FIELD GUIDE TO
CAREER SUCCESS

Strategies to Realize Your Ambitions



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About the *Field Guide*

Career success requires a blend of self-assessment, relationship building, and continuous learning. The primary purpose of a field guide is to help people bridge the possible—what they think something looks like—and the actual—what it really looks like. With that purpose in mind, a "field guide to career success" should support a person's journey between seeking and achieving career success.

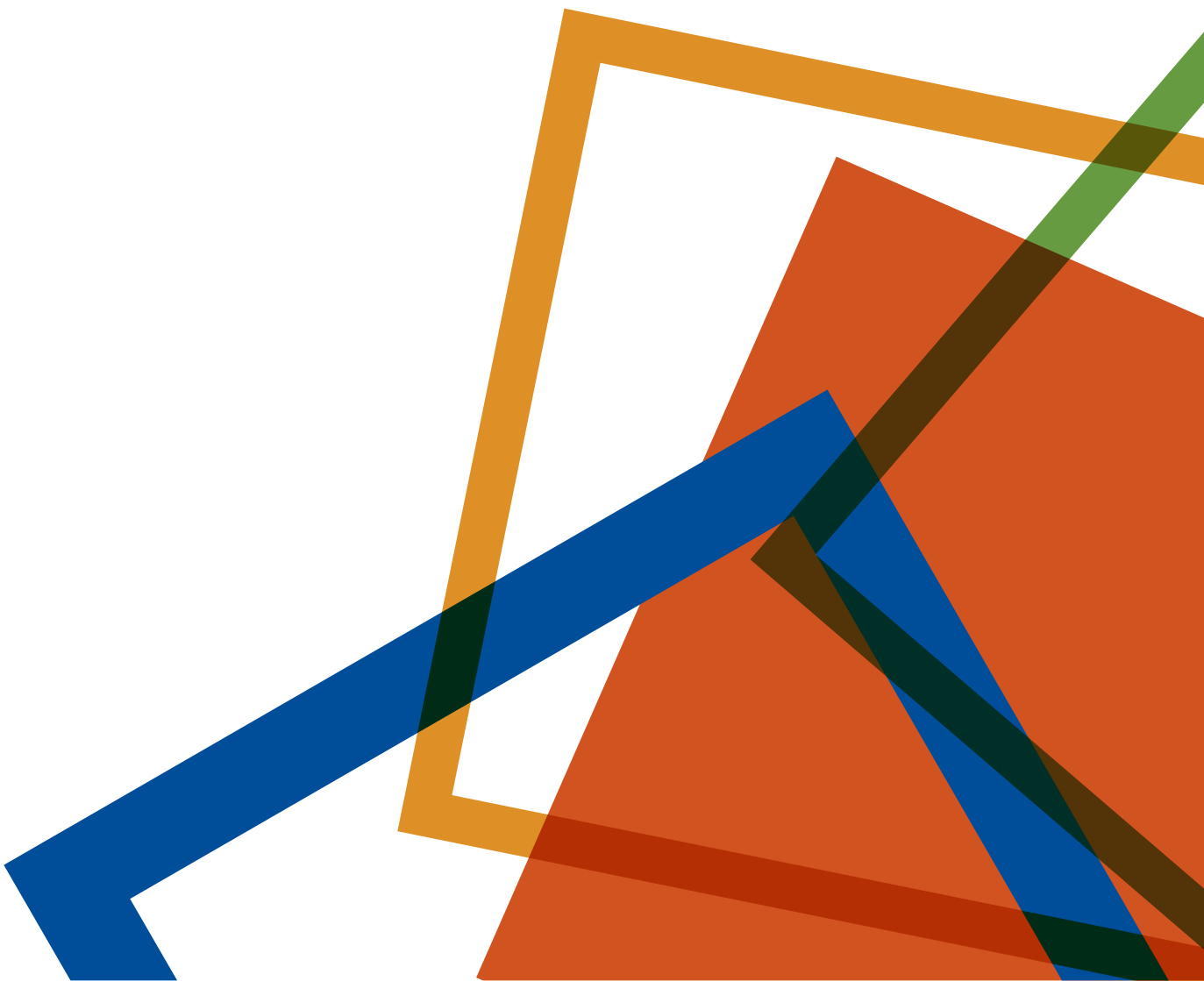
A personal journey to career success could have phases that include planning and assessing, performing and growing, connecting and collaborating, and adjusting and adapting. The resources in this guide should help you in specific phases of your journey.

The design work is by Marissa Villones and Bryan Richter.

Best wishes for achieving your career ambitions!

Craig Maile
Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education

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PROFESSIONAL DRESS TIPS

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STEAL THE SHOW







NO-GO













**Jeans may be worn when task-appropriate (such as setting up at a conference), when you have a valid Jeans Pass, on a Friday, and when the State Director authorizes. Clothing must not be stained or have holes.*

PROFESSIONAL DRESS TIPS

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ADVANCING YOUR CAREER

20 STRATEGIES ANYONE CAN USE

Advancing your career requires a mix of skill-building, relationship cultivation, and strategic visibility. The transition from being visible to being "selected" requires shifting focus from doing good work to demonstrating strategic impact.

Master Your Current Role and Take Initiative.

Excel at your core responsibilities: A proven track record and consistently exceeding expectations is the foundation for growth.
Volunteer for "stretch" assignments: Raise your hand for projects outside your standard scope of work to showcase your versatility and initiative.
Solve problems, don't just report them: When identifying a roadblock, always come to your manager with proposed solutions.
Take ownership of processes: Look for inefficiencies in your daily workflow and suggest or implement improvements that save time or money.
Align with organizational goals: Understand your organization's broader objectives and directly connect your daily work to those priorities.

Be a Lifelong Learner.

Upskill purposefully: Identify the professional, durable, and technical skills that are in demand in your industry and bridge any gaps.
Earn relevant certifications: Boost your skillset with recognized credentials or specialized training courses.
Attend industry conferences: Participate in events to stay current on trends and emerging methodologies.
Learn to communicate effectively: Strengthen your speaking and writing skills to help express ideas clearly.
Find a mentor or sponsor: Seek others who can provide guidance, accountability, and industry insights.

Build Relationships and Visibility.

Expand your network: Your visibility and influence improve drastically when you build connections outside your immediate team. Join cross-functional committees, volunteer for stretch assignments, and share knowledge across departments.
Seek feedback: Regularly ask supervisors, peers, and mentors for constructive insights and act on them.
Establish your presence: Speak up in meetings with thoughtful questions and ideas.
Quantify and communicate impact: Hard work alone rarely speaks for itself. Track your contributions and quantify them using data ("$10,000 in savings," "reduced wait times by 15%," "increased client retention by 20%"). Share these achievements regularly with key leaders.
Engage with professional associations: Expand your network externally by joining industry-specific groups, attending local meetups, or volunteering.

Aim for Your Future.

Set SMART goals: Outline specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound objectives for your career path.
Make ambitions clear: Don't assume managers know what you want. Clearly articulate your career goals to mentors, sponsors, and leaders so that when a new role opens, you are someone who comes to mind.
Find someone to mentor: Supporting others builds your leadership skills, establishes you as a subject matter expert, and expands your network.
Track opportunities: Regularly review job opportunities inside and outside your organization and prepare yourself for roles you want.
Cultivate a growth mindset: Treat failures and challenges as opportunities to learn, adapt, and enhance your workplace value.

