

5 ways to support employee career growth during the pandemic



While the COVID-19 pandemic has changed how and where many people perform their jobs, it has not stopped employees from seeking career growth opportunities. Unfortunately, new research shows companies falling short of giving career growth the attention it needs.

Half of working Americans say their [career development has stalled or even regressed](#) during the pandemic, according to a survey of 1,000 workers by the online scheduling firm Doodle. Forty-nine percent say they are not getting enough training, coaching, or mentoring to advance their careers. Only a third of workers report having a regularly scheduled one-to-one video conference with their boss at least once a week. These numbers aren't inspiring.

Employers obviously have many concerns during this stressful, unprecedented time. However, according to Kelby Zоргdrager, CEO of [DevelopIntelligence](#), “employees want opportunities to grow and advance their careers. That was true before the pandemic, and working from home hasn’t changed this. If you want to attract and retain the best talent, you need to be intentional about providing the training and support they need today.”

How can managers do this under present circumstances? It may not be as hard as it sounds.

Give thought to the issue of employee development and career growth

Don’t relegate the future needs of the company and the talent required to meet those goals to the bottom of your to-do list. Yes, daily objectives that keep the organization afloat during the pandemic may oftentimes need to take precedence. Ignore tomorrow for too long, however, and you’ll eventually pay the price.

“Managers benefit from regularly asking themselves, ‘What do my employees need to be able to do today? And what will they need to be able to do in six months? In one year? What resources and support do I need to provide to get them from where they are now to where they need to be so that our organization is poised to succeed in upcoming projects — not just the projects we’re working on right now?’” Zоргdrager says.

Getting folks together for on-site seminars or classes remains difficult because of safety concerns. However, a plethora of options exist for [online/virtual training](#) — many offered at low or no cost. Examine what’s out there that fits the skills you would like team members to develop.

Encourage teaching and mentoring

According to Terry Traut, CEO of the leadership development firm [Entelechy](#), now is **not** the time to pause training or other development opportunities. “Employees are craving purpose, meaning, and direction. Learning and development initiatives can help provide structure during the chaos,” Traut says. Still, those don't necessarily have to be formal training programs that require large budgets. In fact, your organization likely already has a wealth of knowledge that can support employee career growth.

Think about what current staff members can offer one another in terms of education and guidance. Learning how to perform additional office tasks expands an employee’s horizons and makes the person more valuable to the organization. Similarly, teaching boosts the worth of the individual doing the instructing by honing leadership and communication skills.

If your company already sponsors a mentorship program, make sure it remains active during the pandemic. Organizations lacking one may want to consider starting. During this time of confusion and isolation, developing meaningful relationships benefits both younger employees and seasoned staff. A regularly scheduled virtual coffee or a weekly phone chat strengthens bonds and promotes thinking about experiences from different perspectives.

Support innovation among employees

On-site safety concerns, employee mental health, creating an inclusive environment... plenty of issues confront companies in 2021. Encourage staff members to identify problems and pose solutions. Career growth

opportunities for employees can come in many forms. Thinking about ways to improve procedures or expand in new directions offers mental stimulation and may result in some great ideas.



Schedule one-to-one meetings with employees to discuss career growth

When so many things need attention, setting up regular chats with individual employees may slip through the cracks. Lack of such conversations, however, keeps managers from obtaining valuable information about personal circumstances, productivity, and morale.

“Because all of us are facing challenges as leaders and employees due to the conditions brought on by the pandemic, it is important to encourage everyone to share their experiences and insights as they make their way through this experience. Some of the responses to the challenges may actually uncover interests and passions that leaders should be able to leverage to engage and grow their employees,” Traut says.

Targeted contact also sets the stage for something from which all careers benefit — confidence. The turbulence of the past year has many people experiencing slumps where negative thinking or self-doubt creeps in. A nervous worker might read a manager’s silence as unhappiness with his work and subsequently start wondering whether he has a future with the organization.

Ease doubts with proactive, regular check-ins. In fact, go a step further by demonstrating your concern for the person’s long-term goals. These are opportunities to talk with employees about their career growth aspirations and how you can help them.

“Managers need to be open to asking the employee, ‘Where do you want to be in three years?’ or ‘What are your dreams?’ And then, the manager should be a supporter and encourager for that person to get there, providing the coaching and guidance they need to achieve that goal,” Zorgdrager says.

Continue providing performance reviews

Finally, don’t use the pandemic as an excuse to stop conducting performance reviews. Both management and employees benefit from a structured, thoughtful evaluation of accomplishments and areas that need

improvement.

While some leaders argue that times are too chaotic to perform such assessments, Traut contends that this is *uniquely* the time to be looking at internal talent. “We rarely get opportunities to see what people actually do under adverse conditions. Do they rise to the challenge, or slink away? Do they reach out to help others, or do they focus on themselves? Do they learn and grow, or sit and complain? Now is the time to identify those most elusive and desirable of attributes: character.”

Additional Resource: Career growth isn't just something existing employees are about. When hiring new employees, [establishing a structured onboarding program](#) helps set them on the right path to succeed and grow their careers within your organization.