



Workplace Satisfaction Project Training, Growth, and Development Tools

A 2020 NPS survey indicated that employees were generally unsatisfied with the amount of training and professional development opportunities they were receiving. This was broadly ascribed to budget constraints, staffing shortages, travel caps, and supervisors being too busy to invest time in developing employees themselves. This has generally resulted in a system where professional growth too often occurs the hard way (i.e. by employees trying things without being trained to succeed at them, failing, and being educated solely by failure), or by employees seeking growth experiences on their own initiative with varying levels of support.

Employees can and should continue to be self-actualized in seeking professional growth opportunities. Managers can and should ensure that not only is the work of today getting done, but that wise investments are being made for the future as well. Employee training, growth, and development tools are invaluable in ensuring the highest possible workplace performance and employee satisfaction, and are necessary means of ensuring a bright future for the NPS, as they involve training the next generation of leaders and managers.

- Often employees and managers focus on multi-day training opportunities as the primary means of growing professional skills but overlook the possibilities of putting on frequent, shorter in-house training opportunities. Such opportunities are highly customizable, have few barriers to success (low cost, no travel, more easily accommodated in busy schedules), and can also be valuable teambuilding and trust-building exercises. Managers can and should value regular in-house training as a primary means of employee growth.
- In addition to training opportunities, employees should also value opportunities to get on-the-job training through close work with their supervisor or another employee skilled in the task at hand. Often, employees and supervisors are simply trying to get the task accomplished as quickly as possible in order to move on to the next task, and do not take the time to make it a learning opportunity for others. Investing a bit more time to show other involved employees how to do the work well is likely to repay that time investment with dividends in the long run.
- Involving employees in decision making and problem solving is another form of on-the-job training that managers can conduct. It models strong performance for employees who will themselves be making similar decisions and solving similar problems in the future. Again, it requires slightly more investment of time and energy, but pays dividends in the long run – and it has the huge added benefits of increasing employee engagement, demonstrating transparency, and building trust.
- Training and development ultimately require the provision of feedback and a willingness to accept and internalize that feedback, or no growth will occur. Supervisors grow their employees whenever they provide feedback, whether it is reinforcing or constructive.
- Temporary promotion or lateral details can be a mixed blessing in the NPS, where different workplaces can be so dissimilar that a detailer spends a considerable amount of their available time simply learning the norms and expectations of their new workplace. Such details are very valuable if the detailer's temporary new supervisor treats the experience as growth-oriented for the detailer and does not fall into the trap of simply assigning work and leaving the detailer alone. Temporary promotion details should involve significant training and mentoring by the temporary supervisor into the new skills, roles, and expectations of the higher-graded position; hoping that an employee will gain valuable leadership skills simply by being paid at a higher grade for a short period is doomed to failure. With promotions come new skills and expectations, and they must be taught. Detail opportunities always have the benefits of providing the detailer with new perspectives and experiences which they would not otherwise have attained; this usually results in professional growth.

- Exchange details, in which two employees are lateraled to each other's positions for a period of time, are an infrequently used tool which can aid in growing perspectives and experiences for both employees.
- Cross-training outside one's own specific career field has similar benefits of growing perspectives and experiences. Such opportunities should be used so as to give the employee growth experiences but should not overwhelm or water down the employee's primary skillset. Realistically, any experience that helps expand an employee's viewpoint, whether formal or informal, is a growth experience.
- Organized retreats or mini retreats (i.e. in-house in a novel environment) and conference attendance are a good way to make the most of growth opportunities by setting aside all other work and distractions and focusing on the development at hand.
- Mentoring is a critical component of employee development; it is too often underutilized because it requires a significant investment of time and effort on the part of both the mentor and the mentee. Simply put, there is no better professional growth opportunity for an employee than a mentoring relationship, and all managers can strive to mentor at least one other employee.
- 'Coaching', in addition to being an excellent performance management tool, is also an excellent growth tool. Supervisors should embrace coaching skills as they effectively engage the employee, provide clear expectations and feedback, and move positively toward desired results. A broad coaching model is:
 1. **Put the employee at ease.** This step is especially important when the coaching session is a response to poor performance.
 2. **Find out what they already know.** There are two reasons for this. First, there's little use in telling them what they already know. Second, prior knowledge serves as the foundation for new knowledge that's acquired. Hence, you want to link the «training» to what they already know and correct any misconceptions that could interfere with their learning.
 3. **Present information or demonstrate work methods.** This is the point where you deliver the content of the training.
 4. **Repeat.** Repetition enhances understanding and retention.
 5. **Evaluate learning.** Test whether the employee understands the information or can perform the skill.
 6. Provide feedback. Let the employee know what they have successfully learned and what they still need to learn.
 7. **Correct.** Show the right answers or methods again.
 8. **Evaluate performance on the job.** Periodically check to see whether the employee is using the knowledge or skills effectively on the job. Gradually increase the interval at which you check. The employee should eventually take responsibility for monitoring their own performance.
 9. **Reward.** Provide praise or other rewards for successful acquisition and use of the knowledge or skill