

Talent vs. Career Management

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People often think it's a company's job to help with their career.

It isn't. You are responsible for your own career.

Companies assess the strengths and weaknesses of their people and how to best use the talent at their disposal. They need to attract, retain, retrain and recognize the talent that is best aligned to the work and brand of the organization. Good companies provide employees with tools to manage their career, but make no mistake. Companies are focused on talent, not career, management.

In large enterprises, Talent Management is a formal discipline and, sometimes, an actual department or role. In small companies, talent management is often less formal. It may rest with the owner or senior management team of the company, who likely know each and every employee. It is how workforce planning is done. As an employee, you participate in, but are not in control of, this process.

In contrast, career management is your responsibility. Every individual employee, in companies of any size, owns their own career. You need to have your own plan and determine your own criteria against which you will evaluate future opportunities. The plan may include possibilities inside and outside your current company as well as any other volunteer or educational activities you pursue.

In small companies, an employee's approach to career management can drive the entire discussion. Your ability to articulate what you need and how you are taking control of your future can spark dynamic and rewarding discussions in environments with weaker or less formal approaches to talent management.

Small companies may not provide career management resources to their staff and you may wonder how to start taking steps to manage your own career without coming across as being too aggressive. Here are three suggestions:

Be Proactive. Don't wait until something happens at work to start to get your own thoughts and plan together. Think about what you want and need, now and in the future, and see how you can gain skills and experience at work, in your community and through training to build a solid foundation that helps you and your employer.

Be Predictable. At a company where I used to work there was one cardinal rule: No Surprises. By sharing your career plan you can help your company help you. Wildcard employees are hard to consider for new opportunities as performance and reactions are never easy to predict.

Be Realistic. Since you're responsible for your own career it's up to you to set out a plan. But an unrealistic one that assumes progression at too quick a rate, or one that's based on skills you don't yet have, only sets you up for disappointment. Your career plan is only one side of the equation. It must be met with the talent needs of an organization. Be a strong partner in this negotiation by presenting a realistic view to your capabilities and capacity.

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