

DCIF Project – Career Development Tool 4: Empowering Career Development and Growth Among All Workers

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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 recognize opportunities for growth
- How to implement best practices for development

Take home points

- Adjusting your attitude towards career development. Understand that a “one-size-fits-all” approach should not be applied when developing career plans with workers with disabilities
- Guiding career conversations in a respectful and inclusive way. Actively listen to your workers during career conversations, validate their feelings and concerns, and echo what they are saying to show that you understand
- Create new spaces for discussion. A disability working group or employee resource group can advocate for the needs of workers with disabilities and provide valuable information to inform leadership

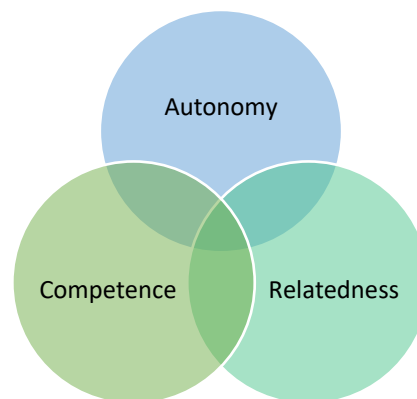
Identifying and Promoting Opportunities for Career Advancement

Top businesses understand the importance of prioritizing workers' professional development – they embed this intention into their policies. Talented workers, including those with disabilities, want to work for an organization that invests in the talents and skills of everyone.

If managers fail to support a worker's career development, they run the risk of undermining company productivity and worker morale, as well as losing qualified workers and their competitive edge in the marketplace.

Empowerment Through Self-Determination

When delivering career development to workers with disabilities, a promising approach that managers should keep in mind is empowerment through self-determination. More specifically, seek to foster the essential aspects of:¹



- **Competence:** the desire to be effective
- **Relatedness:** the desire to interact and connect with others
- **Autonomy:** the desire to be independent

Cultivating these principles among all their workers, including those with disabilities, offers opportunities for choice, self-direction, and a sense of personal responsibility or accountability over work. When these needs are satisfied, workers tend to be more motivated to perform. Here are some ways that you can support empowerment of workers with disabilities through career development opportunities:²

- **Adjusting your attitude towards career development**
 - Understand that a “one-size-fits-all” approach should not be applied when developing career plans with workers with disabilities
 - Recognize that persons with disabilities have historically faced profound barriers to employment, including career development
 - Challenge yourself to make changes to your systems, policies, practices, etc. to ensure that workers with disabilities have equal access to opportunities in the workplace
- **Guiding career conversations in a respectful and inclusive way**
 - Actively listen to your workers during career conversations, validate their feelings and concerns, and echo what they are saying to show that you understand

- Ask questions that promote personal awareness, growth, and a sense of autonomy among workers with disabilities
 - How did you feel once you completed this project?
 - Can you tell me about what you learned throughout this past quarter?
 - Which of your personal contributions to the team are you most proud of?
- Based on your career conversations, engage in open dialogue, and create individualized career plans for workers with disabilities, mapped onto their skills, aspirations, interests, and values
- **Exploring workplace supports and accessible professional development methods:**
 - Discuss the resources available to support, retain, and advance workers with disabilities in their jobs, such as training, **job coaching**, mentorship, or customized employment
 - Communicate the availability of workplace accommodations and assistive devices during career conversations with workers with disabilities. For more information, please click [Communication Tool 2 - Understanding Disability Etiquette](#)
 - Review existing accommodation plans frequently and adjust them as required to ensure they remain tailored to workers' needs
 - Consider different learning styles and use various modalities to communicate information when implementing career development programs
- **Conducting a **job analysis****
 - Use the results of a **job analysis** to inform a career conversation – the assessment can provide practical information that can help with career decision making. For more information, please click [CD Tool 3 - Determining Advancement Opportunities for Workers with Disabilities](#)
 - Identify workers with disabilities' strengths and capabilities through the **job analysis**
 - Take the opportunity to analyze the accessibility of the job, including the **bona fide occupational requirements**, the physical work environment, transportation options to get to work, as well as the social environment
- **Create new spaces for discussion:**
 - A disability working group or employee resource group can advocate for the needs of workers with disabilities and provide valuable information to inform leadership
 - Invite disability organizations and other external stakeholders to speak on disability inclusive approaches to career development
 - Offer networking opportunities and social support to workers who desire a change in their role

Practical Options for Career Advancement and Growth³



Team Building

Team building activities and company social events encourage interaction between workers with disabilities and their co-workers. They also allow workers with disabilities to showcase and further develop their skills, such as problem solving and leadership. Consider these tips:

