

Career Development: The Process

By Paul L. Gerhardt, Jr.

Introduction

Human Resource managers and personnel should keep in mind that many employees are consistently seeking a workplace that satisfies his or her personal needs. Let's face it, the workplace is changing and it is getting harder to compete for good employees. Therefore, in order to keep employees from leaving and also recruiting new good employees--policies and systems need to be developed and implemented in order to maintain a strong and competitive organization. Likewise, employees need to take a proactive stand in his or her career development to maintain a competitive edge and feeling of successfulness in the workplace. I have discovered that key elements of career development are: proper communication, insight, analysis, forecasting, development and initiative.

Body

Michael Dell of Dell computers started his business from his dorm room, before dropping out of college. He once said something that should be kept in mind by Human Resource professionals, "No job will be as beneficial to you as one to which you can make a wholehearted commitment. The secret is in finding where your true talents, motivations and loyalties reside. Only you can do that."¹ Having said that, I believe that HR professionals should create an environment that inculcates the spirit of Michael Dell's wise words. This paper was derived from the exploration of case studies and interviews of successful professionals who have thoughts and insight about career development. This information has been developed to help both the employee and HR professional—alike, to prosper in the ever-changing work environment.

The economy is producing jobs faster than families have been producing workers. By 2008 there will be 6.2 million more jobs than people to fill them, according to government projections. The average employee has 12 to 15 jobs over the course of a career, five to seven of them by age 30, and stays an average of 3.6 years, according to research by Walker Information Global Network, a workplace consulting firm, and Hudson Institute, a think tank. "There's a churning process that's a function of a dynamic economy, where companies are in a

constant state of re-engineering themselves," says Hudson Institute analyst Richard Judy, coauthor of **Workforce 2020**. "It's disconcerting for people who expect the world to be more stable, but the gold watch has been passé for a long time."² With this in mind, I believe HR professionals should really develop systems that assist employees with constant training and also be working to develop more effective means of recruitment to fill the new positions. Likewise, employees need to be consistent and proactive about updating his or her skills and education to be more qualified to fill new positions. Those are the major philosophies behind the processes of career development.

Therefore, HR professionals have a real chore ahead of them in the next couple of decades. Salaries must be competitive, of course. Companies like Starbucks offer all their employees full-benefits--this is a start. But employers who want to distinguish themselves must do it by "...creating an environment in which talented people want to work--and that goes way beyond pet-sitting and latte machines," says management consultant Bruce Tulgan, author of **Winning the Talent Wars** (to be published soon by W. W. Norton). HR Professionals should be consistently looking for ways to develop processes and create dream jobs and excellent work environments to keep their organizations competitive and prosperous. The Microsoft Corporation has been a pioneer in doing just that. I believe that that is one huge reason for their success.

In recent employee surveys (Foote Partners' quarterly polls of IT workers in more than 800 companies.): "Workers want opportunities for growth and advancement. Sure, they'd like to make more money, but when they're up against the decision to stay with their current employers or fly the coop, career progression beats cold, hard cash hands down."³ HR professionals need to realize that today's employees desperately want to discuss their career goals with their bosses. This year's ***ComputerWorld*** job-satisfaction survey (April 24) indicated that 43% of IT workers are either "somewhat" or "very" dissatisfied with the opportunities available to them. Career development programs need to be developed that could include interviews with current employees to find out what is on their minds and what it will take to keep them from leaving the company. The IBM Corporation is well aware of those statistics and is active in developing HR strategies in career development as mentioned in this paper.

What should HR professionals do? According to *Providence Business News*⁴:

First, accept that lack of commitment is the major reason for losing good people. You need to manage your employees' commitment in order to successfully motivate and retain them, not simply pander to their whims and capricious natures.

Next, connect everything possible to career development, giving your workers a clear one- to five-year view of where their careers with you can lead. Create formal programs for moving people ahead but not up some proverbial "ladder" that emphasizes budget control, years of service and number of direct reports under them. Base advancement instead on core skills and competencies that staffers must demonstrate and that have explicit links to business goals and objectives. Identify specific measures of success, craft a goal-directed future for each employee and then manage their commitment to those goals. Develop mutual expectations between managers and workers, and work diligently to achieve them. This is more art than science, so train your managers appropriately. Give them a feeling of belonging to an objective, a project or a team pursuit, and make the workplace a pleasant place to work.

Make certain that incentives and rewards are fair, plentiful, varied and tied to both individual and team success with a view to overall enterprise success. Assign coaches or mentors because - let's face it - managers of projects (to which workers are increasingly assigned as their basic work domain) usually don't have the time or skills to help employees manage their careers and professional growth.

Human Resource personnel must consider a couple of very important features in order to keep employees from leaving. According to Judith Clare, director of Career Services at Bryant College, "Graduates want security and not only a fat paycheck. This generation, definitely values enjoying their tasks and their talents."

