</sup> This is a win-win situation for both the employer and the employee.

Without purposeful management of the career paths of your talented employees, an organization will, at the very least, discourage the employee resulting in low morale and productivity. In the worst-case-scenario, it may ultimately result in the employee moving onto another organization that provides more opportunity for growth and development.

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*“It does not matter what the company mission statement is or what the values say; people learn by carefully observing how others are succeeding around them.”<sup>1</sup>*

*~ Michael Rosenberg*

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## Measuring Success!

### *How to create a relevant career path*

The first step in creating relevant career paths rests solely on the shoulders of the organization.

**Reflect** on the dynamic, evolving business plan of the organization. The question must be asked, “Where is the organization heading – the vision – and where do the employees fit into the vision?” Additionally, the organization needs to update their organizational career paths. Management cannot point an employee down a career path within the organization if there are not clearly defined paths. Remember, this oftentimes is no longer an obvious linear path. The career paths should reflect the ever-evolving business plans of the organizations so the placement of the right

candidate on the predefined career path will benefit both employee and employer.

**Recognize** that job security and advancement depend on competencies, experience, and the achievement of goals, rather than the past model where length of service lead to job security and advancement.

**Review** corporate development opportunities with the employee. Ask the employee to reflect on their life events, strengths, and interests and then review the corporate developmental opportunities and create a plan to apply them to possible future positions within the organization. The manager’s role in this process is to recognize how their employee will move through the organization. Look for opportunities for personal development for the employee and provide the venues needed to achieve their personal goals.

**Encourage** employees to do a self-evaluation and inventory their interests, strengths, major life events, and opportunities for development. Management may wish to consider administering Inscape DiSC® profiles, available through HR Consultants, Inc., to assist in this step of the process.

**Put it in writing!** Without a written plan, the vision is clouded. The employee needs to visualize the steps needed to progress along the desired career path and write down the steps needed to achieve the goal. A development plan is most conveniently covered during a performance appraisal when the supervisor and employee are looking both backwards at past performance and forward to where the employee hopes to go. Items that should be addressed in a career development plan include:

- A specific goal
- A reason for setting the goal
- Specific action steps
- A general timeline
- Resources needed to accomplish the goal
- Metrics – A way to measure whether or not the goal was attained

Management may also offer appropriate enrichment opportunities. These may include workshops, online courses, educational benefits, and career assessments.

Colin Powell said, “There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.” Because the new career path model seems, at times, a bit complex, it is essential to keep employees energized. By helping the employee succeed in accomplishing a new challenge, the employer is paving the way for future successes, which of course is good for both employer and employee.

### Did You Know?

- 28% of employees sampled by NYU’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies, expect life-long careers <sup>2</sup>
- 50% of interviewing companies experienced a noticeable candidate shortage <sup>4</sup>
- 66% of companies surveyed plan to implement a competency management system <sup>4</sup>

### Sources and Recommended Reading

1. Brennan, M. and Gebavi, A. “Managing Career Paths: The Role of the CLO” *Chief Learning Officer* magazine, March 2008.
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3. Gardner, John W. Self-Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society (1995).
4. Romaine, C. “Staying Relevant: Competencies and Employee Relations.” *Information Outlook*, magazine. April 2004. <http://www.allbusiness.com/human-resources/employee-development-employee-ethics/924161-1.html>
5. Rosenberg, Michael. The Flexible Thinker: A Guide to Creative Wealth (1998).

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