

# Executive Interview



*An interview with Dr. Beverly Kaye, founder of Career Systems International, who is recognized for her groundbreaking body of work and the significant impact she has had on learning and performance in the workplace.*

**WSR:** I'd like to welcome Bev Kaye to this issue of *Workforce Solutions Review* to talk to us about how employers can assist employees in the management of their careers. Please introduce yourself and tell us about your life's work.

**Bev:** Well, my life's work spans four decades of specialization in organizational career development. Bottom line, my organization helps managers and employees talk to each other about career aspirations.

I wrote my doctoral thesis on the subject of career development while at UCLA and that doctoral thesis turned into my first book (originally published in 1997) called *Up Is Not the Only Way*. I started out by building an organization that focused solely on the subject of career development, then branched into retention and engagement, which is of course, very connected. In fact, career development is one of the most important drivers of engagement and retention. The fifth edition of *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay* (1999) will be published in January. *Love 'Em* provides practical strategies managers can do to engage and retain the talent on their teams. It's sold about 600,000 copies in 25 languages! I'm happy to say I'm as passionate now in my career as I was when I started. Maybe a few extra headaches, but still passionate!

**WSR:** We'd like to hear your perspective on generations in the workforce. What are some of the important differences in approach that managers need to think about when managing all of the generations that we have in the workforce today?

**Bev:** My personal belief is that the generations are more similar than they are different in what they want from their careers. All the generations want a boss that cares, a boss who's going to challenge them, and a boss who is interested in their growth. They all want work that's exciting and interesting; work that keeps them on their learning edge at a place they can stay. No one wants to jump from job to job. If their work is engaging, challenging, interesting, and if it uses their skill set, organizations

will have an easier job of keeping those employees. There are certain generational differences that many have written about.

The Silent Generation (people born between 1933 and 1945, which happens to include me) is still interested in their future and in their work. I know that a lot of people in my generation have no intention of retiring. They may work differently, maybe work a little less, but are still excited by and dedicated to what they do. "Silents" want to know that their employers value their work and want to be acknowledged for experience. They want to mentor and work in some new ways. When I talk to friends who have retired, they say, "I would've stayed longer if I could've bargained for a part-time role."

With the current talent shortage, employers need to utilize the skills in all generations. I'd advise employers to look at the Silent Generation and the baby boomers and focus on doing something to keep that talent.

Many of the baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) are caught between the responsibility of caring for aging parents and growing children simultaneously. They're examining their careers and the balance in their lives. Some of them are looking at impending retirement and saying, "What do I want to do still in the world of work?" They are thinking more broadly.

Boomers are willing to explore options inside their companies and it is the organization's job via the manager to talk with them about redesigning their jobs to accommodate their life demands. To the Baby Boomer Generation, enriching their current job and continued learning is a critical aspect of career development.

Those in the Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1976) have watched their parents cope with massive layoffs and job insecurity. I think they've watched their workaholic boomer parents and choose to live and work differently, if they can. Although they are willing to pursue a career with one organization, they will leave if it's not meaningful. They want to make a difference and want their skills to be recognized and acknowledged. Many have entrepreneurial abilities that they are using in separate, personal endeavors outside of the workplace. Employers should capitalize on those skills, especially if they are truly needed inside the organization.

Finally, the Millennials (those born between 1977 and 1998) may be the most tech-savvy. They want to communicate frequently with their leaders and their managers and they do not see those in the hierarchy as unreachable and approach them easily. They look for personal fulfillment. They're asking, "Is this job interesting and satisfying? Is it meaningful? Is it important? Do I have colleagues that I love working with? Am I doing work that counts for something?" They love when their organiza-

tions are active in the community and when they honor sustainable environments. I believe Millennials will be loyal and committed to one organization, as long as the job is intriguing and exciting to them.

Managers need to understand these differences. Maybe the best questions a manager can ask are: “How can I be the best manager for you? What do you need from me? What do you not want from me? I want to keep you on my team and I am interested in knowing what truly matters to you.”

**WSR:** Bev, talk to us about how mentoring has evolved and changed.

**Bev:** We’ve done a lot of work in my organization on mentoring. Conventional wisdom used to be that a person needed one mentor and that mentor needed to mentor one person. Now we are suggesting that an individual needs many mentors or a mosaic of mentors who may mentor on a particular thing for a day, a few minutes, or a quarter.

Mentoring today is less about hierarchy and more about learning about what happens in an organization. Reverse mentoring (where individuals lower in an organization might mentor someone higher in the organization) is common. We often think it has to be senior person mentoring a junior person, but no more.

Mentoring isn’t necessarily one-on-one. Some of the best mentoring work I’ve done has been with mentoring groups, a group of five or six mentees who can absolutely mentor one another, but also work with a more senior leader who learns from the group, as well as offers their insights to the group.

**WSR:** Talk about the concept of moving forward instead of up. We know that not every employee can be promoted. How can we use “moving forward” to continue to engage employees?

**Bev:** That’s a key issue that I’ve talked about for years in my own career and also discussed in my latest book, *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go*. It’s never been the case that an upward move is available to every single person who wants it. We have to open other channels so people can be successful. Those channels have to do with moving laterally to gain new wisdom and new expertise. It’s also critical to know that you can grow right where you are by learning, growing, and changing the very nature of your current work. Growth in place is going to be important now and that’s why I talk about moving forward instead of up.

Lateral moves will also be more important than ever. I think lateral or sideways moves give us a great breadth of experience, a chance to learn the organization from another person’s perspective, walk in another person’s

shoes, and thereby do our current jobs much more effectively.

I invented a tool that we’ve used for decades. It’s called the leverage inventory. The best way to remember “leverage” is to think of the word LEVERR with two Rs.

With LEVERR, we talk about *lateral* moves; *enrichment*; *vertical*; *exploratory* (which means “What short-term job assignments make sense?”); *realignment* (meaning moving down in order to get across into something else), and then relocation (if I’m not getting what I want from my current job, I should explore my next move.) The more “leverage” you have, the more you can manage your own career.

Alas, organizations don’t always support this idea. Compensation systems and other ways of rewarding success often aren’t appropriated to people who make these other kinds of moves in their careers. Because of this, many individuals still define career success as moving up.

**WSR:** What advice would you offer to those who want to truly take charge of their careers?

**Bev:** Here’s a slogan I believe in: “If it’s to be, it’s up to me.”

Some people are tempted to hold others accountable for their work satisfaction. Most find over time that those others can’t – or won’t – deliver what’s wanted and needed. Ultimately, you choose your career, your boss, your team and your organization. You decided how long to stay and you have the power and influence to improve your work. Accept that responsibility, complete with its challenges, and you’ll get more of what you want from your work and your workplace.

## About Beverly Kaye



Dr. Beverly Kaye, founder of Career Systems International, was named the 2010 recipient of the Distinguished Contribution to Workplace Learning and Performance Award by ASTD. She is recognized for her groundbreaking body of work and the significant impact she has had on learning and performance in the workplace. Bev is the author of *Up Is Not the Only Way* and co-author of *Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em: Getting Good People to Stay*, The Wall Street Journal best-selling book, co-authored with Sharon Jordan-Evans, as well as *Love It Don’t Leave It*. Her firm, Career Systems International, has worked with the Fortune 500 and continues to invent, create and design systems and strategies in development, engagement and retention. Her most recent book, *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go* was released in 2012. She can be reached at [Beverly.Kaye@careersystemsintl.com](mailto:Beverly.Kaye@careersystemsintl.com).