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BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH TEAM MEMBERS

20 STRATEGIES ANYONE CAN USE

Building positive relationships with team members boosts morale and increases productivity. You can foster a collaborative workplace by showing genuine interest in your colleagues, practicing active listening, volunteering support, and maintaining professional boundaries to build trust and prevent burnout.

Communication & Collaboration

1. **Actively listen:** Focus completely on what your colleagues are saying without planning your response while they speak.
2. **Clarify expectations:** Ensure everyone understands the desired outcomes, deadlines, and parameters.
3. **Be reliable:** Do what you say you will do, when you say you will do it.
4. **Give specific praise:** Recognize your teammates' contributions and say "thank you" for their work.
5. **Ask for help:** Seeking advice shows that you value your coworkers' expertise and like working with them.

Professionalism & Respect

6. **Treat everyone with respect:** Extend courtesy to everyone, regardless of their position.
7. **Avoid gossiping:** Steer clear of "break room" complaints or back-channeling about team members.
8. **Drop the ego:** Accept that your perspective is only one of many.
9. **Hit pause:** Take a moment to respond instead of reacting immediately to stressful or emotional situations.
10. **Assume good intentions:** Give colleagues the benefit of the doubt when disagreements arise.

Building Rapport

11. **Find common ground:** Discover shared interests, hobbies, or experiences outside of daily tasks.
12. **Learn about the team:** Take the time to understand the communication and collaboration preferences of team members.
13. **Welcome new hires:** Help onboard new hires by introducing yourself and showing them the ropes.
14. **Join meetings early:** Arrive early to meetings to participate in casual conversations.
15. **Participate in team building:** Engage in virtual or in-person bonding activities that the team enjoys.

Problem Solving & Support

16. **Notice when others struggle:** Pay attention to team members and offer help if they appear to be overwhelmed.
17. **Work from facts:** Address conflicts logically by looking at observable behaviors and data, not personal traits and assumptions.
18. **Resolve issues directly:** Handle disagreements with kindness and empathy rather than ignoring them.
19. **Be open to feedback:** Welcome constructive criticism to continuously improve your working dynamic.
20. **Prioritize your own tasks:** Be a dependable team member who does an equal portion of the work.

MENU OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

ABOUT THIS TOOL—Many of our most powerful learning experiences occur outside of classrooms, workshops, and conferences. This chart is meant to spark creative thinking in deciding how best to foster team members' development. There are many low- or no-cost options that can lead to lasting learning.

Learn from the Work

- Take on stretch assignments (assignments at a higher level of complexity or skill).
- Participate in a cross-division or office working group.
- Develop or improve a process, procedure, or practice.
- Learn and apply a new method or technique.
- Take on temporary assignments.
- Help design and lead team retreats.
- Work across cultures.

Learn from Colleagues

- Join or start a study group, journal club, or community of practice.
- Find a mentor for yourself.
- Join a LinkedIn group.
- Network (meet periodically with other professionals to learn about their experiences and challenges).
- Learn from the "digital network" (Google, YouTube, TED, wikis, websites, etc.).
- Shadow a colleague for a day (or so, with permission).

Learn Through Teaching

- Mentor others.
- Read, and report to your team about what you read.
- Teach a workshop or course.
- Present at a conference.
- Share what you learn with your team.

Learn Through Reflection

- Write—articles, blog posts, best practices, etc.
- Solicit feedback.
- Keep a journal.
- Read—a book, report, online article, blog post, published insights, etc.
- Listen to a podcast and share what you learn.
- Facilitate a discussion drawing upon research, including AI.
- Create your personal vision and mission statements.
- Clarify your values.

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Learn with Others

- Join online discussion groups.
- Take an online course or webinar.
- Attend internal and external professional development activities, such as workshops and seminars, "pop-up PD" events, and conferences.
- Volunteer in your community.
- Participate in professional associations.
- Take field trips with team members to see how others do business.
- Go back to school.



Source: Richard Wilkinson, The Everyday Manager's Toolbox, 2022. Adapted with permission.

LEARNING LIKE A PRO

20 TECHNIQUES ANYONE CAN USE

By optimizing how your brain encodes, stores, and retrieves information, you can master any skill or subject. Search online to learn more about the techniques below.

Study Smarter, Not Harder

1. **Building Active Recall:** Force your brain to retrieve information from memory (such as by using flashcards) rather than simply re-reading notes.
2. **Using Spaced Repetition:** Review material at gradually increasing intervals.
3. **Applying the Feynman Technique:** Explain complex concepts in the simplest terms possible, as if teaching a child. This quickly reveals where your understanding is weak.
4. **Interleaving:** Mix different but related topics or skills in a single study session instead of focusing on only one topic at a time.
5. **Dual Coding:** Combine words with visuals (charts, graphs, or doodles) to give your brain two different ways to recall the information.
6. **Elaborating:** Connect new information to things you already know. Building a network of meaning makes concepts stick longer.
7. **Providing Concrete Examples:** Anchor abstract, theoretical ideas with specific, real-world examples to visualize and understand them better.

Maximize Mental Output

8. **Following the 80/20 Rule (Pareto Principle):** Focus on the 20% of the material that yields 80% of the results or understanding.
9. **Chunking:** Break large volumes of information into smaller "chunks" rather than trying to swallow the whole text.
10. **Using the Pomodoro Technique:** Work in highly focused 25-minute intervals, followed by a 5-minute break, to fight procrastination and maintain peak focus.
11. **Taking Notes by Hand:** Writing notes by hand is better for learning because it forces you to actively process, summarize, and synthesize information rather than transcribing word-for-word.
12. **Using Self-Explanation:** Frequently ask yourself why a fact or formula makes sense.
13. **Creating Concept Maps:** Draw visual networks connecting ideas, steps, and themes to see the "big picture" of the subject.

Protect Your Brain's Hardware

14. **Prioritizing Sleep:** Sleep is when the brain consolidates short-term memories into long-term storage. All-nighters destroy retention.
15. **Using Pre-Testing:** Try taking a practice test on the material before you learn it. Even if you get every question wrong, it primes your brain to spot the correct answers while you study.
16. **Eliminating Friction:** Make studying easy. Prepare your study space and eliminate distractions (like phone notifications).
17. **Embracing Desirable Difficulty:** Lean into the struggle instead of defaulting to easier, passive learning methods.

Play the Long Game

18. **Adopting a Growth Mindset:** Believe that your intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work.
19. **Setting Process Goals, Not Outcome Goals:** Focus on what you can control ("I'll read for 30 minutes") rather than what you can't ("I'll score in the top ten percent on the exam").
20. **Conducting Post-Learning Reflections:** At the end of a learning session, quickly ask yourself what worked, what didn't, and how you can learn more efficiently next time.

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RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

A Role for Every Player

Employee engagement is everyone's responsibility. Every employee has a role to play in sustaining workplace engagement. Here is what each employee in an organization can do:

Role: Senior Leadership
Focus: Communication, Alignment, and Support

- Communicate regularly why the work is important and what is possible with a fully engaged workforce. Describe examples of where employee engagement has improved service delivery in the organization.
- Align all work practices and talent throughout the organization to drive engagement and results.
- Support strategies for assessing and improving engagement.
- Speak positively of employee engagement and how it is shaping the overall culture.
- Emphasize employee engagement as a continuous improvement effort.
- Model engagement in your words and actions.
- Apply your emotional intelligence.

