

# Let 'em grow! Make career development a priority for your employees

A strong job market demands that you invest the time and energy into career development to help current staff evolve into stronger performers.

In fact, 94% of employees surveyed by LinkedIn said they would stay with a company that invested in their career development.

Though your human resources department may offer career development-related benefits like access to self-paced courses or attendance at key industry events, managers play a crucial role in continually guiding employees in the professional direction they desire, and building upon their strengths and interests.

Here are four ways all managers can start to build a team culture that prioritizes learning and development.

**1. Make the employee the owner of career development conversations.** Career development conversations should be a two-sided exchange between employee and manager—but ultimately, the employee should be in the driver's seat.

Establish scheduled meeting times (ideally, at least once a quarter) to discuss where the employee is currently, whether she wants to remain in that place for at least the next six months, and where she wants to be professionally within the next two to five years.

Based on the information, suggest tangible work the employee can do to progress toward her development goals, and agree upon milestones that will measure her gradual success. When it comes to employee development, remember that the manager's role should be more as a supportive coach, and less like the decision-maker. The employee should own all of the goals in her development plan and the steps she'll take to work toward them. It should not be a "wish list" of what she can or will do on your team in the future that she simply agrees to abide by, or even one that limits her development potential only to skills that directly apply to her current role and responsibilities.

**2. Suggest specific development tools.** More than half of the employees surveyed by LinkedIn said they'd take a professional development course their manager suggested.

While self-paced, online learning tools have made it easier and more cost-efficient for employers to provide access to professional development, an effective effort requires more than pointing employees to a library of courses.

Take the time to suggest specific learning tools for the employee based on your ongoing conversations and progress toward the goals established in them. In continuing development conversations, discuss what the employee learned in the courses and whether she perceived the material as valuable.

**3. Establish a cadence and format for future conversations (and stick to it).** You and your employees are busy with daily work demands. As a result, development conversations tend to get pushed to the back

burner (and sometimes abandoned completely) when high-priority deadlines loom. Schedule recurring meetings in a format that you both agree is effective to prevent this from happening, and ask the employee to own the process of agenda-creation for each.

Treat every subsequent meeting with as much importance and priority as you would if the employee told you they had a significant work issue, or were thinking of leaving the company.

**4. Help the employee find time for development.** Nearly 70% of employees surveyed by LinkedIn prefer to learn at work.

Yet, finding the time to learn is the number one reason talent development is a challenge for both employees and employers. Encourage employees to block time on their work calendar to take development education consistently, and to consider those efforts as part of their workload.

While this may mean employees have slightly less bandwidth to take on overflow work from time to time, consider it a longer-term strategy: Continual employee development closes skill gaps, enhances employee engagement, builds stronger teams, retains valuable employees and can deliver significant value to the company at large.