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Internal Mentorship

TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS TO GET STARTED



Project History

This guide was developed through the Responsive Career Pathways Research Project, and in consultation with working Canadians and small and medium-sized employers in Manitoba.

In March 2023, The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology (MITT) joined forces with Blueprint ADE to create a new proactive career services and workforce development model for working Canadians, involving both working Canadians and employers. The project tested a forward-thinking intervention to address the pressing workforce needs of small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) and the career development needs of mid-career workers. This was achieved through three service delivery pathways: 1) Worker-centered; 2) Employer-driven and 3) Intersections between working Canadians and employers.

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Why Mentoring?

Mentorship is an effective way to create a supportive environment that facilitates individual growth, enhances experiences and opportunities, and promotes employee retention and succession planning.

By providing a broader perspective on career options mentorship can also reinforce strong relationships among employees, support a learning culture in the workplace, and increase job satisfaction.

What are the Benefits?

For the Mentee

- Increased awareness to support career pathing and retention
- Improved skills and knowledge
- Increased self-confidence & motivation
- Enhanced productivity

For the Mentor

- Increased opportunities to share skills and develop soft/common skills including leadership
- Increased job satisfaction
- Increased sense of value in the workplace and retention

Mentor programs can take different forms and evolve over time based on the size and needs of your team. Mentorship can be a **formal** process with specific milestones and events or more informal in nature.

Something to consider when determining the impact of mentoring in your organization is whether you are looking for traditional mentor to mentee learning or if your intent is for the mentor relationship to be more reciprocal in nature and not defined by level of experience. Both allow for depth of learning, can create a bridge to cross training, support understanding, and build on a strong company culture.



Informational Interviews

One way to begin a **low-pressure, low-cost, and accessible mentor process that requires minimal time** is through informational interviews. An **informational interview** is a conversation between two individuals to understand what a day in the life entails for a specific position. The conversation will typically cover tasks, soft skills, and the person's individual career path to get there.

Tips for Employers

You can leverage this approach as part of your internal mentorship strategy or on a case-by-case basis with individual employees:

What could this look like?

In as little as one 30 to 60-minute lunch/coffee/conversation, an informational interview provides the opportunity to ask questions that give a behind-the-scenes look at a specific position. This could be done in person or virtually and can be especially **beneficial to hybrid** environments where people work remotely and where there are multiple locations.

Why does this work well?

Individuals receive targeted and immediate information, networking opportunities, and employees can use this approach at any stage of their career. It also builds further understanding for everyone on the roles within a company.

How to make this happen?

Help staff leverage their internal team networks or create a schedule or mentor match to allow for interdepartmental connections to happen. Provide a team message to help break the ice and introduce the concept!

What to ask?

This conversation may be casual, and the goal is to create a comfortable exchange, but preparation helps to get the most out of the time spent! Attached are some sample questions to help your team get started.

More Tips for Employers

How do I select people to participate?

As an employer, you can choose to leverage this concept across your entire team or on a case-by-case basis. It can be helpful to tap people on the shoulder if they have been a role model to others or shown positive leadership attributes.

What if a mentor has many people interested in meeting with them?

If there is a group of people who want to meet with the same mentor, an information session format is a good option. This can also work well if there are time constraints or if an employee is more comfortable meeting in a group format instead of one-on-one. Planning quarterly group career insight sessions is a great way to build a culture of mentorship at your company.

Where else can this go?

Informational Interviews can also be an excellent add-on to a more extensive mentor program. To determine the right type of mentorship program for your environment, consider research, speak with a Career Development Professional or consultant, and experiment to see how your team learns best through mentorship.

Sample Team Message

Hello Team,

We have exciting news to share! We are launching a program to help you explore new career paths and gain insights into opportunities within our company. It's called Job Talks [insert alternate title]. This program is going to use internal informational interviews within our teams.

What are Internal Informational Interviews? These interviews allow you to connect with colleagues from various departments to learn, share experiences, and expand your knowledge of our organization. Think of it like a mini job shadow for a job you are interested in that is set up to focus on the things you're most curious about!

