

DCIF Project – Career Development Opportunities Tool 2: Having Career Conversations with Workers with Disabilities

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Tags

Who is this for?

High Priority:

- Direct Line managers

Practical Information:

- **DEI** and HR Professionals

What guidance does it provide?

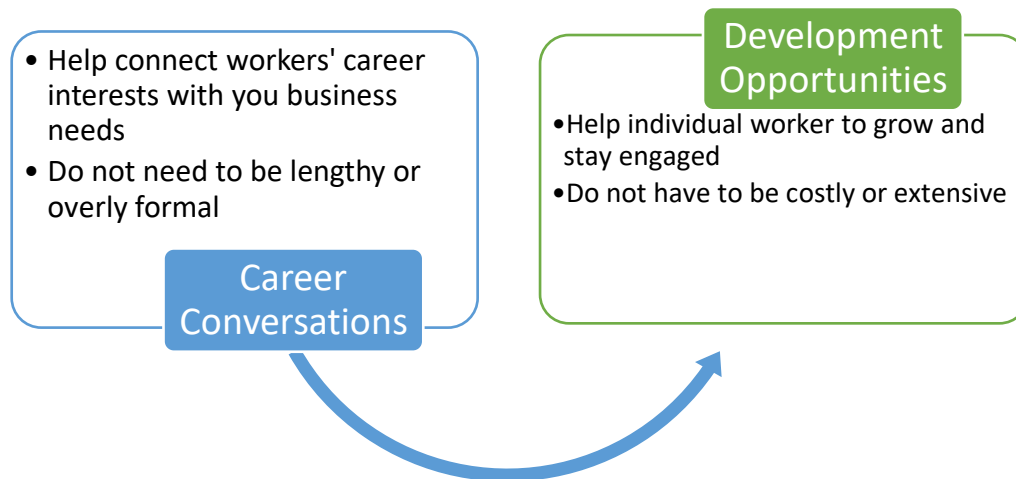
- How to develop conversations through a disability lens to help workers progress in their career

Take home points

- Remember, career conversations are not topics starting from the scratch. For instance, you may already be giving your workers regular feedback on their skills and professional qualities or taking in account your worker's professional interests and commitment to learning when providing training opportunities for them
- Consider providing training to acquire or develop specific skills or knowledge, personal development training, leadership training, establish buddy training and mentorship opportunities

Understanding the Purpose of Career Conversations

A career conversation is an open and honest discussion you have with a worker about their career goals and aspirations. A career conversation enables you to engage in career planning with your workers, understand what is important to them, and work collaboratively to determine the best pathway forward to benefit both the individual and the organization.¹



Career conversations are for anyone and everyone:

- All levels of staff can benefit from conversations about their career trajectory
- Everyone can develop the skills to have these conversations with others
- Everyone can benefit from developing the skills to manage their own careers

Building on What you Know²

When it comes to having career conversations, know that you are not starting from scratch. For instance, you may already be:

1. Giving your workers regular feedback on their skills and professional qualities
2. Taking in account your worker's professional interests and commitment to learning when providing training opportunities for them

When talking with workers with disabilities about career progression, here are additional tips to consider:³

- **Training needed to acquire or develop specific skills or knowledge:** Career conversations are an excellent means to determine what training opportunities may be suitable for workers with disabilities. When seeking out training offerings, remember to ensure that all options you are offering your workers are fully accessible.
- **Personal development training.** Many workers, with and without disabilities, will benefit from training that helps develop confidence and understand their personal strengths and weaknesses. Such training may be particularly helpful for workers with disabilities who have not done well in mainstream education or have not been in employment before.
- **Leadership training.** Don't assume that workers with disabilities don't have the potential to become leaders. If you spot potential in any employee, encourage them to realize this with leadership training.

- **Establishing Buddy Systems.** Buddies are usually workers who are on the same level or grade or do the same job as the person they are ‘buddying.’ A worker with a disability may find it useful to have a buddy when they first start working or when they are promoted. The buddy’s role is to help the worker understand how to do the job and introduce them to colleagues by accompanying them to meetings and work-based social events. Buddies can be particularly helpful for employees with learning disabilities or workers who are neurodiverse.
- **Mentorship:** Mentors typically occupy a more senior role – one which a worker may be aspiring towards. They may frequently discuss career goals with workers with disabilities or help them with networking within the organization. Mentorship can have an immense positive impact on the inclusion of workers with disabilities in the workplace.⁴

Not every employee wants to progress. Talk to your employees about their life goals. Some people are happy with the job they have because it pays enough, is in the right location, fits their skills and abilities and leaves them enough time for external interests. Some workers with disabilities are reluctant to move from a job they are doing well, has the necessary reasonable adjustments in place and they can manage. You will need to get to know the people who work for you to understand their needs and aspirations.

