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Train Your Employees To Train Themselves

Tips for Promoting Self-Guided Development in the Workplace

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Teaching your employees to be agile problem-solvers and decision-makers doesn't have to involve a major investment in a formal training program. Instead, you and your employees can leverage the learning that happens naturally each day at work.

The process is called self-guided development, and it leads to happier, more engaged employees. It can also help you build a smarter workforce—without spending a dime.

TIP 1 HIRE THE MOTIVATED, THE CURIOUS, THE SOCIAL, AND THE DEDICATED

- Look for employees who are primed to seize the initiative, eager for fresh projects and new roles, and willing to accept responsibility.
- Pick candidates who are naturally curious, with a bias toward improvement, and who are comfortable seeking out and interacting with other people.
- Choose employees who are committed to their own careers—they're more likely to seek out new knowledge and skills.

TIP 2 EXPLAIN YOUR COMPANY'S TRAINING STYLE

- Explain that informal learning and self-guided development are key ways for your employees to grow within your organization.
- Encourage your people to pursue new knowledge by collaborating with coworkers, seeking help and advice from supervisors and colleagues, and observing others doing their jobs.
- Describe to your employees that new experiences and developing new relationships inside and outside of work can provide information, insight, and perspective to advance their careers and increase their professional value.

TIP 3 PRIORITIZE SELF-GUIDED DEVELOPMENT

- Make informal learning and self-guided development a priority at your company.
- Refer to self-guided development in performance reviews.
- Encourage employees to give feedback about their experiences.
- Promote knowledge sharing as the cultural norm.

Insights from “How Do Middle Market Firms Leverage Informal HR Strategies,” a 2012 Fellow Research Initiative.

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TIP 4 MAXIMIZE INTERACTION

- Structure jobs so that employees must converse and coordinate their efforts.
- Give teams more autonomy, and give people more autonomy to create teams.
- Build in-house networking opportunities into the workday.

TIP 5 MAKE TIME FOR REFLECTION

- Give employees time to take stock of their own strengths and weaknesses.
- Encourage employees to determine what they need in order to improve their performance and to chart a course for obtaining the needed skills and knowledge.

TIP 6 KEEP IT “LIGHT”

- Lay the right foundation for self-guided development.
- Then step back and proceed with a light touch, allowing employees to take the lead and become fully engaged with your company and their own professional development.