

GUIDING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

by Robert M. Gignac

As professionals (regardless of your field of expertise), we are regularly faced with complex decisions about how to guide our careers, and for those who manage others, the careers of those who report to you. For some, career guidance seems to come naturally. For others I offer the following ideas that have helped me over the years:

Teach them to learn

On of my favourite lines is “Never let school get in the way of higher education”. Our learning process does not end when school stops. Learning requires time and effort, not all of which will be provided on the job. In order to develop professionally, you will be required to give up some personal time. If you manage, you need to promote learning by creating plans for your staff to allow them to grow. Our rapidly changing work environments demand that we redefine and adapt our roles within ever-shorter cycles. When we make the decision to become lifelong students, we are increasing the odds that we will be among those best equipped to handle change.

Tell them what you expect

Many of the people we work with, by their very nature, tend to be task oriented, but they are not mind readers. A recurring theme in management evaluations is the complaint that staff gets little or no direction from above and expectations are not being clearly communicated. “If you don’t know where you are going, don’t be surprised if you don’t get there” is the thought that immediately comes to mind. Do not be fooled into thinking that technology will solve your communication problems. I am baffled by organizations that see e-mails travel the distance of two cubicles, when getting up and simply talking to someone would be the better solution.

Lead by example

We cannot, or should not, expect those we manage to do things we do not or will not do personally. We cannot expect others to set and attain goals for themselves if we have no prescribed goals. If we are unenthusiastic about our role with the company, our staff will not be enthusiastic about their roles. If we do not share information and concerns with our staff, do not expect them to share or be concerned. Many task-oriented people often like to work alone, but they do not like to work in a vac-



uum. The spirit and approach that we take in our own jobs will have a major impact on those who work for us.

Give them a chance to experiment

The best way to develop your staff is to let them take their new skills, along with a clear set of directions, and do something. The process of building and breaking things is the growth process; you cannot learn anything if you do not make mistakes along the way. Some will say they cannot afford the luxury of doing this—you cannot afford not to. A firm that does not afford itself any degree of experimentation will evolve into a rigid and inflexible organization that cannot handle today’s continually changing environments.

Work with the willing

You can run faster with 10 people who really want to run than with one who really does not. In today’s environment, companies cannot afford the luxury of carrying staff who do not want to go somewhere. You will encounter two types of people: those who are capable but unwilling, and those who are not yet capable, but are willing. It is easier to teach the willing to be capable, than to motivate the unwilling. Teach those who are willing to be taught; for those who are not willing, the alternatives are not pretty.

Even with these ideas as a starting point, it is not easy to be successful. That does not mean it is not a worthwhile endeavor. The onus is on you to take care of your career, grow, reinvent yourself, and stay marketable—because you never know what tomorrow may bring. Encourage those who work for you to do the same. In the end, it might be the best thing you ever do for them. **E**

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