

Crafting Career Strategies with your Staff

Three Core Responsibilities: In his book, *“The Practice of Adaptive Leadership”* Professor Ronal Heifetz says, *“Whether you are the president of a country or company, a hospital administrator or the head of an advocacy organization, or simply (simply?) a parent, your functions in your authority role are largely the same. You have three core responsibilities, to provide: (1) direction, (2) protection, and (3) order. That is, you are expected to **clarify roles and offer a vision** (direction), **make sure the group, organization, or society is not vulnerable and can survive external threat** (protection), and **maintain stability** (order).”* To help your organization and staff navigate today’s VUCA world, one thing that you can do is crafting career strategies with your staff. In so doing, you need to balance the needs of the organization with the interests of its employees.

Step1: Conduct Staff Development Interviews

Talk to you direct report about their interests and skills, organizational fit, work values, and their vision of the future. You must keep in mind that, it’s different from performance management we discussed last week. Performance management is about optimizing current capabilities and staff development is about investing in the future capabilities. Thus, the nature of the conversation will be more like “How can I help you to be more successful?” and less like “Why haven’t you delivered your promise?”.

Step 2: Suggest Developmental Opportunities

Based on their response, suggest training opportunities for them including in-house or external training, professional conferences and books they should read. Urge them to meet with HR, conduct informational interviews in the company, or pitch you on a job redesign.

Step 3: Refresh their Responsibilities

With the changes in organizational strategy and maturity of job roles, you might want to refresh and renew responsibilities of your staff so that their day-to-day work is better aligned with their larger aspirations. **Redefine their job** so that they do more work they’ll enjoy and learn from. You can also **find a mentor** for them within our team who can teach them the skills they want to know. **Delegate stretch assignments** that will help them grow or expose them to different parts of the company.

Don’t limit their growth: Gone are the days of unidirectional career path: up, in whatever stream of the business they’d already landed in. Today’s world of lateral career moves means you and your employees can be creative about crafting career strategies that are responsive to their- and the company’s- needs. Some of the above options will require your employees to spend time away from your team, working in other parts of the company other managers. Don’t look at this as losing their time. A well-conceived assignment will benefit the whole organization.

As professor Clayton M. Christenson put it aptly, *“the only metrics that will truly matter to my life are the individuals whom I have been able to help, one by one, to become better people”*, developing the capabilities of your people is one of the most important and rewarding responsibilities you have as a manager.

Key Reference: *Harvard Business Review: Manager’s Handbook*