

# Up Is Not the

**The phrase, 'Up Is Not the Only Way,' was coined almost 30 years ago by the author in a book on career development for HR professionals. That phrase has continued to be true over the past three decades, but is possibly truer today than ever before.**

# Only Way...Really!

By Beverly Kaye

Job opportunity: Slow growing organization with limited opportunities seeks hard working, bright, and creative professionals. Potential for growth in current job.

Would you be enticed to apply to this job posting? Would this opportunity be attractive to the employees in your organization? This posting does imply a huge truth: promotions are in short supply in most organizations today. And this trend most likely will continue. In fact, the lack of perceived opportunities is one of the major reasons employees choose to leave organizations, and one of HR's more serious challenges.

What happens to employees when they see that the "right place" is already occupied or not available in their immediate future? Often they become dissatisfied; they consider packing their bags and moving on. In addition to developing the "right people," human resource professionals also need to look closely at developing more enticing "right places" within their organizations.



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Why not re-write the old saying “right person, right place, right time” by putting “right place” first? If there are more right places, there would be more right times for all the right people already working in our organizations.

The challenge for HR professionals responsible for career development is to educate employees and managers in how to redefine advancement and career success to include more than just traditional vertical moves.

### Options for employees

While it is not the role of the organization to do career planning for employees, it is critical to educate employees about the career development process and provide the necessary support. A key piece is communicating the various options available and benefits derived from pursuing each option. This may require transitioning from the traditional career ladder that focuses on moving up to a career lattice that enables employees to move in a variety of directions.

Increased lateral mobility keeps people from stagnating in a career cul-de-sac. Lateral moves are excellent for employees who wish to

- increase their portfolio of marketable skills
- broaden their breadth of experience for the future
- experience other managers and leaders
- move into a faster growth area
- demonstrate newly acquired competencies by working with different colleagues in a new part of the organization.

Different sorts of projects, team assignments, rotations, and mentoring relationships with people from other parts of the organization are developmental and increase perspective and abilities.

**Enrichment.** Richard Hackman coined the term “job enrichment” in 1977 when he wrote *Improving Life at Work* with Lloyd Suttle. Today, their concept

of “growing in place” still provides opportunities for learning and development, yet it does not require employees to move out of their present job. Of all the career choices today, this may indeed be the most fertile.

Through job enrichment, employees can enhance their reputation in the organization, increase their own job challenge, build competence or confidence in skills, and widen their network of contacts. More important, it can perhaps prepare them for lateral or verticals moves in the future. Today, moving sideways no longer indicates that an individual is being sidelined.

**Vertical movement is a positive way to advertise and support promotion from within. It is a clear means of rewarding for performance while building the organization's succession and strategic plans.**

**Vertical moves.** Most employees are aware that vertical moves are attractive for increased compensation, status, and responsibility. Many opt for vertical moves because they want a new challenge or wish for more power and influence. Still others opt for vertical moves because they are responding to social pressure. They believe moving up the ladder is the only way to increase their marketability in the organization.

It is important to remember that not everyone lusts for vertical moves. For example, many Millennials seek flexibility and work-life balance often more than they seek the status and dollars that go with a move up the ladder.

**Exploration.** For those employees who don't know what they want, or what might be possible, exploration is

## Sidebar 1 | WIFM and More!

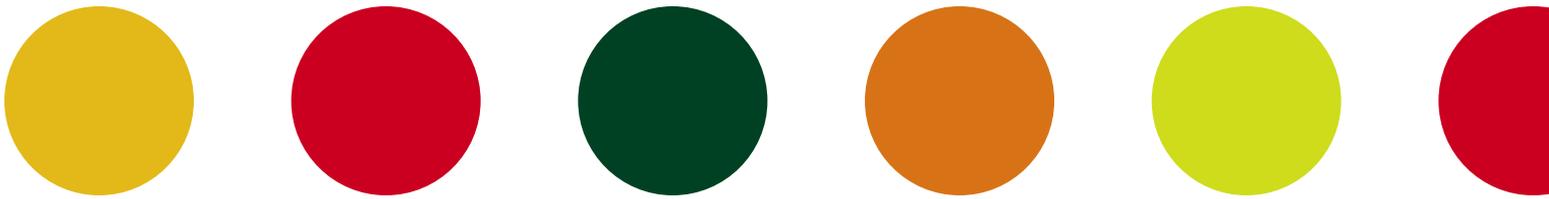
When employees can describe how a goal supports their own development, how it contributes to their workgroup performance, and how it supports the organization's objectives, they are better prepared to garner the resources they need to progress in their careers. This set of questions can be asked by individuals of themselves, by peer support groups, or by development-minded managers.

