



# It's Time to Prioritize Career Development

**Leaders who adopt these priorities are more likely to outshine those who don't.**

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Given the nature of today's workplace, there are a number of things pulling at business leaders' attention on any given day. Instantaneous access to information coupled with pressure to consistently meet the ever-escalating expectations of customers and shareholders offers fuel countless priorities and to-dos everyday.

But there's one priority that might serve leaders better than any other and drive sustainable business results: career development.

Whereas in the past career development was frequently relegated to "nice-to-do" or "when you get around to it," today it's increasingly being viewed as a necessity. Study upon study links career and talent development to valued business metrics, leading indicators and positive overall outcomes.

Despite the quantifiable connection between a focus on career development and what matters most to organizations, too few managers and leaders focus on career development. A recent pulse survey we conducted found that half of respondents felt that their managers are disinterested in their career development.

How would the employees in your organization rate managers overall? How would your employees rate you?



At the same time, this pulse survey also offers a hopeful message. Twenty-five percent of the respondents expressed their satisfaction and pleasure, indicating that

their managers fall on the “prioritized” end of the continuum and act as active partners, supporters and champions of career development.

Being able to learn, grow, expand capacity and work toward career goals is of vital importance to most individuals. It’s also of vital importance to organizations interested in exceeding customer demands, continuously improving products and services, and delivering shareholder value. Leaders who prioritize and put energy into career development find they are better able to deliver on both the business and human outcomes.

These leaders think and behave a little differently than others, putting daily behaviors and habits into practice that any leader can adopt. Try one or more of these priorities to demonstrate your commitment to the development of those around you.

### **Priority 1: Assume that everyone has the potential to learn and grow.**

Leaders who drive career development live by an abiding belief that every individual is valuable and capable of developing their skills and abilities further. This belief plays out in countless ways every day, conveying and inspiring greater confidence in others. Under these conditions, employees are willing to commit to learning, take risks, entertain instructive failure, and make enormous development strides in the process.

### **Priority 2: Focus on an opportunity-filled future.**

#### **Research Roundup: Career Development**

Career and talent development are among today’s hottest research topics. As a result, business leaders are learning more than ever about these pressing priorities.

- Gallup’s “State of the American Manager” study (<http://www.gallup.com/businessjournal/182228/managers-engaged-jobs.aspx>) reveals that employees who feel that their managers are invested in them as people are more likely to be engaged. Unfortunately, less than one-third of employees feel engaged, according to Gallup’s 2014 “State of the American

Workplace.” (<http://www.gallup.com/poll/181289/majority-employees-not-engaged-despite-gains-2014.aspx>)

- According to Korn Ferry Hay Group (<https://www.go2hr.ca/articles/key-driver-employee-engagement>) research, “Career development is consistently cited by employees as critical to their satisfaction with an organization, and a key reason why they may change jobs ... It is the most important aspect of a company’s reward program as far as talent retention is concerned. Yet it is an area where many employers do an incredibly poor job.”
- CEB research (<http://www.usc.edu/programs/cwfl/assets/pdf/Employee%20engagement.pdf>) finds that managers who are effective at developing employees drive 25 percent performance improvement and increase their retention by 40 percent.
- Josh Bersin of advisory and research firm Bersin by Deloitte states in a 2011 trend report (<http://www.bersin.com/Blog/post/BersinBasics-Pioneers-A-New-Way-To-Learn-The-Fundamentals-Of-Talent-Management.aspx>) that strong talent management is good business. “Companies with superior talent management practices generate 26 percent higher revenue per employee than their peers,” he writes.
- Last year, the CEB reported in its 2015 “Careers Employee Survey ” (<https://news.cebglobal.com/2015-11-16-Seventy-Percent-Of-Employees-Unhappy-With-Career-Opportunities>) that 70 percent of employees are dissatisfied with the future career opportunities within their organizations. In its 2014 “Departure View Exit Survey Summary,” CEB reported that 41 percent of departing employees ranked “future career opportunity” as the most dissatisfying attribute of previous job.