Guideposts for Your Career Conversations

Core Considerations Before You Begin

The following steps and questions can help you to plan your career conversation with a worker with a disability. Cycle through these resources before you sit down with your worker. Choose the steps and questions that are the most appropriate for your specific business:²

Review Current Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○What are we doing now? Can it work better? ○What do employees see? ○What do you they need or want?
Set Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○What do we want to achieve? ○What would success look like? ○What's our timeframe?
Decide What You Could Offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○Where could we begin? ○What opportunities can we offer? Now? Later? ○What would this cost?
Decide On a Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○Who do we need to involve in this decision? ○What needs to happen? ○How will we what's working?
Communicate and Educate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○How do we talk to employee about this? ○What will they need to get involved?
Implement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○What resources are available to help us? ○How will we get feedback on the process?

Additional Tips for Career Conversations

Use the checklist below to guide your approach to career conversations with your workers:⁵

1. **Create a career progression plan with your worker to achieve targeted goals: Developing a strong career progression plan is imperative to helping you and your worker achieve your shared goals.**

- ✓ Suggest that workers to write out tasks that they have achieved.
 - ✓ Ask workers about how they see themselves contributing to the company's mission and vision.
 - ✓ Collaborate and determine how you can best support their advancement.
- 2. Develop a timeline with your worker and include milestones: Timelines are a good way to boost productivity in your career development.**
- ✓ Create a deadline to plan your day-to-day workload.
 - ✓ As succession planning can span over a long time, it is important to remind yourself with deadlines and milestones.
- 3. Jump on new opportunities: Seek out ways to help build your workers' skillsets and experiences.**
- ✓ Ask your workers about what knowledge and skills they want to bring to their work – do they have them all? If not, what can be done to help broaden their skillset?
 - ✓ Routinely remind workers with disabilities about opportunities at work:
 - Is there a new project coming up that they might want to be a part of?
 - Are there job vacancies or upcoming opportunities for advancement that they would be suitable candidates for?
 - Encourage them to voice their interest.
 - ✓ If you think there is a training that might be beneficial to your worker, invite them to take part in it.
- 4. Do more than your job: As a manager, you should be there to help your workers' career progression.**
- ✓ Offer work shadowing opportunities. Shadowing a role in a different department or one which they might like to progress too will help workers with disabilities learn the skills they might need to include in their career progression plan.
 - ✓ Attend training days/programs with your workers. Attending a variety of work events such as a morning breakfasts, lunch and learns, evening seminars or all-day events, is a great opportunity to network and introduce your workers to roles which they might like to progress into.
 - ✓ Make the most out of your appraisals and reviews. Use this time to your advantage and ask to co-develop or review career development plans. It is likely that your workers will be interested but potentially unsure how to get started, so offer some valuable advice on succession planning and career development examples from your own experience.
- 5. Write it down: Encourage your workers to document their career progression.**
- ✓ Ask workers to bring their documentation to career conversations and performance management reviews
 - ✓ Review and reference a worker's progression towards their long- and short-term goals
 - ✓ Reward your workers when they have reach career milestones
 - ✓ Discuss any areas where goals have not been achieved
 - ✓ Devise a new plan to support your worker's progression towards revised goals

References

¹ Borgen, W. A., Butterfield, L. D., & LaLande, V. (2013). Career conversations in small-to medium-sized businesses: A competitive advantage. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 47(2).

² Careers New Zealand (2012). *Introducing career development: toolkit*. <https://www.careers.govt.nz/assets/pages/docs/introducing-career-development-toolkit.pdf>

³ Conference Board of Canada (2015). Employers' Toolkit: Making Ontario Workplaces Accessible to People with Disabilities. https://conferenceboard.ca/docs/default-source/pdf_downloads/7159_accessibilitytoolkit-2015_rpt.pdf?sfvrsn=a98e7013_2&pdf=toolkit

⁴ Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Leck, J., Shen, W., & Stinson, J. (2019). Employers' perspectives of including young people with disabilities in the workforce, disability disclosure and providing accommodations. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 50(2), 141-156.

⁵ Cornell University (2022). *Career Management Toolkit*. <https://hr.cornell.edu/professional-development/career-management%20toolkit>