Role: Engagement Team Members/Engagement Champions
Focus: Strategy, Promotion, and Support

- Communicate a vision of what is possible with a fully engaged workforce.
- Align all work practices and talent throughout the organization to drive engagement and results.
- Speak positively of employee engagement and how it is shaping the overall culture.
- Emphasize employee engagement as a continuous improvement effort.
- Observe yourself. How engaged are you in all areas of your work? Model engagement in your words and actions.
- Apply your emotional intelligence.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

A Role for Every Player

Employee engagement is everyone's responsibility. Every employee has a role to play in sustaining workplace engagement. Here is what each employee in an organization can do:

Role: Managers and Supervisors

Focus: Support, Relationship-Building, and Dialogue

- Use existing communication loops to amplify the importance of employee engagement.
- Speak positively of employee engagement and how it is shaping the work within your teams.
- Build personal and trusting relationships with all of your employees.
- Observe yourself. How engaged are you in all areas of your work?
- Model engagement in your words and actions.
- Take time to understand the strengths and talents of your coworkers and employees.
- Explicitly match each person's talents, strengths, and needs with the organization's objectives.
- Meet with other managers and supervisors to discuss levels of engagement and what is needed to shape an environment where employees thrive.
- Apply your emotional intelligence.

Role: Employees

Focus: Ownership, Commitment, and Action

- Communicate your career interests and needs to your supervisor.
- Celebrate your peers' success and how their work makes a difference to you.
- Observe yourself. How engaged are you in all areas of your work?
- Participate fully in the organization's goals and try to improve practices and service delivery.
- Seek opportunities to participate on committees to improve or innovate.
- Create trusting relationships by genuinely interacting with your peers and supervisor.
- Seek development resources and learning opportunities to refine your work and maximize your career potential.
- Apply your emotional intelligence.

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WHAT HISTORY CAN TEACH US
ABOUT WORKPLACE SUCCESS



"In War: Resolution.
In Defeat: Defiance.
In Victory: Magnanimity.
In Peace: Goodwill."

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

In War: Resolution. Confront difficulty. Plan the work and work the plan. Maximize your strengths. Be a scrappy hand-raiser. Take calculated risks. Be willing to un-learn and re-learn.

In Defeat: Defiance. Embrace a growth mindset. Learn to fail well. Capture the learning before cleaning the slate. Have a bias toward action. Reframe and recommit. Elevate your profile and amplify your accomplishments. Build your adaptability muscle. Earn from your mistakes.

In Victory: Magnanimity. Reach out, keep your door open, and be ready for partnership. Build bridges to resolve differences. Acknowledge the positive efforts of others. Express your gratitude. Voice your readiness to collaborate. Recognize that example is leadership.

In Peace: Goodwill. Seek harmony. Practice empathy. Promote cooperation. Listen actively. Build social capital. Diversify your network. Share what works. Lean on your WeQ*.

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Sir Winston Churchill by Yousuf Karsh

*The skills to interact, build relationships and show the self-awareness needed to work effectively with others in person and virtually.

CROSS-TRAINING
Best Practices

In most organizations, one of the most significant expenses is the organization's investment in its people. One such investment is cross-training. Cross-training involves giving employees the opportunity to learn new tasks or skills that would usually fall outside of their primary job duties. With cross-training, individuals (trainees) learn to be supports or back-ups for other individuals (trainers) when those individuals are on leave or are otherwise absent from the workplace for a defined time. Cross-training can also be another way to train future managers. It can also strengthen teams and give employees more opportunities to advance.

Cross-training can also be a strategic tool for an organization. One common use for cross-training is to assist the organization for succession planning. It allows the organization to build its resilience when individuals plan to exit from the workplace. In this way, cross-training helps organizations to prepare for change.

Cross-training may not be advisable for some tasks or skills, such as those that are highly specialized. For some tasks or skills, the organization may also not want less skilled employees trying to handle very complex tasks or issues. In such instances, the organization may want to supplement cross-training with additional professional development opportunities for the trainee(s). Cross-training requires planning to be implemented effectively.

Value of Cross-Training

For Employees

- Expand an employee's knowledge of different roles
- Support an employee in working on new projects or stretch assignments
- Improve employee readiness for collaboration, teamwork, and other potential roles in the organization
- Help an employee to specialize in alignment with organizational goals and initiatives
- Reassure an employee that one or more other employees can provide support when the employee takes time away from the workplace

For Organizations

- Maintain stability amid anticipated and unanticipated change
- Improve organizational agility
- Boost employees' understanding of and engagement with the organization
- Ensure continuity when a key employee is absent or leaves
- Preserve institutional knowledge
- Support internal mobility (which can enhance morale and reduce hiring costs)
- Strengthen collaboration among teams and break down silos

Some Best Practices

- Map essential roles (jobs needing cross-trained staff) and their key tasks or processes.
- Determine if the existing task or process is up to date (and still necessary) before cross-training anyone.
- Pair each trainee with a trainer (employee experienced in the task or skill).
- Be thoughtful about how you approach employees and address possible concerns upfront:
  - Some people may see the addition of another task as punishment.
  - Staff who are cross-training others may fear they will soon be replaced.
  - Staff not chosen to cross-train may resent being left out.
- Select the right candidates to be trainees. Consider their personality, motivation, and ability to take on the added responsibility of the task or skill. Get input from a trainee candidate's supervisor and from human resources staff, if needed.
- Make sure employees know why they have been selected to participate as the trainers (the people currently performing the task or skill) and the trainees (the person learning the task or skill).
- Be clear about role expectations, such as when a newly trained employee would perform the task or skill.
- Include cross-training as part of goal-setting discussions with employees. Make sure the organization's managers are comfortable with talking about cross-training needs and opportunities with their teams.
- Create a job rotation or job shadowing experience, if appropriate, for interested employees (trainees).
- Set clear learning objectives and manageable timelines. Be careful not to overload trainers or trainees.
- Support the employees involved by recognizing the learning curve involved and giving the employees (both the trainee and trainer) time to complete the cross-training.
- Supplement cross-training with professional development, as appropriate for the task or skill.
- Give trainees opportunities to practice their new tasks or skills through stretch assignments.

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DEVELOPING RELATIONAL CAPACITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

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Relational capacities refer to the interpersonal skills and organizational abilities used to build, maintain, and strengthen professional connections. They transform organizations from purely functional spaces into collaborative environments by fostering communication, problem-solving, and coordination. Organizations must build and activate relationships to be successful.

1. Structure Cross-Functional Collaboration. Break down departmental silos to ensure information flows naturally across the organization.

- **Matrix Structures and Task Forces:** Form teams composed of members from different departments to tackle specific projects.
- **Communities of Practice:** Create voluntary, interest-based groups that allow employees to share knowledge and best practices outside of traditional reporting lines.

2. Invest in Relationship-Focused Training. Treat networking and relationship building as core professional competencies to be strengthened, not left to chance.

- **Onboarding and Mentorship:** Embed cross-departmental introduction programs during onboarding. Implement mentoring or buddy programs to connect new staff with more senior team members and peers in different departments.
- **Upskilling:** Provide training in active listening, constructive discussion, and emotional intelligence.

3. Establish Shared Values and Goals. Relational capabilities thrive when all parties clearly see mutual benefits.

- **Aligned Incentives:** Tie departmental key performance indicators to shared objectives rather than to isolated metrics, encouraging teams to collaborate rather than compete.
- **Co-Creation:** Involve employees, stakeholders, and strategic partners in planning and strategy formulation so everyone has ownership of the outcomes.

