



Career Coaching: Strategy for Employee Retention

With increasing frequency Human Resource staff are experiencing staff approaching them for assistance with their career situations. These approaches can be informal such as in the corridor, cafeteria, staff functions, even the car park. More formal settings are where the staff member has been referred by their manager or has requested a meeting with their career issues on the agenda. Where ever the location the HRM person is thrust into a career coaching role

The kinds of assistance employees seek for their career development support are diverse. Just some concerns for which answers are sought or support requested are:

- Help with life planning concerns
- Need for career information
- Clarifying what the employer expects of them
- Determining appropriate type of career path in relation to training and work experience
- Determining appropriate type of career path in relation to interests, values, skills and personality
- Learning more about their skills and capabilities
- Preparing for next career review discussion with manager
- Changing career path
- Help in changing to a part-time job or job-sharing arrangement
- Obtaining a transfer locally, interstate or overseas
- Résumé counselling
- Apprehension about change
- Job application counselling (promotion, transfer, re-employment)
- Interview training (one-to-one and selection panels)
- Help with further education course selection
- How to write a career plan document

The challenge for the HR person in their career coaching role is to act as a facilitator of employee retention and their development and to guide the employee to the 'right action' for both the individual and organisation.

Coaching opportunities

Underpinning the interaction with the employee career coaching has the opportunity to do the following:

- Connect staff with a deeper level of motivation than 'just having a job'. In the process staff discover their passion and purpose to guide their career action step decisions and are empowered to propose work content that they can love, not just tolerate.

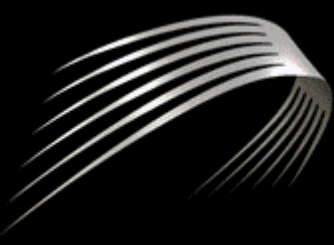


- Probe for conversational openings that may lead to resolution of 'hidden issues', rather than providing just a 'quick fix' to the proffered problem.
- Create positive coaching interactions by listening, observing, discerning and modeling.
- Deliver effective coaching through feedback, questions, statements, confrontations and ideas.
- Improve the employee's ability to market them in the internal job market.
- Increase their potential for career growth and earning power.
- Assist staff in becoming 'career self-reliant' by taking control and ownership of their own career development.
- Increase the employee's awareness of career path options.
- Improve the capability of staff to cope with constant change and transition.

Delivering career help

In what ways could the HR person be involved in their career coaching role? These could be:

1. working with individuals or groups in a process which focuses on increasing self-awareness and understanding of the world of work; to facilitate the development of a satisfying and meaningful career direction
2. administering assessment instruments, computer-aided guidance and information systems, and personal inventories, discussing results and giving feedback
3. facilitating people's work and life management decision making skills
4. assisting with goal setting and action plan development
5. coaching clients in self marketing including job applications, resume preparation, interview skills and negotiating employment conditions
6. providing training in internal job hunting strategies
7. keeping appropriate records of career coaching discussions
8. offering counselling on issues affecting work and career, including coping with stress, problems at work, difficulties in balancing work and family commitments and coming to terms with redundancy or retirement;
9. working with and referring staff to appropriate external agencies or professionals;
10. planning and delivering a programme of interactive workshops, seminars and events on career-related topics
11. developing individual support initiatives such as mentoring programmes
12. reviewing, updating and developing self-help resource material and careers information, both in hard copy and for use on the employers' Intranet



Some employees will initiate their own search for career coaching help. Others will need to be stimulated to act and seek this assistance by invitation. Some of the ways in which you might describe the purpose of a career coaching service from HR are :

- To help you to learn about yourself and the way you view and feel about your life at work.
- To help you to cope with changes within yourself, in your job and in other facets of your life.
- To help you to discover your options and generate realistic alternatives from the information that you develop about yourself and your career.