### What's in it for you?

- How will it make you a better performer in your current job or another job?
- How will it support your long-term professional development?
- How will it make you more employable in your current organization or elsewhere?
- What's in it for your workgroup?
- How will it help you deliver more valuable additions to your team?
- How will it give you great versatility so you can support divisional or departmental goals?
- How will it enable you to take greater responsibility in specific projects or help your team with theirs?

### What's in it for your manager or the organization?

- How will it remove some of the current pressures on your manager?
- How will it prepare you to take on greater or different responsibilities that support the business strategy of your organization?
- How might it give you greater visibility with others on the leadership team?



a viable option. Exploration involves the process of researching and testing multiple opportunities so that smarter decision making is possible.

Exploration can help individuals validate the benefits of their present job, clarify choices and options, and increase contacts to learn more about their organization. For instance, job rotation and temporary or short-term job assignments encourage employees to push beyond current task boundaries and check out assumptions about other choices before committing to a specific next career move.

**Realignment.** Moving downward in the organization—or realignment—may be an option for managing personal change or for reconciling the demands of work with other priorities. Such moves will be enticing to individuals who want to reduce pressure, or for those who recognize that managerial responsibilities are not for them. It also can work as training for acquiring new skills or for moving in a different career direction.

**Leaving the organization.** Leaders and managers need to be open and willing to discuss the reality that leaving the organization is another option for those who can't find the right career fit or view their career ambitions as blocked. A manager's willingness to have an authentic conversation is an important step in leaving the door open for a potential return at a later date for talented individuals who feel a change is in order. An open conversation about leaving can garner positive press about the organization.

### **Payoff for the organization**

Multiple career options benefit the organization as well as the employee. Organizations that support lateral movement often have more qualified backups, and are in a better position to maximize the potential of their internal resources while reducing turnover and increasing employee job satisfaction. By moving laterally, employees acquire expanded understanding of the

## Sidebar 2 | **When to Do What?**

This set of suggestions can guide coaches to think more clearly about options.

### **Lateral: Moving Across**

A lateral (or sideways) move would be strong option if the employee:

- seeks to expand their professional network
- wants a role with similar responsibilities but assignments that require new or different skills and abilities
- desires to learn another function, product, or part of the organization

### **Enrichment: Growing in Place**

Growing in place would be a strong option if the employee:

- has room to grow in the current position
- wants to focus on improving their performance
- would like to continue their current role and has a keen interest in developing new skills.

### **Vertical: Moving Up**

Moving up within the organization would be a strong option if the employee:

- is ready to take on more responsibility
- wants to be accountable for a workgroup or project
- wants greater input to organizational direction.

### **Exploratory: Investigating Possibilities**

Understanding alternatives would be a strong option if the employee:

- is considering a change but is unsure of what it would take
- wants to learn about other roles and jobs
- is uncertain how or if a role would meet their values, skills, and interests.

### **Realignment: Stepping Back**

Moving down or back would be a strong option if the employee:

- is considering changing disciplines or professions
- wants or needs more time to focus on personal priorities
- prefers to return to a role held in the past.

### **Relocation: Moving Out**

Leaving the organization would be a strong option if the employee:

- has a strong desire to be an entrepreneur
- finds job satisfaction only in roles that are not available in the organization
- cannot continue to grow and learn inside the organization.

## Sidebar 3 | Clarifying Questions

These questions might help an individual get more specific about which actions make sense at any given time.

### Lateral

Which of your skills could be applied beyond your present job and department?

If you could make a lateral move, what long-term career opportunities would it provide?

### Enrichment

What could be added to your job to make it more satisfying?

What do you enjoy most about your job? How could you do more of it?

### Vertical

In what ways would you compare to others who are applying for the job?

What value would you bring to the organization at this level?

### Exploratory

What other areas of the organization interest you?

If you could start your career over, what would you do differently? Is that still possible? What could you do in your current position to pursue that option?

### Realignment

Would you be willing to accept the same or lower salary to make a fresh start in a new area?

How would a realigned position enable you to use the skills you really enjoy?

### Relocation

What is it about the organization that makes you want to look outside?

What relationships have you established here? What reputation have you built? How will you build similar connections with a new group of colleagues and customers?