4. Foster Psychological Safety. Open dialogue is impossible without trust and a non-punitive environment.

- **Transparency:** Ensure leaders openly communicate organizational changes and provide safe outlets (such as town halls or anonymous feedback platforms) for team members to voice concerns and ask questions.
- **Collaboration Recognition:** Acknowledge and publicly reward team members who share knowledge and bridge gaps across the organization.

5. Leverage Collaborative Tools. Use digital tools that facilitate connection.

- **Open Platforms:** Use tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, or similar platforms to maintain open lines of communication, share feedback, and express appreciation.
- **Relationship Mapping:** Use internal directories to map communication and collaboration networks and to address gaps by introducing people who should be connected.

Storytelling translates data and strategies into compelling human experiences. It boosts engagement, empathy, and memory to construct a more connected workplace culture.

- **Onboarding:** Besides an employee handbook, sharing the organization's "origin story" and historical milestones with new team members can help them grasp the lived values and mission of the organization.
- **Meeting Kickoffs:** Start team huddles with a short anecdote about a recent success with a stakeholder or a shared positive experience to quickly capture the group's attention.
- **Project Kickoffs:** Frame a project roadmap not only as a series of tasks, but as a journey, so team members can visualize their roles in the big picture.
- **Data Presentations:** Wrap your data points in real-world scenarios or customer profiles to show how your team's work addresses tangible human needs.
- **Change Management:** When rolling out an initiative, replace the memo with stories about real people addressing and overcoming similar challenges.
- **Failing Forward:** Extract the learning before "cleaning the slate" by leading an open dialogue about a project that underperformed but that revealed insights or sparked innovations.
- **Brainstorming:** Describe the end-user of a product or service by creating a character-driven narrative, putting the characters' needs at the center of your creative process.
- **Team Building:** Host "virtual campfires" where colleagues can share personal anecdotes and journeys to promote vulnerability and deepen trust.
- **Performance Reviews:** Rather than simply listing responsibilities, frame career development as a narrative arc of challenges overcome, skills gained, and aspirations clarified.
- **Leadership Updates:** Rather than simply delivering departmental updates, share stories about individual employees whose actions going "above and beyond" highlight the organization's values and goals.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR *Storytelling* IN THE WORKPLACE



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USING ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

How to do it

Paraphrasing

Restate the same information, using different words to more concisely reflect what the speaker said.

Why Do It

· Tests your understanding of what is heard by communicating your understanding of what the speaker said.

· Allows the speaker to "hear" and focus on his or her own thoughts.

· Allows the speaker to see that you are trying to understand his or her message and perceptions.

· Encourages the speaker to continue speaking.

Examples of Active Listening Responses

"What I'm hearing is..."

"Sounds like you're saying..."

"I'm not sure I'm with you, but..."

"If I'm hearing you correctly...."

"So, as you see it..."

"It sounds like what's most important to you is..."

How to do it

Clarifying

Invite the speaker to explain some aspect of what she or he said.

Why Do It

· Gives the speaker the opportunity to elaborate and clarify what was said.

· Gives you the opportunity to identify anything that is unclear and to check the accuracy of your understanding.

Examples of Active Listening Responses

"I'm not sure I quite understand; or do you mean that...?"

"Can you say more about...?"

"You've given me a lot of information, let me see if I've got it all..."

USING ACTIVE LISTENING SKILLS

How to do it

Reflecting

Relaying what was said back to the speaker to show that you understand how he or she feels about something.

Why Do It

· Deepens understanding of feelings and content.

· Allows the speaker to see that you are trying to understand his or her message and perceptions.

Examples of Active Listening Responses

"I get the sense that you might be feeling afraid about what might happen if..."

"To me, it sounds like you're frustrated about what was said, but I'm wondering if you're also feeling a little hurt by it."

"It seems like you felt confused and worried when that happened."

How to do it

Summarizing

Identify, connect, and integrate key ideas and feelings in what the speaker said.

Why Do It

· Helps both listener and speaker identify what is most important to the speaker.

Examples of Active Listening Responses

"Let me summarize what I heard so far..."

"So, on the one hand...but on the other hand..."

"I think I've heard several things that seem to be important to you, first____, second_____, and third_____."

"It sounds like there are two things that really matter most to you..."

Some Roadblocks to Good Listening

Fixing
Ordering
Suggesting
Advising
Diagnosing

Diverting
Reassuring
Changing the subject
Focusing on your own agenda
Minimizing

Evaluating
Judging
Threatening
Praising
Condemning
Taking sides
Giving opinions

Interrupting
Interjecting comments
Not allowing speaker's own pace
Tuning out
Creating/responding to distractions
Cross-examining

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Source: Boston University, Office of the Ombuds. Used with permission.

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30 DAYS OF GRATITUDE CHALLENGE

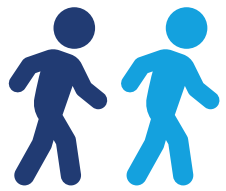
Start at any time and complete in any order

DAY 1 Write three things you are thankful for.	DAY 2 Go a full day without being critical of someone.	DAY 3 Express your gratitude to at least one person today.	DAY 4 Identify someone to strengthen bonds with.	DAY 5 Compliment a co-worker today.	DAY 6 Use a personal wellness strategy today.
DAY 7 Remember to smile today.	DAY 8 Identify something you will look forward to today or tomorrow.	DAY 9 Carry out a random act of kindness.	DAY 10 Reach out to someone you recently thought about.	DAY 11 Write a personal note or ***Bravo!*** card to someone today.	DAY 12 Savor a favorite experience today.
DAY 13 Try to make someone smile.	DAY 14 Take a short walk with another person.	DAY 15 Recall someone who made you laugh today.	DAY 16 List three things you like about your work.	DAY 17 Spend the day as a *glass half-full* person.	DAY 18 Seek a moment or experience that awes you.
DAY 19 Remind yourself of something you like about yourself.	DAY 20 List three things you often take for granted.	DAY 21 Practice active listening all day.	DAY 22 Catch somebody doing something good and tell them.	DAY 23 Recognize how somebody helped you today.	DAY 24 Try to make someone laugh.
DAY 25 Spend some time with a friend today.	DAY 26 Compliment a stranger.	DAY 27 Identify something you appreciate about a supervisor.	DAY 28 Doodle about a joyful moment today.	DAY 29 Write about a memory that makes you smile.	DAY 30 Identify a positive difference this year from last.

