

Fostering a culture of learning

As a people leader, it's in your job description to encourage the professional development of your team. Offering meaningful motivators and education can help your employees live up to their full potential, feel empowered to make a difference within their role, stay loyal to your organization and ultimately, positively impact your bottom line.

Moving Beyond the Status Quo

High potential employees won't be satisfied with the status quo and these are the employees you want on your team. If given the guidance and support they want and need, they will be the future leaders of your organization. But ignore them or quash their desire for personal and professional growth, and you will likely lose them to the competition. To encourage and maintain a work environment that promotes a culture of growth and learning, remember to:

Check in. Regularly evaluate your employees' performances by offering both positive feedback and suggestions for improvement. Schedule frequent discussions with staff about their short and long-term career goals based on their strengths, interests and experiences and together create a plan for how to get there. These are great ways to not only encourage career progression, but also show genuine interest in the people you manage.

Branch out. Start a mentoring program in your workplace that will cost nothing and benefit everyone. Pairing less-experienced employees with your seasoned veterans will allow established employees to share their expertise, while giving newer employees a first-hand look at what they need to do to succeed. If possible, find ways for your high-performing employees to train in roles outside of their comfort zone. "Cross-training" will offer you a more skilled workplace while giving your employees a chance to explore other directions. Make a point of finding out what professional interests your employees have and how this may fit in with your organization's HR needs.

Reward the standouts. Take the time to notice, acknowledge and celebrate individual accomplishments—even if it's as simple as a thank-you note, acknowledgement of an individual's efforts to the team or a team lunch. Don't make the common mistake of neglecting your strong employees just because they don't need a lot of supervision. Everyone appreciates the occasional pat on the back. If responsibilities change and new opportunities arise, reward your employees for the extra work by making sure their titles and job descriptions reflect these changes.

Open the lines. Employees often think of suggestions and ideas for change that could really benefit your organization, but struggle with how to be heard. Encourage idea sharing, by reiterating its importance and ensuring there's a clear process for getting these suggestions to upper management. This will make employees feel like their opinions matter and can provide you and your organization with some fresh perspectives.

Hire and promote from within. Always let your team know when a position is available before opening the opportunity up to the public. Although you will expect the same high standards from all applicants, be sure to give first consideration to your in-house candidates. If you work for a large organization, consider holding an internal job fair a couple of times a year, always make sure that the positions are clearly posted and that it's easy for staff to check on and apply for new jobs. Hiring internally will boost the morale of the whole team, offer the motivation to develop their skills and encourage employees to look up instead of out.

Support education. Whether it's covering tuition costs or allotting funds for educational opportunities throughout the year, your employees need to know about these perks and take advantage of them. If your organization can't pay for high-priced degrees or workshops, try to compensate for this by being understanding of school commitments, allotting work hours for study time, or setting them up with a more senior "tutor." You may also consider hosting your own resource library to share industry-related information with the team or holding lunch and learns to bring in experts on a variety of topics. These efforts actively demonstrate your organization's commitment to creating a skilled and talented workplace.

By understanding the importance of and enthusiastically supporting your teams' professional development, you'll ensure everyone—you, your staff, and your organization as a whole—will reap the benefits. A little extra work and a lot of support will help your team enjoy higher job satisfaction, better retention rates and an increased commitment to your organization.

If you require support to deal with a sensitive employee situation, contact LifeWorks·fgi to find out more about the consultation and training services your Employee Assistance Program provides.