



Competitive employers make career development programs a priority



LEARNING AT WORK

BARBARA GREENE

What do the most prestigious and well-managed companies have in common? They invest in employee career development programs.

Such programs emphasize a vision that embraces the connection between organizational success and employee career development. Employers provide the tools, environment, and skill development opportunities for employees, and then employees are better equipped to serve the company and build it to its potential.

Organizational career development programs started being developed in response to the changing nature of employees' career expectations and desires. The traditional psychological contract between employers and employees in which lifelong employment was guaranteed has ended. The recognition that employees own their own career and will display that sense of ownership through switching both jobs and career fields multiple times has led companies to quit ensuring lifelong employment.

Employers focus more on helping employees build employability so that they are able to make any number of career changes — vertically or laterally. The hierarchies that once made straight career paths simple are disappearing,

and organizations have become flatter.

Besides the structure of organizations, the way that their degree of competitiveness is measured has changed too. It is no longer measured in purely financial terms; rather, the skills, abilities, and emotional intelligence of the workforce define competitiveness. Likewise, employees seek opportunities to build the type of skills that will make them competitive, whereas monetary compensation used to be paramount to employees.

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Organizations have acted in response to the new needs of their employees by providing them with the means to develop their skills. Employees no longer have to leave a company in order to grow. But for both the organization and the employees to benefit from a career development program, they must partner to assume an equitable share in its success.

Organizations can encourage employees to manage their own careers and help them to do so, and employees need to follow through on the responsibility of managing their own career development. By

offering career development to employees, companies can enhance their productivity and reputation while simultaneously gaining employee trust and commitment.

They can also promote more employees from within their company because they have developed and easily identified their internal leaders. Career development programs help provide employees with a way to thrive in their current job while also supplying the means to make either a horizontal or vertical career move possible. Employees can thus feel prepared to contribute in more ways if their company or their interests change.

In theory, the goal of having a career resilient workforce seems simple. In practice, however, it requires ample resources and time. However, because companies increasingly recognize the return on investment of career development, such programs are becoming more prevalent.

As with all organizational initiatives, designing a career development program that matches the culture of the organization is vital. Organizations of every size and type can reap the benefits of an organizational career development program.

The program

Career development initiatives can take the following forms:

1. Budget allowances for customized career plans. Each employee maintains an individual budget for learning opportunities and personal development. They decide how to utilize that money.

2. Career center on-site or on-line career centers encourage employees to participate in a variety of career development initiatives. A library for employees to check out resources is available. Workshops that address managing your career, worklife integration, time management and positioning yourself for a new position and other career development topics are offered continually. Career coaches are available to provide career information and guidance.

3. Formal mentoring programs match experienced professionals with novices. Mentorship is a flexible and valuable means to share knowledge through experience.

4. Role reversal. Have employees temporarily work in different positions. This makes them more aware of the operations of the organization.

5. Corporate campus. Companies teach courses on-site through partnerships with local colleges, agreements with consultants, or internal staff.

6. Alliance building. Executives from

non-competing companies meet regularly. They share solutions to everyday problems, to inspire each other, and to learn from each other.

7. Career success team. A small group of employees from the same department or a mixture of departments meets monthly to support one another in achieving their career goals. Career specialties, gender, high talent and other diverse groups can also determine success teams.

8. Executive coaching. Executives meet with an external coach for regular one-on-one sessions. The sessions can be performance-based or can serve as preparation to help the executive lead the organization in a new direction.

Strategies for employers

The following are some tips for employers interested in forming career development strategies in the workplace.

- Expect employees to establish a vision of their career so that they can feel a sense of personal responsibility and empower-

ment.

- Help employees identify strategies to achieve their career goals. Expect individuals to be accountable for achieving their career goals.

- All goals set must be directly related to the current and anticipated needs of the organization. Keep employees informed about the company's direction, business plans, and goals.

- Redesign managers' performance evaluations to include responsibility for employee development.

- Connect compensation and promotion to success.

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