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GET SOCIAL *(WITHOUT SOCIAL MEDIA)*

CONNECT WITH YOURSELF AND OTHERS DURING A 30-DAY PERSONAL DETOX CHALLENGE

DAY 1  Take a walk with another person outdoors.	DAY 2  Learn a craft from another person (or teach a craft to another person).	DAY 3  Identify something you've always wanted to try—and try it.	DAY 4  Write a letter to a friend, relative, coworker, or acquaintance—and mail it. (Do not forget postage.)	DAY 5  Go for a nature walk with another person or as a group.	DAY 6  Organize or participate in group mindfulness activities.
DAY 7  Share a favorite recipe (and the story behind it) with someone else.	DAY 8  Visit a local park with at least one other person.	DAY 9  Organize a book club and walk in a park as a group to discuss each book.	DAY 10  Organize or participate in a discussion group at a local coffee shop.	DAY 11  Learn about an aspect of local history from a local authority (another person).	DAY 12  Initiate small talk with a stranger in a safe setting.
DAY 13  Check out a book from the local library (get a library card while you're at it).	DAY 14  Partner with a local organization to help foster connection.	DAY 15  Organize a bowling team (or other sporting team).	DAY 16  Seek a mentorship opportunity.	DAY 17  Host a potluck dinner.	DAY 18  Walk the dog (or engage with your other pet).
DAY 19  Identify something you've long wanted to get done—and get started.	DAY 20  Volunteer to assist at a local senior center.	DAY 21  Organize a garage sale to benefit a charitable organization.	DAY 22  Spend time on a hobby. Go fly a kite.	DAY 23  Contact your county or city United Way office about volunteering opportunities.	DAY 24  Call (not text) a friend.
DAY 25  Participate in an in-person community forum, meeting, or other gathering.	DAY 26  Express your gratitude to someone.	DAY 27  Complete a chore for a neighbor in need (individually or with a group).	DAY 28  Pay it forward somehow, today.	DAY 29  Spend time meditating or reflecting.	DAY 30  Invite someone to attend a concert, go to a movie, or share a meal at a restaurant.

HOW TO GET READY:

- Tell people about your detox plans on social media (so they won't worry or feel ignored).
- Turn off non-essential notifications and delete the apps that zap your focus.
- Create a phone-free zone at home and/or phone-free hours of the day.
- Get a journal to describe your progress. (Optional)

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A POCKET GUIDE TO NETWORKING

Networking is critical for personal and career success. Most jobs are filled with referrals and professional contacts before they can be publicly posted. Networking builds professional relationships that provide mentorship and sponsorship, workplace insights, and career development opportunities. Networking can also boost your visibility by making your skills known to the right people.

Tips for Everyone

- Focus on a few (such as "five to thrive"):
  - in your current or desired line of work
  - in a field of interest to you
- Grow the relationship:
  - periodic emails or texts
  - invites to interesting events
  - meet-up at a conference or locally
  - remembrance of milestones or anniversaries
- Find common ground:
  - Know something about the other person.
  - Engage in small talk, then expand upon it.
  - Talk about things they like or are passionate about.
  - Seek ways to add value.
  - Show genuine interest in the other person.
- Stay in touch:
  - Keep it casual—stay in touch without being a burden.
  - Find ways to be helpful to the other person.
  - Respond to social media prompts.
- Reinvest in a strained or damaged relationship (in addition to new contacts).

Tips for Introverts

- Network in ways that you enjoy most.
- Set a connection goal ("3 new people").
- Skip big events/gatherings for smaller ones.
- Focus on the quality of your existing network.

Mastering Small Talk

- Stay informed—know what is going on in the world each day.
- Become more social/visible—give people a chance to approach you.
- Be ready with your own ice breakers—ask questions that allow the other person to give unique responses, such as "What are you looking forward to today?" or "What was the high point of your weekend?"
- Rather than ask a direct question, offer a personal observation (such as relating to a shared reason for being somewhere together).
- Be interested, not interesting—show genuine curiosity and listen more than you speak.
- Observe something unique about the other person—and ask about it.
- Get comfortable with pauses.
- Build rapport through genuine interest:
  - Repeating the other person's name back to them
  - Using positive body language to show interest
  - Asking the other person about herself/himself
- Connect with people by putting them at ease; use humor wisely to confront awkwardness or "the elephant in the room."
- Avoid:
  - Complaining or gossiping
  - Intense or divisive topics
  - Overly personal questions
  - One-word responses (that sound like a dead-end to the other person)
- Know when it's time to go—end a conversation politely with phrases such as, "I'll let you go, but I'm glad we chatted" or, "It was great talking with you, I hope you enjoy the conference."
- Make it a habit—have random interactions with people in your daily life.

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MAKING THE MOST FROM NETWORKING

FOR PEOPLE WHO AVOID NETWORKING

People often avoid networking for several reasons. They may not feel comfortable making small talk. They may feel anxious about promoting themselves. They may be naturally shy, or they may think of networking as insincere and transactional. However, networking offers important benefits, including uncovering the "hidden" job market, staying informed about industry trends, and raising your professional profile. Networking can also help you identify a mentor and others who can assist you in developing your skills.

Preparing for the Event

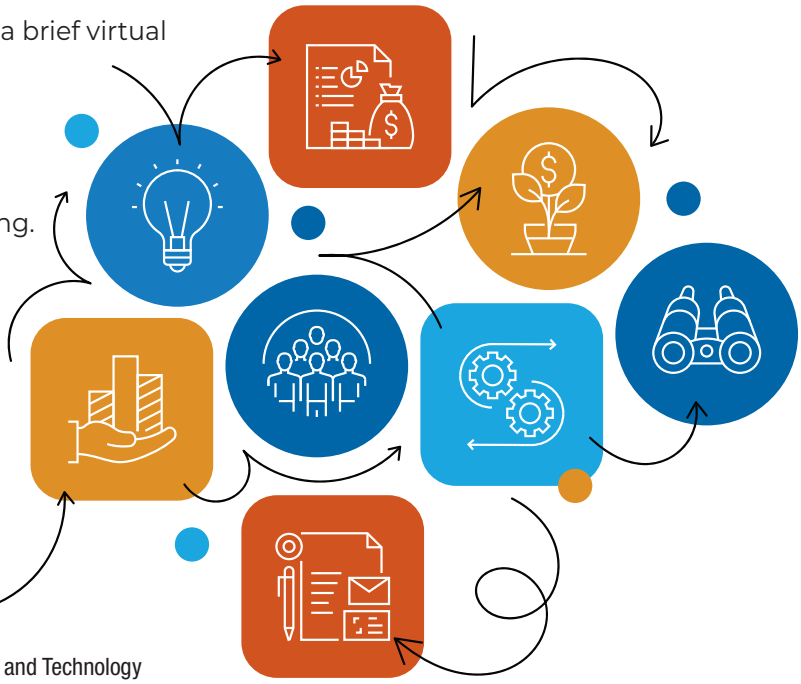
1. **Be intentional:** Know why networking is important to you and act upon those reasons or goals. Work your plan for each event.
2. **Aim for connection over quantity:** Focus on achieving a few meaningful conversations.
3. **Know your lines:** Arrive with open-ended questions such as, "What brings you here?" or "What was your favorite part of the presentation?" Practice a 15-second introduction about who you are and what you do.
4. **Choose structured events:** Prioritize workshops, speaker events, seminars, or other events that have a built-in agenda (and limit the pressure to mingle).
5. **Research the attendees:** If the participant list is accessible beforehand, find individuals you genuinely want to meet.
6. **Reframe your purpose:** View networking as making new acquaintances or as lifelong learning.

Attending the Event

7. **Find a networking buddy:** Tag along with a more extroverted friend or colleague who can help make introductions.
8. **Look for people like you:** If you spot individuals standing by themselves or looking at their phones, they may be as eager to chat as you are.
9. **Join gently:** If a group is chatting, wait for a natural pause before asking if you can join.
10. **Listen more than talk:** Ask engaging questions and let the other person do most of the talking.
11. **Take strategic breaks:** Allow yourself a few minutes of time alone to recharge your battery.
12. **Close a conversation politely:** Say something like, "I'll let you go, but I'm glad we chatted" or "It was great talking with you, I hope you enjoy the conference."
13. **Leave when you're ready:** Once you've had a solid interaction, it's perfectly fine to leave before you feel worn out.