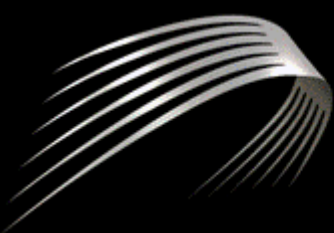
You may wish to highlight that in pursuing these employees can learn valuable skills such as:

- To learn what you can and want to do.
- To express what has personal meaning and value for you in your job and career.
- To track or anticipate external changes that may impact the quality of your worklife.
- To discover various ways in which to make the contribution that you want to make.
- To master the anxieties that accompany change, and the process of making worklife choices.
- To increase your employability.

The helping experience

It is not unusual for a career coach to hear a very wide range of employee issues when they first meet. A significant number of staff will be 'unfocussed'. Their career paths have been disjointed and decision making for past changes has often been irrational or hasty. Many are experiencing a lack of self-confidence. After all how to plan your career was not on the curricula in their secondary or tertiary education. It is often said that as a career coach we now have to do what the education system failed to do—teach employees career self-management as a living skill.

Many are going through a separation from a partner or recovering from one; others are reluctantly single, widowed or married. The 'whole person is in front of us—not just an employee. They often lack of self-motivation stemming from childhood or other experiences which has created a negative attitude towards authority or employers; a suspicion or mistrust; a feeling of powerlessness in the employer-employee relationship.



Too many employees have spent endless hours, weeks, even years looking outwardly for that perfect career situation. They have by-passed the need to look thoroughly at who they really are and want to be. This outward look has had them often focusing on self-defeating beliefs and erroneous information. We call these 'career myths'—believed by many but which are not valid in today's employment scene. Many have just waited for things to happen in their career situation or sought out others who they hope will make decisions for them.

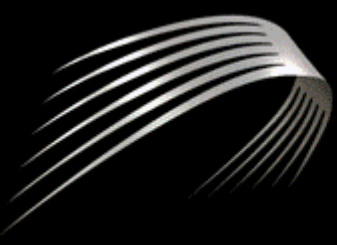
To try to facilitate an employee in one meeting in these or similar circumstances is simply unprofessional. Rather the approach should be to arrange a series of meetings, a journey of helping experiences. The objective of the first meeting is to clarify the real agenda and determine where the person is at in the overall career self assessment review process.

The first meeting is completed rarely within an hour. Outgoing, verbally articulate employees tend to elaborate more in discussing their issues than the more quiet, reserved and less communicative. The latter may need more 'drawing out' through careful questioning. As self-reflection is a crucial part of the career process you should endeavour to secure agreement on what the employee will do and think about before the next meeting. This is termed in the career coaching lexicon prescribed homework.

Sometimes when talking about their past and their present living an employee will become emotional. Past non-productive patterns of career behaviours will surface; a feeling that time has been wasted; or a realisation by the person that they have been 'living someone else's agenda'. An HRM helper needs to know just how far they should assist in such situations. One needs to know the extent of own skills and what are the limits of appropriate HRM behaviours within your employment environment. Referral to an external expert may need to be considered.

The reward

Helping others help themselves has its special rewards. I'm referring to the gifts our employees give back to us without realising it. There is the satisfaction that we are doing our job professionally. Reflect on your own feelings as you observe an employee you are helping grow, take action, become more self-resilient (many times claiming that they did it all by themselves!) It is like a flower coming into bloom. Of course, some flower among weeds and others are like bulbs which don't break the earth's surface. Carl Rogers wrote in *On Becoming a Person* that his work in creating and applying helpful measures for others stretched and developed his own potential for growth.



Focus on your successes with individuals—not groups of employees in Departments or Divisions. People just like you and I on their own very personal journey of self-discovery. They are living by acting on their career concerns —not just existing, obeying, complying, tolerating. Don't 'flag-wave' and intrude into some employees' self-congratulatory posturing when they achieve a career success. Take your rewards privately—you earned them by being a skilled helper. (But don't neglect to let your boss know of these successes!)

People who learn to know themselves better through career coaching grow to like themselves, are more self-confident and this feeling good produces positive results for themselves and for whom they work.