Human Resource managers could administer this test to employees and themselves in order to create an environment that keeps employees happy and from leaving and going to other organizations, such as an Internet start-up company, as is a current trend. The test, "Rate Your Job," analyzes the level of satisfaction in the workplace⁵:

1. Are you compensated fairly?

a. Yes, I have the upside potential of an Internet start-up.

b. My upside is limited, but I have the security of a brick-and-mortar company.

c. Every time I ask my boss about money, I get hit upside the head with a brick.

2. You're traveling week after week, but it's worth it because you regularly receive:

a. Plenty of bonuses and promotions.

b. Plenty of stock options.

c. Plenty of frequent-flier miles and a boatload of those little bags of peanuts.

3. You work hard, but at least you get:

a. Half days on Fridays.

b. Three-day weekends all year.

c. Three weekends all year.

4. With whom would you say you have the best working relationship?

a. Your boss.

b. Your co-workers.

c. Your headhunter.

5. How do people think of you?

a. Six or seven people wish they had your job.

b. Six or seven people wish you'd do your job.

c. Six or seven people make you do their jobs.

6. Are you exposed to new projects and technology?

a. I'm stuck on one project.

b. I get to work on lots of different projects and get all the technology I can handle.

c. I'll have to work on lots of different projects until I find a technology I can handle.

7. How flexible is your employer about telecommuting?

a. Not at all; we have to work at the office.

b. Very flexible; we get to work from home.

c. Somewhat flexible; we have to work at the office and work more when we get home.

8. Describe your office's teamwork and culture.

a. We work effectively in project teams.

b. I'm more effective working by myself.

c. We used to work in project teams - until everybody quit, and now I'm doing this whole stinking project by myself.

9. Are you a mobile employee? How do you feel?

a. Yes, I'm mobile and feel isolated and alone.

b. Yes, I'm mobile, but thanks to e-mail, voice mail and pagers, I never feel alone.

c. Yes, I'm mobile, and thanks to e-mail, voice mail and pagers, I'm never left alone.

10. Finally, rate your loyalty - how long do you plan to stay at this employer?

a. Till I finish this year.

b. Till I finish this project.

c. Till I finish this sentence.

How did you score? Our panel of experts has determined that if most of your answers were:

A - You're probably in the wrong job.

B - You're definitely in the wrong job.

C - You might be better suited for a career in tollbooth fare collection.

Although this test was designed for high tech employees, it can be modified to fit any organization. The concept is simple but allows for new perspectives in career development that both HR professionals and all employees could yield growth and insight from.

HR professionals need to investigate questions in the processes of career development that identify needs, planning; implementing plans and also analyze successes before identifying further needs. This should be done gradually. "All your learning needs cannot be tackled at once, so you need to prioritize." Explains Jayesh Patel, CEO of a London pharmacy, "Be ambitious, but realistic. Set yourself deadlines to help focus your mind on the task⁶." I believe this to be good advice, useful for both HR professionals and individuals—alike.

Career development takes effort by both employers and employees. Employers need to be proactive in career development philosophy and about creating a work environment that allows and promotes employee growth. HR professionals should take the lead in identifying the

needs of his or her organization's employees in the processes of career development. This can begin with simple conversations or interviews.

Organizations are made up of people, and it takes a great deal more money to consistently train new employees than to educate current ones and assist them in career development within his or her current organization. When it comes right down to it, employees must realize that they direct their own careers. If they want to maintain up-to-date knowledge and skills. They must take the first steps. Employers must create working environments that motivate employees and provide them with the means to improve their intellectual assets as they contribute to the organization's goals. Human Resource management and professionals must take on new and different tasks than the traditional Personnel Department. The department should become more involved in job design, job relations, performance evaluation and the "other people" tasks that affect the productivity of knowledge workers.⁷

Conclusion

The processes of career development are critical to be constantly considered by both HR professionals and employees—alike. The workplace is rapidly changing. The economy is shifting with technology. New jobs are being created faster than there are qualified people to fill them. HR professionals need to be proactive in developing systems, processes and policies that promote employee growth within his or her organization. They need to create an environment in which employees will want to stay in and compete for promotions. Forecasting, interviewing, recruitment and analysis are even more crucial than ever before for HR professionals. Career development involves communication, education and training. Both HR professionals and individuals--alike need to do their parts in staying ahead of the career game and keeping themselves and their organization moving forward as time goes on.

Endnotes/Bibliography

¹ Gibson, Stan. "Career moves: Where will destiny lead?" *eWeek*, Dec. 4, 2000, p.63.

² Anne Kates Smith; Joellen Perry; Sage Dillon; Tim Smart. "Charting your own course." *U.S. News & World Report*, Nov. 6, 2000 v129 i18 p.56.

³ Foote, David. "Want to keep your staff happy? Think 'career'." *ComputerWorld*, Oct 9, 2000 p.38.

⁴ Gavin, Karen. Job options plus growth potential inspire grads. **Providence Business News**, May 29, 2000, p.1B.

⁵ Cohn, Michael. "Happy at work? Take this test, and you could be." **ComputerWorld**, July 3, 2000 p.25.

⁶ "Variety is key to continuing professional development." **Chemist &Druggist**, Mar. 25, 2000. P. 26.

⁷ Gautschi, Ted. "Are you employable?" **Design News**, June 5, 2000, p. 188.