## Flexibility and agility have been touted as key competencies for leaders and managers in this fast-changing world. Indeed, they are critical mind-sets for coaching employees about career options.

organization, which typically increases their own effectiveness. Bottom line: The exchange of people and ideas across organizational boundaries can result in increased innovation, better communication, and coordination.

Enrichment moves increase morale as well as job stability. Such moves spark creativity, support career professionals, and build stronger organization skills. They offer individuals a chance to demonstrate their strengths and develop themselves further within the scope of current jobs. Calculated enrichment options encourage employees to develop particular proficiencies through assignments. Because titles do not change, the satisfaction driver lies in becoming ever more competent and well-known for this key proficiency.

Continued support of vertical moves is still critical to providing the leadership talent necessary to meet business needs and objectives. In addition, vertical movement is a positive way to advertise and support promotion from within. It is a clear means of rewarding for performance while building the organization's succession and strategic plans.

Exploratory moves assist the organization in its efforts to enhance employee knowledge of the organization. It avoids costly misplacement (poor person to job matches) and promotes a positive open and communicative climate within the organization. Managers need to remember to debrief with employees about their experiences and what they learned.

Realignment can improve quality of work life for individuals who really want to decrease managerial stress, as well as support downward communication in the organization. When individuals with information and resources take a step

downward, they bring that information with them to another level of the organization. Realignment also offers a potential satisfactory solution to the dilemma of promoting the best technical contributor and later recognizing that it wasn't the best leadership match.

Finally, when an organization's leadership is open and willing to talk with employees who want to leave, they open the door for an employee to return later—and say “the grass really wasn't greener.” In fact, many organizations realize their own revolving doors can indeed work both ways. Organization alumni groups (popular on sites such as LinkedIn) keep employees connected with one another; these organizations often find return engagements are the result.

Career development is a major driver of employee engagement and retention. Studies across generations and industries consistently demonstrate that exciting work and challenges, as well as opportunities for career growth, learning, and development, are critical factors to employee job satisfaction and engagement at work.

Organizational commitment to multidirectional career development processes and systems will contribute to the maximum utilization of talent as well as overall satisfaction among employees.

### Make goals SMART and REAL

Learning professionals can coach managers on vetting options and identifying the most compelling career possibilities for their workers. This means influencing employees to understand that promotion is only one way of defining success. The end goal is to expand

perceptions about job options that employees may not have considered.

Traditionally, learning professionals suggested that career goals must be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound. Today, a deeper dive that suggests goals should not only be SMART but REAL is needed.

**Relevant.** If an option is considered relevant, there must be alignment between where the employee wants to go and where the organization is headed. Relevance must simultaneously relate to the present and the future.

Tip: Ask what steps can be taken to learn whether goals match strategic plans and the direction the organization is going in the future?

**Enticing.** Options need to match an employee's genuine interests and the work they truly enjoy doing. It is possible to provide skill development, it is impossible to train for passion. Career goals need to have pull for an individual; they need to be able to visualize themselves in a particular future picture. A job that satisfies an employee's interests will keep him inspired to achieve his goals.

Tip: Ask the employee where he finds excitement, and how he will fully use strengths.

**Achievable.** It is important to question the achievability of goals, both in terms of the employee's skills and abilities and the organization's structure and constraints. Realistic conversations help employees make sure they are not building an impossible dream.

Tip: Ask how the career option suits experience, preferences, and values of the individual.

Discover what is motivating about stretching beyond the current level of performance.

**Leveragable.** When a goal has leverage it serves multiple purposes. Contingency plans are critical in this ever-changing environment. Goals that require skill sets that can be used in multiple ways for a variety of future

possibilities bring more energy with them.

Tip: Ask how skill acquisition fits several career options. How can current experiences transfer to a variety of other areas in the organization?

Managers play a key role in collaborating, reality testing, and vetting the goal-setting process. Their aim should be to motivate employees to pursue challenging goals that energize development and align with the future direction of the organization.

### **Flexibility is key**

Flexibility and agility have been touted as key competencies for leaders and managers in this fast-changing world. Indeed, they are critical mindsets for coaching employees about career options.

To be sure, organizations and their leaders must reinvent the current structures and systems that support vertical mobility as the main path to greater status, compensation, and power. But individuals must do their part to take ownership for their own commitment to explore lateral moves that often provide a wider array of options. This can be a positive process with constructive and encouraging outcomes for all involved. Up is clearly not the only way, but flexibility is. Let's not wait.

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