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## Rethinking Career Options

By [Beverly Kaye](#) and [Sharon Joedan-Evans](#)

But here's a twist to consider: What if there were more right places? Would there not be more right times for all those right people? What if your employees began to think about other ways of moving? What if each move challenged and rewarded them? What if they could move forward instead of up? If employees see that you can support several viable alternatives within the organization, they see a future for themselves within the realities of that organization.

We believe that there are five possible options in addition to moving up. We also believe that the more specifically you can outline those moves, the less your talented employees will see green grass in other organizations. Consider talking with your employees about moves in several (or all) of the following directions:

- Moving across or horizontally
- Moving back or down to open new opportunities or reduce stress
- Exploratory (Temporary) moves intended for researching other options
- Growing in place
- Moving to another organization

Four of these options raise the possibility of your talented people moving away from you. If this makes you nervous, you're in the majority. You've spent time and resources building a strong, functioning team, and you don't want to lose them to other managers and other parts of the organization. What's in it for you?

There may not be anything in it for you, except that the talent you have developed may just stay with your enterprise...if not with you. Your best people will leave if they feel that you are hoarding their talent, and not exposing them to other managers and other departments within the organization who could use their skill set.

The choice may be yours. The good news is that your reputation as a manager who cares about development may draw other talented people who want to work on your team. Here are some choices to pose to your talented employees when they come to you to have that conversation.

### Moving Across

Until recently, lateral moves meant that your career might be headed for a dead end. Not today. Lateral moves offer much-needed breadth of experience. Taking a lateral move should mean applying current experience in a new job at the same level, but with different duties or challenges. Help employees see that lateral moves can improve skills or help them shift from a slow-growing function to an expanding part of the organization. You can ask:

- Which of your skills can be applied beyond your present job and present department?
- If you take a lateral move into a new area, what long-term career opportunities does it provide?

### Growing in Place

This might be the easiest option to discuss -- but it's also one of the most ignored. Most folks seem to think they need to move out of their current position to develop. Not true. Most of your employees' work is changing constantly. Enrichment means that employees expand the job, refine their expertise, or find depth in areas they really enjoy. You can help.

The critical question for you to ponder is: What can employees do, or learn to do, that will energize their work and bring them closer to achieving their goals and the goals of the organization? You can also ask:

- What could be added to your job to make it more satisfying?
- What internal and external training programs could you pursue to help enrich your job?

## Exploring Options

Sometimes we reach a stage in our careers when we aren't sure of what we want or what choices are available, or even what's appropriate. This option involves gathering information to inform a decision or new direction. Encourage your people to consider taking short-term job assignments in other parts of the organization, participating on project teams with people from other departments or even going on informational interviews. Giving a talented person, whose expertise you need, the chance to explore other positions isn't easy. But people are less likely to feel trapped in their current jobs when they have other choices. Consider asking:

- If you could start your career over, what would you do differently?
- Which of our current organization task forces interest you? Which might give you the best view of another part of this organization?

## Moving Back or Down

Often the thought of moving back to a previous position or downward would be last on anyone's list of options. Sometimes though, the path to a career goal involves a step backward in order to put oneself in a better position for the next move, or to join a part of the organization poised for rapid growth. More common is the technical specialist who accepts a management position and then sorely misses his technical work. Organizations lose far too many technical people because the road back to their technical areas seem to close behind them. Perhaps these questions are appropriate:

- What are the long-term opportunities for future growth and development if you make this move?
- Will this position enable you to use the skills you really enjoy?

## Leaving the Organization

If relocation means leaving the organization -- why would a manager even suggest this option if talent is so precious? Relocation means that an individual has thought through all the options and the fit just isn't there. This might happen when (1) an employee's skills, interests and values just don't fit his or her work or (2) an employee's career goals are all unrealistic for your organization.

Most employees who have had this kind of straight talk conversation with their own managers do move on. And if it is done well, they end up being the best ambassadors for that organization after they leave. Of course, an employee should search the internal labor market at their current organization first. You might ask:

- What is it about this company that's making you feel you want to look outside? How has the company changed?
- If you leave here, what are your long-term career opportunities in another organization?

## When Up Is the Only Way

Vertical advancement is the classic step up the corporate ladder. Your job is to identify and communicate what a talented employee's vertical options could include. Of course, advancement is most likely when an employee's abilities match the needs of the organization. You must interpret the organization's strategic

direction so that employees select assignments that will prepare them for impending changes and openings. Clearly, technical excellence and political savvy are both critical to gaining that next step. Some good questions might include:

- Who is your competition for that next position?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- How has your current job prepared you for the next step?

### **Bottom Line**

Helping employees reach their goals often means helping them consider moves they may not have taken seriously before. Key questions can help them see what they could gain by trying a move that isn't a simple vertical step. Our research reveals that not all those who say they want vertical moves will leave if they don't get them. But they will leave if they are not challenged, growing, and realizing new experiences.

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