Reaching Out After the Event

14. **Leverage digital spaces:** Use LinkedIn to comment thoughtfully on work-related posts and to make connections.
15. **Personalize your connections:** When adding a connection online, include a short note about why you want to connect.
16. **Ask for digital coffee breaks:** Invite people for a brief virtual chat as an alternative to a crowded room.
17. **Follow up the next day:** Send a quick email or message referencing your conversation at the event to solidify the connection.
18. **Pace your outreach:** Pace your follow-ups to maintain a steady stream of relationship-building.
19. **Lean on mutual connections:** Ask mutual acquaintances to introduce you to new people rather than always reaching out alone.
20. **Skip group meetings:** Bypass events altogether by asking people directly if they would be open to a brief person-to-person meeting.



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Compiled and edited by Craig Maile, Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education and Misty Toms, Meridian Technology Center.

FOLLOWING UP AFTER NETWORKING

Mastering your follow-ups after a professional conference can turn brief introductions into valuable career connections.

01 **Act quickly:** Reach out while the event is still fresh in the minds of the people you met. Send social media connection requests or emails within 1-2 days.

02 **Organize your contacts:** Immediately sort your business cards or digital notes by category (such as “Partnerships,” “Informational Interviews,” “Subject Matter Expert,” etc.) to guide your follow-up efforts.

03 **Personalize your outreach:** Avoid using default connection templates. Mention a specific topic you discussed, a session you attended together, or a shared interest you discovered to show the conversation was genuine.

04 **Connect on LinkedIn:** If you initially connected via email or business card, send a LinkedIn request with a brief note to place you on the other person’s radar.

05 **Offer immediate value:** Delay making a request. Share an article, resource, or tool related to what you discussed to establish yourself as a helpful peer or connector.

06 **Keep it brief:** Respect the other person’s time by keeping messages brief. State clearly why you are reaching out.

07 **Suggest a next step:** Instead of an open-ended “let’s stay in touch,” propose a specific action, such as a 15-minute Zoom or Teams call or meeting for coffee.

08 **Automate scheduling:** Provide a link to a calendar tool so the person can easily choose a time for a follow-up call or meeting.

09 **Track your progress:** Use a spreadsheet or other tool, noting the date of your last contact and setting a reminder to reach out again in 1–2 weeks if you haven’t heard back.

10 **Engage sincerely with public content:** Before and after you reach out, interact with the person’s professional posts on LinkedIn by leaving thoughtful comments.

MANAGING AN EXTENDED JOB SEARCH

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Job searches vary depending on a person's career and can potentially last months or longer. The effort required can be exhausting, which will test your resilience. In today's hiring landscape, the shifts can be based on the industry, the time of year, and the role being filled. Talent acquisition staff may also become the recipients of layoffs, leaving fewer people to review even more applications. Staying focused on both your job search and your well-being is vitally important during these times. Below are some suggestions you may find helpful.

Job Search Tips

Time Management & Organization

- Set daily or weekly goals, such as applications per week or networking activities per week.
  - Set achievable daily goals (applications submitted, new contacts made, etc.).
  - Track your applications and follow-ups using a spreadsheet (or other method that works for you).
- Establish and keep a daily routine that centers around job search activities; recognize that your job search is your current job.
- Set fixed hours for your job search "workday." Build in breaks to keep from feeling overwhelmed. Consistency can strengthen focus.

Industry Focus

- Identify the potential employers that align with your skillset, experience, and personal preferences (driving distance, family needs, etc.).
- Revitalize your approach:
  - Refresh your LinkedIn profile.
  - Revise your resume using AI-generated feedback.
  - Boost your networking efforts with personal and professional contacts.
  - Consider expanding your horizons to related industries or jobs.
  - Consider taking a course or seeking to obtain a certificate that may enhance your skills.

Personal Inventory & Reflection

- Inventory your durable skills and how you've used them to make an impact. These skills include communication, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and self-motivation.
- Upskill your skillset during your job search. *Use learning to create future value.*
- Review your words and actions for *projections of confidence*—in your resume and cover letter, in your LinkedIn profile, during networking events, and during interviews.

Networking

- Dedicate time to networking, including engaging with people on LinkedIn and conducting informational interviews.
- Network with a purpose: (1) Identify potential employers that align with your skillset, experiences, and preferences, then (2) Shape your networking efforts with your employer list in mind.
- Reach out to personal mentors and advisers.
- Optimize your network to serve as a learning hub to help you spot opportunities and stay current. Everyone has a network, by chance or by design. Your network should be diversified with purpose to help you stay on top of trends and spot opportunities.

Job Rejection Management

- Recognize that job rejections happen every day and may seem overwhelming. Don't take it personally. Keep reminding yourself by perhaps putting this on a sticky note in your computer. It's not about you.
- A rejection can be delivered in many forms. If you have the opportunity, ask for feedback as to why you were not selected for the position.
- Step back to reconsider your approach. Perhaps you are "stuck in your old ways" and need to rethink your strategies.

Resilience & Grit

After a period with unsatisfactory results, this is where resiliency and grit get tested:

- Are you unclear about what you want? You may be targeting the wrong employers or failing to communicate what you're seeking.
- Is your resume just like the rest? Your resume should not only demonstrate that you are a qualified applicant but should help set you apart from others. *Your resume should make it easy for the employer to recognize that you are a top candidate for the job.*
- Is your LinkedIn profile misaligned with your job search goals? Make sure your profile includes key words relating to your job search to appeal to recruiters (so they will spot your profile) and hiring managers (so they will read your profile). *Your profile should stand in for you while you are asleep.*
- Are you discounting the importance of networking? Growing and leveraging your personal and professional networks will speed up your job search. *Studies show that most jobs are found through personal contacts and referrals.*
- Are you letting yourself down during interviews? Besides being able to explain what sets you apart from other applicants, you should have a library of experiences to share that specify a relevant situation or task, your action, and the result—in other words, stories that create a *STAR.* (These stories will help you respond to behavioral-style interview questions.)

Health and Well-Being Tips

Fundamental Strategies

- Separate your identity from your job search. *You are not your employment status.*
- Focus on what is within your control: preparing quality application resources, reaching out to people through networking, and getting ready for interviews.
- Prioritize self-care, especially activities that get you moving.
- List the attributes that set you apart from other job applicants and remind yourself of them daily.
- Ration the time you spend scrolling through job boards and social media posts.
- Avoid isolation. Pursue networking opportunities, volunteer, take a class to build your skills, set up informational interviews, and generally *get out and among people.*
- Give yourself a break from searching for and applying for jobs. Schedule focused time for informal networking.
- Set smaller goals you can achieve each day and celebrate achieving them.
- Celebrate small successes, such as finding a relevant job posting or getting through the resume screening process.
- Choose a personal "walk-up song" or "get-in-the-zone" tune—you could even assemble a playlist for your daily job search efforts (like a unique song that plays as a baseball player walks up to home plate to bat or thematic music from a movie/album).
- Recognize that your job search efforts also create more examples of your development of *durable skills* that are prized by employers.
- Work to stay in the moment. Focus on your future, not your setbacks.
- Continue to build *social capital*—goodwill that you build with others and that you can draw upon later.
- Implement a personal "gratitude challenge."
- Create a personal "community of support" for:
  - career development support.
  - financial support.
  - emotional support.
- Continue to enjoy a hobby or get a new one. You never know where a passion could surface.