—*Julie Winkle Giulioni and Beverly Kaye*

Leaders who prioritize career development know how to generate enthusiasm, energy and a sense of hope by helping others envision the possibilities that might lie ahead. For employees, the future feels bright in the presence of these leaders because they consistently anticipate ways to connect what employees need to learn or experience with ever-changing workplace conditions. Because

these leaders coach their employees to always be pursuing multiple, flexible scenarios, plenty of chances to learn and advance will always be available along some of the possible paths being pursued.

### **Priority 3: Cultivate peripheral vision.**

Leaders committed to employee development are able to enjoy this confidence in the future in part because they are constantly scanning the environment. They keep their eyes on and continuously refine their understanding of the big picture. They remain hypervigilant to the factors that affect the business, the organizational culture and future opportunities, and they teach those around them to do the same. This focus forward and toward the future allows employees to make decisions today that will serve them well in the uncertainty of tomorrow.

### **Priority 4: Generously share information.**

Hoarders of information typically make terrible developers of people. Think about the managers under whose leadership you've grown the most. They likely communicated a lot. These individuals probably believed in the value of transparency; they knew that with the right information, employees could make the best possible decisions, both for the business and their own careers.

Employees are hungry for candid, forthright information about things that affect them. They don't want managers to tell them what they want to hear; they want what they need to hear — even if it's unpleasant or scary.

And sharing big picture information about the organization, its strategies, where it's headed and the challenges anticipated along the way will not only help people perform better but also give them crucial information about where they can add value and where opportunities might lie.

### **Priority 5: Dwell on strengths, talents and capabilities.**

Powerful developers of people don't frame the effort in terms of fixing problems, shoring up weaknesses or unraveling vulnerabilities. They know that the shortest and surest way forward and toward one's career goals is through their strengths and talents. Employees who are fortunate

enough to report to these leaders quickly learn to focus on what they do well and find ways to further magnify those capabilities. This approach is energizing and quickly establishes a positive context for development that infuses itself into all dimensions of work life, triggering an upward spiral of enthusiasm, engagement and results.

### **Priority 6: Treat career development as a daily part of the leadership role.**

Managers who prioritize career development understand that it's not a human resources function — it's a leadership function. They don't see it as the annual exercise of checking boxes but rather as the daily exercise of checking in with others.

Research has shown that the more frequently managers meet with those who report to them, the more engaged team members will be. In customer service, it's long been understood that that every customer contact is an opportunity to build the emotional connection between the customer and service provider. The same holds true for managers and their employees. More positive points of contact build rapport, trust, engagement and commitment.

Formal, scheduled connections like one-on-ones, performance appraisals and individual development planning sessions are just a small part of the conversational repertoire. These leaders recognize and seize small moments within the context of daily work to connect, offer feedback, acknowledge effort, praise results, explore learning, or just ask how things are going. These conversations are spontaneous, ad-hoc, unplanned and tremendously powerful in terms of institutionalizing career development.

### **Priority 7: View talent as an enterprisewide resource.**

Our field research suggests that one of the key factors keeping managers from engaging in career development is that they are concerned about developing people only to see them leave for a better opportunity. A 2015 survey from advisory and technology firm CEB backs this up. Nearly 60 percent of the human resources executives who responded paint a dismal snapshot of managerial generosity, indicating that managers in their organizations don't share talent.

Leaders who prioritize career development see things differently. They recognize that as skills and experience increase, employees might need challenges that are no longer available in their current roles. As a result, these leaders help find other opportunities — even if it means losing a key player. They realize that developing individuals raises the bar for the entire group. They also realize that the reputation they develop for helping others grow makes them a talent magnet, able to attract a steady stream of capable individuals.

### **Priority 8: Use the value of peer-to-peer support.**

Leaders know that they can't — and shouldn't — do it all. They realize that each of their own direct reports has not only the skills and abilities to apply to their jobs but also the coaching and counsel to offer each another. They take advantage of this.

Others' input benefits personal and professional growth in most areas. As a result, employees who can seek and offer feedback freely and effectively experience accelerated development. In the process, they also master a core supervisory skill that may prepare them for a future role.

Prioritizing career development is a good thing for leaders at every level — because it creates the conditions for people and organizations to thrive.

Besides, of all the things to prioritize, shouldn't the growth of employees be at the top of a leader's list?



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