- Never assume that a worker with a disability cannot participate in team building opportunities
- When planning team meetings, staff training, or other team building events, make sure you communicate the availability of accommodations to support participation
- If you are not sure about whether a worker with a disability can participate, discuss with the worker prior to the event

Mentorship

Mentorship is a low-cost opportunity that promotes the inclusion of workers with disabilities. Through mentorship, experienced workers act as role models, offer advice, and provide workers with disabilities with social and emotional support in the workplace. Consider these tips:⁴

- Mentorship may resonate more if mentors are persons with lived experience of disability, but all staff can benefit from the guidance of a more experienced worker regardless of their disability status
- Persons with disabilities who serve in senior positions should strongly consider becoming mentors or champions — both internally and externally
- If mentors are in leadership positions, care should be taken to ensure that workers with disabilities have a safe and confidential space to speak freely without negative repercussions
- When developing mentorship programs, try to offer:
 - A variety of structured opportunities for mentorship (e.g., online mentorship, work-based mentorship, community-based mentorship, workshops and training)
 - Group-based or mixed formats (e.g., one-on-one meetings, group-based activities)
 - Ongoing mentorship (e.g., >6 months)

Mentors provide many benefits, including:

- Broadened perspectives about the transferability of skills and interests, as well as future career directions to consider
- Motivation to take calculated risks
- Advice on the “politics” of dealing with human relationships within the organization
- Honest and constructive feedback about problem areas
- Coaching on technical, interpersonal, and management skills
- Encouragement
- Networking contacts, references, and introductions

Check out these inclusive mentorship opportunities and initiatives that support people with disabilities in Canada:

1. **MentorAbility Canada** is a national supported employment initiative that facilitates unique, short-term mentoring opportunities between employers and people experiencing a disability. By providing and celebrating successful mentoring experiences in communities across Canada, this initiative is part of a national effort to promote the employment of Canadians experiencing disability. To learn more about MentorAbility Canada, please visit: <https://supportedemployment.ca/mentorability/>
2. **Dolphin Disabilities Mentoring Day** facilitates the pairing of job-ready persons with disabilities with companies that want to use the skills they have or are developing. The mentoring day uses technology to bridge the talent, communication, and knowledge gaps between business, employment and community supports, and persons with disabilities. To learn more about Dolphin Disabilities Mentoring Day, or participate in the next event, please visit: <http://disabilitiesmentoringday.org/about-dmd/>

Networking

At networking and social events, business-related conversation often takes place. As well, many workers are able to further their interpersonal relationships with their peers, leaders, and other individuals in their field. All workers, including those with disabilities, should have the choice to equally participate in social or recreational activities within the workplace.

Training²

Training and education are excellent options to support the advancement and development of skills among workers with disabilities. Management and leadership training must be among the offerings available to workers with disabilities, in addition to specific skills training. Consider these tips:

- Maximize new opportunities by rotating workers roles and/or positions within the company
- Provide training in various positions within the organization that are different from the original role the worker with the disability was hired for
- Give workers the opportunity to learn a new skill set and acquire knowledge

When hosting training or networking events, employers must ensure access for people with disabilities:

- Arrange for accessible facilities and transportation and take a look at inclusive design principles. For more information, please click [Built Environment Tool 1 - Understanding the Building Blocks of Inclusive Design](#)
- Share the itinerary for, and the format of the event in advance so workers with disabilities can request accommodations if needed
- Provide accessibility training for event organizers and staff
- Provide materials in alternate formats (e.g., [Braille](#) and large print for persons who are blind or who have vision loss, [American Sign Language interpreters](#) or closed captioning for participants who are Deaf or hard of hearing, and other necessary accommodations should be readily available)
- Check out additional best practices for hosting inclusive and accessible events. For more information, please click [Communication Tool 4 - Hosting Inclusive Virtual Meetings](#)

References

¹ Dispenza, F. (2021). Empowering the career development of persons with disabilities (PWD). *Journal of Career Development, 48*(5), 670-685.

² The Conference Board of Canada (2015). *Employers' Toolkit: Making Ontario Workplaces Accessible to People with Disabilities* (2nd ed.). https://www.conferenceboard.ca/docs/default-source/pdf_downloads/7159_accessibilitytoolkit-2015_rpt.pdf?sfvrsn=a98e7013_2&pdf=toolkit

³ Disabled Person (n.d.). *Disability Career Development*. <https://www.disabledperson.com/career-development-pwd>

⁴ Lindsay, S., R. Hartman, L., & Fellin, M. (2016). A systematic review of mentorship programs to facilitate transition to post-secondary education and employment for youth and young adults with disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation, 38*(14), 1329-1349.