Managing Change & Risk

- Sometimes, you'll face decisions that require taking a risk. Consider taking calculated risks; they are more strategic. Change often involves risk — not a risk of danger in this context, but a risk of continued job rejections with an ambiguous timeline.
- Reflect on previous challenges to identify successful coping strategies.
- Be open. This may sound easy, but it is surprisingly tough for most people. Are you open to change, opportunities, and ideas? Are you truly open to honest feedback?
- Improve your ability to confront change without fear. Fear is natural, but it can be managed with practice and time.

Staying Current

- Keep an eye on trends in your field and in technology and pursue ways to prepare for those trends. Watching for trends also buys yourself some time to get comfortable with the idea of change.
- Learn with purpose using every source available:
  - Completing online courses
  - Accessing blogs, podcasts, videos
  - Participating in chat discussions, online forums, social networks
  - Interacting with coaches, mentors, peers
  - Volunteering
  - Reading, joining a book discussion group

Final Suggestions

- Imagine an interim role for yourself as an entrepreneur—what could you provide for which someone else would pay? Consider temporary roles such as contract work or part-time work to stay engaged, satisfy a sense of purpose, gain experience, and bridge any income gaps.
- Take care of the basics:
  - Manage your budget.
  - Unsubscribe ruthlessly.
  - Look for ways to downsize.
  - Find a part-time job to pay some bills.
  - Look into any state or city programs that could help support your basic needs.

Compiled and edited by Laura Fidler and Craig Maile.

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THINKING ABOUT A CAREER PIVOT?

Some Strategies to Consider

Step 1. Assess the hiring landscape.

- **Think about supply and demand.** When it's a job-seeker's market, employers may be more receptive to applicants new to the industry. When the job market is tight, employers may be more specific, may modify their timeline, or may be more strategic about their applicant pool. Take a bird's eye view of industries so you can spot an educated pivot that will position you well.
- **Skills and outcomes stand out.** Inventory your skills to decide if a new context could support a pivot. Identify the specific skills appearing in employers' online job postings along with targeted outcomes being sought by industries. State workforce agencies and state-specific job boards could provide you with helpful labor market information. Perhaps a skills realignment is in order.
- **Entrepreneurial mindsets are key.** Think more about what you can offer and market yourself accordingly. Options could include freelance work, a consultancy, or navigating your network to source a start-up opportunity. Remember that it's about your skills, aptitudes, and outcomes.
- **Compile a portfolio.** Start with 3-5 "highlight reel" projects and achievements that illustrate your skills with quantifiable results. This will get the ball rolling for you to accumulate a spectrum of portfolio samples for greater marketability.

Step 2. Conduct an opportunity exploration experiment.

- **Prototype a possible pivot path.** Sign up for online newsletters promoted via LinkedIn and other sources to give you pivot and job search ideas. Seek guidance on a pivot path if you're stuck. Opt for opportunities such as contract or freelance work, gig work, informational interviews, volunteering, or short-term commitments. Perhaps a temporary project or grant-related work could allow you to explore something new.
- **Seek free or sponsored training opportunities.** Some states offer free training for skill enhancement, depending upon the industry.
- **Build for agility.** Use short-term courses to stay current with technology and other skills that demonstrate your resilience while also remaining fluid. Remember that this is an experiment for you. It's an ideal time to learn!

Step 3. Pivot in small chunks.

- If you want to stay in the same industry but change location, identify places where your skills are needed. If you want to change industries but stay in the same location, leverage your existing network—and even identify new ones. You never know what insights you may discover. **Stay open to ideas.**
- Expand your network to reflect your pivot. **Network with a purpose.** Identify potential employers that align with your skillset, experiences, and preferences, then shape your networking efforts with your employer list in mind.
- **Align search efforts with your pivot.** Prepare for any career fairs and other job search opportunities that may be offered and that align with your pivot.

Step 4. Announce your pivot.

- **Make the case for your pivot.** Identify the rationale associated with your skills, your outcomes, and any recent learning.
- **Update your profile.** Infuse your LinkedIn profile, your resume and cover letter, and your interviews with your pivot rationale. Think of it as a new elevator pitch.
- **Inform your networks about your pivot.** Make sure the members of your networks are aware of your career pivot. Don't forget to update any mentors and sponsors, too. This will prepare them to spot opportunities for you, including introducing you to individuals who could join your network.



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Written by Laura Fidler and Craig Maile.

MAKING AI WRITING SOUND *(ALMOST)* HUMAN

STEPS AND STRATEGIES

Editing the writing generated by artificial intelligence is necessary so the content creator or organization can ensure accuracy, add a human "voice" to the text, and own the result. The goal is to keep AI-generated text to roughly one-third of the total to personalize the content. *AI is the instrument, but you are the musician.*

Steps for Editing

1. **Read for understanding:** Read without editing to identify the overall structure.
2. **Restructure:** Rearrange paragraphs and sections for a logical flow that aligns with your purpose.
3. **Revise and humanize:** Vary the sentence structure (as a human would), improve word choices (to match your vocabulary or your organization's writing), and add real-world experiences (yours or your work team's).
4. **Verify:** Verify all facts and identified sources.
5. **Reread and refine:** Read the text aloud. Reading aloud forces the brain to slow down and focus on what was written, not what could be written. It engages your sight and your hearing, making it easier to spot mistakes or awkward writing.

Strategies for Each Step

- **Read for understanding:**
  - **Skim:** Scan the abstract, the table of contents (or navigation pane), and the content headings and subheadings. These are the structural "signposts" of the text that indicate how the content is organized—by time (chronological), by theme, or by other logic (cause and effect, etc.).
  - **Sample:** Read only the key text, including the introduction or summary, the conclusion, and the first sentences of paragraphs. The topic sentences should "tell the story."
  - **Spot:** Pay attention to transition words. Examples include "However," "Therefore," "As a result," "In contrast," and others. These words signal a change in direction or indicate a new data point.
  - **Glance:** Look at any tables, charts, and other graphics. They often summarize key points or provide supporting data.
  - **Grasp:** Identify the overall structure or logic of the text—problem and solution, cause and effect, arguments and evidence, etc. Recognize the relationships between sections and record impressions of any possible gaps.
- **Restructure:** AI writing can include unnecessary sections, abrupt transitions, and filler words.
  - Eliminate repetitive, wordy, or unnecessary sections to improve readability. For example, AI often includes preview and summary paragraphs that may be unnecessary for your audience.
  - Improve transitions within and between paragraphs and between sections. Look up lists of potential transition words and phrases.
  - Clean up the "adjective pile-up on aisle 7." AI often strings multiple adjectives together when one does the job. You can search online for common adjective strings in AI-generated text.

