

# The Employer's Share

## Career Development & Pathing is a 50/50 Proposition

*Issues around career pathing and development were among the top concerns for both talent and the executives that hire them, according to 24 Seven's 2013 Salary and Job Market Study. No doubt feeling the pressure to deliver on career growth promises made to talent, executives reported that planning career paths has risen as an issue that makes their managing/leading more difficult. Unfortunately, these executives aren't getting organizational support in the form of established processes or philosophies around talent development. Six out of ten executives reported that their company doesn't have a formalized approach to managing high-potential talent.*

*With an improving job market, and the majority of talent surveyed looking to make a career move in the coming year, there has never been a more opportune time for companies to make talent career pathing a priority. Our survey shows that when talent feels fulfilled, developed and cared for professionally, their attrition likelihood decreases. An investment in talent development slows the cycle of continuous recruiting and training required to replace the highly-skilled but disillusioned talent that's walking out the door.*

**Take temperatures frequently.** Organizations can stave attrition by assessing talent engagement on a regular basis to understand what's driving job satisfaction and recalibrating professional development plans accordingly. This assumes that there are career development procedures and programs in place to direct talent towards. If not, read on.

**Invest in formal training processes and programs.** There is no doubt that training programs can be costly but organizations need to view these not as an expense, but in an investment with recurring interest. When taking talent temperature, ask questions about skills that need shoring up, or new ones that need to be added – these can be related to job function but also to the individual's managerial level. Identify content experts within or outside the organization to work with employees in developing these skills. Get creative to keep costs down – like doing Brown Bag Lunch meet-ups, hosting guest speakers, creating your own knowledge-transfer webinars, or finding free training modules on the web. The key is to establish a formal process that identifies development needs and to actively seek ways to help employees learn and grow. Talent surveyed in our study reported that employers that demonstrate a caring for the employee's career 'wellness' are extremely sought after.

**Establish mentorship and coaching programs.** Connect employees with senior professionals within the organization to impart career advice, functional expertise and management guidance. Consider reverse mentorship relationships too – for example having a Gen Y employee teach a Boomer about social media. Make the process official with established guidelines about meeting frequency and achievement goals.

**Empower managers.** Effective managers are keenly aware of the skills deficiencies on their teams. Give managers the discretionary budget to provide development opportunities for their direct reports as needed. The benefits of this are tri-fold. The empowered manager feels good about themselves, and gets additional satisfaction knowing they have a direct impact on talent development and operations improvement. The professional development opportunity inspires goodwill between the manager and trainee. The company benefits from happier, more engaged, and better skilled talent.



### Clearly map all potential career paths – up, across and diagonally.

Very often talent feels frustrated because the only career path they are aware of is being filled by someone else above them. This is often because talent only considers the traditional vertical career ladder climb. Open their eyes to all the possibilities and minimize the likelihood that talent will jump ship. Ask yourself: are there other viable routes available to talent besides 'up' in your organization? Is talent aware of these alternatives? Does recognize transferable experience or have support systems in place (like job shadowing) so that talent can move along these alternate routes? Map out multiple internal opportunities in other divisions, teams and locations to keep talent interested even if the next job immediately above them isn't yet available.

**Communicate and celebrate career journeys.** Actively promote that interesting and successful careers don't always follow a traditional path. Sell the dream and the journey, highlighting how detours keep the trip interesting while ultimately reaching the desired career destination. And to further market the concept, make sure lateral career moves are celebrated with as much fanfare as vertical ones. This will drive the idea home that success at your company is measured by how a role adds value to the organization, not just by securing the next level title and a foothold on the subsequent rung of the organizational ladder.

**Make promises you can keep.** Perhaps the most important aspect about keeping talent happy about their career path is being honest and transparent at all times – from the hiring process and throughout their tenure at the organization. Our study found that talent disillusionment, and hence restlessness, came when career path and development expectations weren't met. Make sure your career path conversation includes training initiatives, mentoring programs and alternate career maps as dimensions of career development at your organization.

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# The Employee's Half of the Deal

## Career Development & Pathing is a 50/50 Proposition

**A**cross the globe, a common issue is keeping professionals up at night. 24 Seven's 2013 Salary and Job Market Study revealed that career concerns top the list of insomnia-inducers. Talent is most anxious about their career pathing: opportunities to advance, to develop professionally and to add marketable skills.

Often, talent makes the assumption that these worries should be their employer's concerns too. But the harsh reality is this – no one will care more about your career than you. Certainly, a smart employer has processes and plans in place to develop their talent pool, and to keep them happy and loyal. But our study shows that this is the exception, not the rule. So when it comes to your career, there are certain regular steps you must actively take on your own to ensure a long, fruitful, evolving and marketable career:

**Get the most out of every job.** Every role is a stepping stone to the next one. Keep a running list of your accomplishments and skills or concepts you have learned. Even entry level jobs or temporary ones provide important building blocks from which you can stretch. Make sure you are able to quantify accomplishments whenever you can (for example: how much time or money did you save your company, did you increase revenue or customer traffic - real or virtual.) Master each opportunity and document it as evidence that you're ready for the next stepping stone.

**Network from within.** Connect with managers within your department and in other areas at your company that interest you. Learn about what they do and talk up your work – there may be opportunities you don't know about that they might see you as a perfect fit. Alternatively, if you are aware of an opening you might want, it's easier to approach someone you have a relationship with than someone who doesn't know you at all.

**Identify a mentor or a paragon.** Seek out someone within your organization that's on the career track you think you might want to follow. Approach them about mentorship – they may be willing to meet with you regularly to help you make career decisions and identify ways to ramp up the skills you need to stay on track. Or identify a paragon (a shining example) outside the organization whose career you admire (maybe it's the Creative Director of a Fashion Brand). Research their career online to learn the steps they took to get to where they are today. By better understanding the career maps of others, you can make some navigation decisions of your own.

**Think 2-3 years out – both upwards and sideways.** As you take regular stock about where you currently are and learning, it's important to think about where you might go next. Remember to consider roles that are lateral moves – not every career track has to be a series of upward steps. Sometimes the most interesting journeys have detours. Ask yourself what's the next role I want? And where might I go after that? Do I have the experience and skill set to move into that role? If the answer is no to the last question, take action (see the Steps 5 & 6).



**Don't be afraid to ask.** When it comes to professional development, you must be proactive. Be the squeaky wheel. Missing skills or need to sharpen them? Approach your manager about getting involved in projects that will allow you to practice them, or courses that will help too. To increase the likelihood of manager approval, make sure these opportunities are relevant to your current role. Otherwise, be prepared to invest in the training yourself – refer to Step 6.

**Time to ante up.** Sometimes employers won't fund your training – due to budget cuts or because they don't see the relevance of the opportunity to your current role. You must be ready to pay for the training you need yourself. Like any smart investment, keep an eye on the long term prize. A squeeze on the pocketbook today will pay off over the course of a career. Not only will future employers find your newly-minted skills attractive, but the professional commitment, moxie, self-reliance and ambition demonstrated by ponying up your own dough is highly appealing.

**Don't get too comfortable.** Comfort is a career's biggest enemy. When one gets too cozy in a role, it's easy to get lax about development, training, and staying on top of trends. One might miss the subtle changes that are evolving your industry or be blindsided by a disruptive trend (think digital media versus printed media). Always have an ear to the ground and eye to the horizon so you can spot developments impacting your job, ways your profession is evolving, what skills are becoming obsolete, what new ones are emerging, and the adjacent sectors where new opportunities may exist. Use this intelligence to redraw your career path and identify training to improve career longevity.

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