

THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION - A Crucial Communications Tool

Through this series of articles, we've talked about some important principles, strategies and challenges related to taking ownership of our career development (work, life experiences, and education goals), and creating more awareness and understanding of today's ground rules.

Now let's do a quick recap as much of what we have talked about relates to our success in using this next important communications tool - "The Career Development Discussion." It's a step in this career process that few take, and if done well, most definitely places us ahead of the pack. We'll explore this in just a minute. First, let's look at where we have been:

- ***"Career Development Today - How Would You Describe It? Parts 1 & 2"***

We recognized that there is a psychology of career development, this attitude or view of ourselves and our work life that is, in my opinion, far more important than any resume, interview or career strategy today. Further, our career view, which is based on our personal experiences and the positive and negative challenges we've faced in work and life and how we communicate this view through our attitudes and actions, influences our success.

- ***"What Does It Mean to Take Ownership of Your Career? - 7 Key Responsibilities"***

We talked about the challenge for each of us today, which is to recognize that the only real security we possess is that which we create within ourselves. It's clear that in today's work environment our success depends on our ability to take ownership of work and life and manage our development opportunities through 7 key responsibilities.

- In the last article, ***"Three Must Strategies to Prepare for Any Interview,"*** we discussed the marketing side of this career process, and the delicate balance of psychology, attitude (and of course, skills and abilities) in preparing for this "customer meeting," as I call it.

The Career Discussion...

This annual career review is an important communications tool that brings together much of what we've talked about so far, and is crucial to our success in making our career plans, goals, and direction happen in any organization.

We build our value, commitment, credibility and create focus by taking initiative in arranging a career development discussion meeting with key partners or decision makers including our supervisor, mentor and/or manager, at least annually.

How many of you have actually done that? Don't everyone raise your hands at once! Now, I'm not talking about that elusive career discussion that's supposed to take place at the tail end of your annual performance review. First of all, that discussion is initiated and led by the supervisor or manager, many times it's uncomfortable or awkward for both parties, and is focused on past performance. I'm talking about a formal career development discussion that you initiate at least once a year, and at a time other than during performance reviews.

This discussion should be a two-way dialogue, with the supervisor in more of a coach or facilitator role. The focus is on future development, continuous learning and competencies or capabilities relative to your interests, values, skills, goals, development needs, and your division, department and team direction and objectives — this "partnership" relationship that we've talked about before.

The Purpose...

I look at the purpose of this discussion as an opportunity to share and build trust and support for your personal and professional development in five areas:

1. Feedback on your self-awareness results: strengths, skills, interests, values and contributions, interpersonal communications, leadership skills.
 - What skills or competencies do I need to further develop?
 - What education and training are required?
 - Are there other projects, products, assignments, responsibilities or relationships I can take on or learn more about?
2. Aligning your career direction and work with the team, departmental and divisional goals. Can you increase your satisfaction and commitment levels?
 - How can I connect more with my job satisfiers, energizers, and motivated skills? (Remember, these are skills that I'm not only good at, but enjoy.)
 - Clarify team, department and divisional goals and direction.
3. Your research on internal development opportunities, and your direction, goals and Career Action Plan.
 - Share appropriate (and politically correct) short- and long-term career goals.
 - Discuss how you can best implement them in your organization and culture.
 - Inquire about future trends, organization changes, new technologies.
4. Advice and feedback on business partnerships, relationships and communications strategies.
 - Ask for feedback on your communications skills and work relationships.
 - Talk about what you can do to develop more effective relationships/partnerships.
5. Other organizational or outside resources, network contacts, training, professional associations/ publications, books and tapes that would help implement your career goals.

Preparing for this Discussion...

Study the five discussion areas above and identify 2-3 outcomes. What specific advice, feedback or resources do you want to walk out of this meeting with? Now develop an agenda with meeting time requirements (generally no more than one hour) incorporating specific outcomes related to both your self awareness, organizational awareness, and your career action plan. Share this agenda with the individual or supervisor prior to your meeting. Specifically prepare by reviewing your actions or status in each of the 7 key career responsibilities.

During the Discussion...

Remember who called this meeting. It's up to you to ensure that you are on schedule and follow your agenda. Start the meeting by reviewing the purpose and either agree to or modify the agenda. Again, this is not a performance but a positive future development discussion.

After the Discussion...

Send a thank you note and include those action items that were generated from your discussion. Track your progress and periodically update the individual on your status.

Some Final Thoughts...

What a simple, yet powerful tool to build our value, credibility and positive relationships with your key partners, and gain valuable personal and professional insights to achieve your goals, align with organization goals, and better understand the business. How would you respond to such a request from an employee or one of your staff? What would your impression be of someone who was taking that kind of career ownership? Most likely, the value of their stock would increase in your eyes.

So, it's through this dialogue that you can focus on realistic development expectations, expanding individual skills and contributions, building rapport and trust with your important business partners, achieving a sense of responsibility for your career development, and create a positive forum for discussing your unique talents, skills, strengths and interests as they relate to your future.