Why are we doing this? We believe in fostering learning, career development, and growth among our team members. This program will provide a great opportunity to achieve this goal.

You won't go after a job you've never heard about and we hope this program will also support increased knowledge and better career conversations!

How does it work?

- You can sign up to be an interviewer, interviewee, or both.
- We'll provide questions and tips to help you prepare.
- Interviews can be virtual or in person, and they're flexible to suit your schedule. They will typically be 30-60 minutes.

Stay tuned for the sign-up form coming on [date]. This program is open to everyone, in any role. We look forward to you being involved!

Sample Individual Message

Hello Team Member Name,

As part of our ongoing career conversation with you, we are recognizing your skills and interests in other areas of our company and we would like to support your development through informational interviews.

What are Internal Informational Interviews? These interviews allow you to connect with colleagues from various departments to learn, share experiences, and expand your knowledge of our organization. Think of it like a mini job shadow for a role you are interested in that is set up to focus on the things you're most curious about!

Why are we doing this? We believe in fostering learning, career development, and growth among our team members, and this program will provide a great opportunity to explore possible options and career paths.

You won't go after a job you've never heard about and we hope this program will support increased knowledge and better career conversations!

How does it work?

- We can determine together the first role that you are interested in exploring and match you with an appropriate colleague to interview.
- We'll provide questions and tips to help you prepare.
- Interviews can be virtual or in person, and they're flexible to suit your schedule. They will typically be 30-60 minutes.

We look forward to seeing what information you discover!

Sample Questions

For the most effective interviews, Career Conversations, career exercises or speaking with a Career Development Professional, can help employees determine their career values and tailor questions that address their primary interests. Here is a list of general questions to work from:

1. Introduction Questions:

- Can you tell me a bit about your background and how you got started in this career?
- What motivated you to pursue this career?

2. Job Responsibilities:

- What does a typical day look like in your role?
- Can you describe the primary responsibilities and tasks associated with your job?
- How has your role evolved since you started?

3. Skills and Qualifications:

- What skills and qualifications are essential for success in this field?
- Are there specific educational or professional certifications that are particularly valuable?

4. Challenges:

- What are some of the challenges you face in your day-to-day work?
- How do you handle challenges or setbacks in this field?

5. Industry and Company Insights:

- How would you describe the current state of the industry?
- Can you share some insights into the culture and values of the companies you've worked for?

6. Career Advancement:

- What opportunities for career advancement exist within our organization?
- How have you seen your career progress, and what steps did you take to advance?

Sample Questions Continued

7. Work-Life Balance:

- How would you describe the work-life balance in this career?
- Are there peak seasons or periods of increased workload?

8. Trends and Future Outlook:

- Are there any emerging trends or changes in the industry that someone considering this career should be aware of?
- How do you see the future outlook for this field?

9. Advice for Aspiring Professionals:

- What advice would you give to someone looking to enter this field?
- If you could go back and give yourself advice when you were starting out, what would it be?



Do You Have Questions About Your Questions?

If you need help preparing for an informational interview or exploring your career values and ideas, a Career Development Professional can help!

Tips for Participants

Remember, this is meant to be a **positive and open dialogue** to share and gather career knowledge. That means the conversation dynamic should be professional but feel comfortable and even casual. There's nothing wrong with having an informational interview over coffee; we encourage that if it helps set you at ease!

Preparation is not required for the person being interviewed, and both interviewees/interviewers should only share the information they feel comfortable with.

Here are some tips for your first informational interview as the interviewer:

- **Prepare Questions:** Develop thoughtful questions in advance and customize them to your career values and interests.
- **Be Punctual:** Respect the start time and stick to the scheduled amount of time.
- **Introduce Yourself:** Briefly share your background.
- **Listen Actively:** Focus on what is said and take notes as appropriate
- **Ask Follow-Up Questions:** Delve deeper into topics.
- **Express Gratitude:** Thank the interviewee and follow-up with a thank you email.
- **Reflect and Apply:** Be open-minded and embrace diverse perspectives. Consider how insights apply to your journey.