

Onward & upward: How to use career pathing to support employees' development

Want to retain more of your top performing employees, increase engagement and productivity, and support their interests and future goals? Introduce your team to career pathing, a training and development tool designed to help employees design a plan that defines the opportunities they want to pursue over the course of their career, and maps out the steps they need to take to accomplish their goals.

Here's a closer look at career pathing, and how to introduce this process into your department.

Why career pathing is mutually beneficial to managers and employees

When you hire employees, much of the onboarding process is dedicated to helping the employee understand how to apply existing skills to be a top performer.

Unfortunately, few employers put as much emphasis or attention on the opportunities that exist for employees once they've comfortably settled into the role they were hired into.

The side effect? Employees eventually stop being challenged, and start feeling stuck.

In fact, Randstad's 2015 Employer Branding Survey revealed that lack of opportunities to develop outranks salary as the reason employees choose to leave an employer. When good employees leave a company, managers, employers and employees all suffer. The employee may not want to change jobs, but may feel there are no other options to advance otherwise.

Career pathing attempts to eliminate this problem entirely. It maps a plan so employees understand what opportunities they may be able to pursue within the company when the time comes, and details the skills and experience they need to secure those roles, based on their goals and interests. A career path in no way guarantees employment, but it may make employees may feel an additional sense of loyalty to an employer who prioritizes their career satisfaction in the present, and future.

The elements a career path includes

A thorough career path should identify the potential paths to advancement for an employee based on her skills, interests, and career objectives; it may include a series of lateral or vertical moves, based on goals.

To create an effective career path, employees and managers need to be equally involved in the creation process and execution of the plan. Here are some simple ways to initiate the process:

Ask employees to complete a self-assessment of the tasks they enjoy doing (whether part of their current role or unrelated to it), along with their perceived skills and strengths, and interests and future goals. Ask them to consider what they value, which may include factors like money, power, influence, fulfillment, or work-life balance.

Review the employee's assessment together; provide feedback about areas of opportunity you see that they may not have noted. Often, employees undervalue important skills that come easily to them, or are unusually self-critical about areas of weakness.

Discuss the timeline an employee would like to implement into the career path. Some goals may be ten years into the future, while others may work on a one- or two-year timeline.

Share your knowledge about functions in the company that may relate to the interests they've expressed. A career path considers the information in the employee's self-assessment to suggest areas of opportunity he or she can work toward, whether in your department, or other parts of the company. The intent is not to list positions that are vacant today, but to give the employee an idea of what roles she may be able to start preparing for now, so she is qualified and ready to apply when the time comes.

Once each employee has a career path, make an effort to provide each individual with relevant opportunities to connect with mentors, other teams in the company related to his or her goals, and to participate in courses that support learning and development. You may not want to see the employee leave your team, but your support is critical to their professional potential in their current role, and whatever they pursue in the future.