

# Career planning essentials for employers

A Badenoch & Clark guide

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Some 60% of people in professional roles have told us that they would consider moving jobs for career progression\*. While 'career progression' can mean different things to different people, what is clear is that an understanding of what opportunities exist for personal development and career advancement is a high priority for many employees.

Whether your current focus is on recruiting top talent, retaining your valued people or developing the skills of your workforce, you cannot afford to dodge the inevitable question around what career opportunities exist for your people.

This guide highlights the key issues employers may need to consider when developing your approach to career planning.

## 1 What kind of structure is needed?

Make your people development and talent management strategy appropriate to the current climate and be prepared to adapt it as necessary.

As long as there is a clear structure in place and career plans and opportunities are being communicated in the right way there is more chance of your people getting behind it and less chance of fall-out.

Make sure that your people are receiving a consistent message, relevant to their own career and personal development plans. Explain how it works and its importance from the outset. Be clear about the message people are being asked to communicate. Ensure managers understand the importance of preparing for career conversations and have the required competencies to support and develop their people.

Review career plans regularly. Doing this gives you the opportunity to check that what is in place is appropriate to the economic climate, that it fits with the firm's strategy and is generally fit for purpose. It also encourages your people to review where they are currently, agree next steps and build their understanding of what opportunities exist for them in your practice.

## 2 Be realistic

An important part of the process is to be upfront in the first interview about what career plans and progression your practice can offer. However, don't be tempted to offer the world just to secure the best talent and then under deliver on your promises. Do this and the likelihood is that you will risk losing that individual to a competing firm. Be realistic about what is available and manage expectations. By explaining that what is on offer is driven by business needs, as well as their level of ability in certain required competencies in any role, you will set the expectation for constructive, ongoing dialogue in order to meet the company's ends and the career aspirations of your people.

## 3 Discuss future opportunities during interviews and at offer stage

Although interviews are your opportunity to sell your firm to candidates, you need to remain realistic. Candidates are always interested in understanding what their future prospects could be within a firm, so it's an ideal time to start these conversations. When interviewing or making an offer to a candidate, discuss what their future career potential is within the practice, how long they would be expected to stay in the role before they could be considered for a promotion, what's the typical course of promotion from their

\*Badenoch & Clark Workplace Studies 2009

role, and what roles did the incumbent employee move to/develop into? By having new employees start with an understanding of the possibilities and expectations regarding their career progression within your firm, you're setting the groundwork for future career planning conversations and engaging your new employees from an early stage.

#### 4 Root it in competencies

Ensure every role within your practice and everyone's career plans are embedded in competencies. This will help potential and existing employees fully understand what skills and behaviours are essential in order to succeed in the role, and therefore where they need to develop in order to advance their career, whether that is laterally or a promotion. Embedding roles in competencies allows for a fully objective and transparent process. It ensures your people know what they are working towards while making the process very clear for managers also. Make competencies an integral part of your firm. Where used in the right way, from competency-based interviews through to competency-based performance management, the more attainable career plans become to the employee, allowing the employer to reap the rewards of having the right people in the right roles at the right time to take your practice forward, whatever the economic climate.

#### 5 Think beyond your own practice areas

Successful firms have comprehensive career planning and talent management processes, which not only allow employees to move between departments and functions, they actively encourage it. Being creative about how you develop and move around the best talent will inevitably help you hold onto the staff you want to. Giving employees visibility of and confidential access to all available roles across the practice is the first step. This gives both you and your employees the opportunity to consider what's on offer and assess whether they could make the transition into another role. Many core skills are transferable, so with some additional training it's not impossible to move talent to a different

specialism. Some believe that having experience of a number of specialisms is imperative to becoming managing partner. In our recent research on the accounting and finance profession, 83% of respondents said that gaining non-finance related experience is key to getting to the top.

#### 6 Engage your managers

As with any other firm-wide messages and processes they need to be delivered consistently across the practice. Engaging the right people to ensure that effective career planning conversations are held is crucial. Each individual will have their own skills, motivators and aspirations so defining someone's career in line with what is available in the practice is not always straightforward. Training your managers in coaching and listening skills is key, as is ensuring that they too have a clear understanding of their own potential and the opportunities for progression that exist for them. Strong succession planning is directly aligned to good talent management.

#### 7 Review career plans with employees regularly

After initial career planning conversations, it's important there are regular updates between you and your employees regarding their career plans. Even during times of resizing or limited growth, by continuing to have discussions that are focused on the future, employees are more likely to stay engaged during periods of instability. These conversations do not necessarily need to focus on "the next position", but can rather focus on personal development – what competencies can the employee focus on, what steps do they need to take to improve, and how can you assist them in that development. By focusing on aspects of career development, employees will still feel that they can see progression in their ability and skill even if the next role in their career isn't immediately available. Regular meetings that provide an opportunity for these discussions will ensure that expectations from both sides are clear and will help in planning a future that achieves the right outcome for the practice as well as the individual.

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