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- **Revise:** AI writing can sound formal or academic in one paragraph and casual or conversational in another.
    - Know your audience. Ensure the tone of the text is appropriate for your audience and aligns with your organization's style guidelines.
    - "Listen" for a consistent tone.
    - Include words of value to the reader—and that support search engine optimization for your audience.
    - Replace "AI language" with your own choices.
        - Overused words and phrases: Some words and phrases appear more often in AI-generated text than in human writing. Look up synonyms online to help you find alternatives.
        - "Hedging" language: Some examples include "might," "may," "generally speaking," and other AI cop-outs. Take a position appropriate to your purpose.
- **Humanize:** AI writing can only include what others have said. *AI has no lived experience*.
    - Integrate personal and team experiences, stories, opinions, and examples to add authenticity (and credibility).
    - Use "I" and "we" as appropriate. AI often produces text that sounds like a textbook, not like a person.
    - Express a definite and accurate point of view, as appropriate. AI often includes "balanced" arguments that can be the opposite of what you are trying to say.
    - Make sure your intended message comes through.
- **Verify:** AI can confidently present false information («hallucinations») and can repeat outdated data and known biases. (Biases enter AI-generated writing through the human-created datasets used to train AI.) AI can even invent plausible content sources.
    - Always verify all facts, names, and data.
    - Double-check any cultural references.
    - Eliminate biases, stereotypes, and prejudices.
    - Verify referenced sources.
- **Reread and refine:** Read aloud to yourself or to somebody else, ask somebody else to read to you, record yourself reading and play it back to yourself, or consider changing the font temporarily to something odd—like **Broadway** or Playbill—and reading (which forces your brain to view the text as new). Pay attention to:
    - Stumbling—Is the text tripping you up? A sentence may be awkwardly phrased or poorly punctuated.
    - Shortness of breath—Are you running out of breath trying to read one sentence? Break up long sentences.
    - Repetition—Are you hearing the same words repeatedly in a short time? Choose alternative words (synonyms).
    - Shifts in tone—Does the writing shift abruptly from formal to casual? Refine the wording for a consistent tone.
    - Clarity—Are you confused about anything? Revise the text as needed.

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APPLYING CRITICAL THINKING TO AI-GENERATED RESULTS



10 STRATEGIES ANYONE CAN USE

AI is a fallible collaborator. It can reproduce biases and flatter its user. When reviewing AI-generated results, you should cross-verify all claims using trusted sources, check for AI hallucinations or biases, and evaluate the logic, context, and tone of the output. You should never accept AI-generated results at face value.

1. **Independently Verify Facts:** Never trust AI statistics or data without cross-checking them against research journals, reputable databases, or recognized domain authorities.

2. **Confirm All Citations:** If AI cites sources, independently track them down and verify the context. Disregard any claims that rely upon broken or fabricated links.

3. **Box-Out Bias:** AI models can reflect the narrow viewpoints or stereotypes present in their training data. Review the content to ensure it includes diverse perspectives and omits exclusionary language.

4. **Gut-Check the Logic:** Analyze whether AI's argument flows logically. Watch out for generalizations built on limited evidence or faulty leaps in reasoning.

5. **Replace Overemotional Language:** Flag content that relies on loaded, dramatic, or inflammatory words designed to provoke emotion rather than delivering objective information.

6. **Compare and Contrast:** Don't settle for the first response that AI produces. Generate multiple variations or compare AI's synthesis of a concept with the source text to spot missing nuance.

7. **Cross-Reference AI Tools:** Input the same prompt into multiple AI platforms and compare their outputs.

8. **Refine the Prompt:** If an AI-generated response seems off, analyze the prompt you gave. Vague or leading questions result in vague outputs. Refine your prompt until AI produces more specific or objective results.

9. **Challenge Assumptions:** Use AI to generate opposing viewpoints or to challenge your own conclusions. This helps you recognize your blind spots and test the strength of your ideas.

10. **Document and Annotate:** Keep notes on exactly how and when you used AI in your workflow. Acknowledge AI's contribution so you can remain in the driver's seat of the final product.

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CREATIVITY AT WORK

How Leaders Can Inspire and Encourage

The future is creative. It will remain people who create visions for organizations, who identify solutions to problems and who encourage their colleagues. These capabilities are called durable skills. Creativity is one of those durable skills. Prioritizing creativity and innovation can also enhance employee engagement and retention.

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Strategies to Boost Creativity

- Adopt a growth mindset—and encourage one in others—in which creativity is part of a cycle of learning.
- Be vocal about the importance of creativity to the organization.
- Harness organizational Human Resources activities and processes—such as onboarding, training events, and performance reviews—to reinforce the role of creativity in the organization's success.
- Give employees "permission" to be creative.
- Recognize when processes and workloads could prevent employees from thinking creatively.
- Encourage employees to move around away from their workspace to create physical and emotional energy and to sharpen their creative focus.
- Model uncoupling from office technology each week (or each day) to enlarge the mental space for innovation.
- Accommodate employees' balance between collaboration and time alone.
- Sprinkle "pop-up" learning activities into the professional development mix to strengthen employees' creative thinking mindset and skills.
- Provide updated tools so employees can act upon their creativity.
- Delegate the destination, not the directions for getting there.
- Help employees rest and recharge to power creativity.
- Embrace reasonable risk-taking and the potential for mistakes.
- Host a quarterly "sprint"—concentrated efforts by cross-functional teams over a brief period (a few days to a week) to address a specific challenge.
- Give employees time to dedicate to passion projects of their choosing.
- Use "brain break" activities to motivate and refocus employees through interaction, reflection, and movement.
- Periodically take a pulse-check of the status of psychological safety (whether employees feel safe about being more creative).
- Deploy regular "paper clip challenges" and similar activities as creativity boosters.
- Create opportunities for employees to informally share professional and personal knowledge, such as skills and hobbies.
- Counter employee self-talk that can block their creativity.
- Remind employees to seek diverse points of view for input and feedback.
- Use more inclusive alternatives to traditional brainstorming, such as brain writing, mind mapping, round robin brainstorming, and breaking larger groups into smaller teams that share back with the larger group, among others.
- Pose "what if" questions so new possibilities can emerge.
- Get creative about meetings: change locations, involve employees as facilitators, and incorporate informal chats.
- Build in "ideation time" (silence) before group discussions.
- Recognize and reward creative efforts and progress, not just outcomes.

Spaces to Inspire Creativity

- Commit to valuing human-ness amid technological change.
- Manage distractions through spaces that support both individual concentration and face-to-face connection.
- Be intentional about redesigning and locating spaces for creativity.
- Rearrange furniture, if possible, to stimulate creativity.
- Encourage employees to personalize their workspace.
- Support both physical and virtual collaboration.
- Provide spaces that allow for a range of posture choices: sitting, standing, reclining, and perching.

ENCOURAGING NO-BOX THINKING

20 STRATEGIES ANYONE CAN USE

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Encouraging "no-box" thinking—a mindset where the constraints of tradition and "how we've always done it" are removed—requires a shift from rigid processes to a culture of psychological safety, experimentation, and diverse input.

Fostering Culture and Psychological Safety

1. **Redefine Setbacks as Learning:** Celebrate "failing forward" to encourage risk-taking.
2. **Reward Unconventional Ideas:** Praise team members who challenge the status quo, even if their ideas aren't initially implemented.
3. **Implement a Policy of Fearlessness:** Ensure everyone feels safe sharing ideas without judgment.
4. **Use "Yes, and..." Techniques:** Ensure team members build upon others' ideas rather than shut them down.
5. **Encourage Team Diversity:** Assemble groups with varying cultural, age, and experience backgrounds to improve the potential for unique viewpoints.

Brainstorming with Structure

6. **Try "No-Box" Problem Solving:** Facilitate sessions where the premise is to solve a problem by assuming traditional constraints do not exist.
7. **Use Silent Brainstorming:** Avoid group-thinking by having team members write ideas individually before sharing.
8. **Experiment with Backwards Brainstorming:** Ask, "How could we cause problems X, Y, and Z?" Then, work backward to find solutions.
9. **Start the Clock for Rapid Ideation:** Set a timer to encourage fast, unfiltered thinking that focuses first on quantity over quality.
10. **Ask the "Five Whys":** Drill down to the root cause of a problem, rather than address its symptoms.

Establishing a Supportive Workplace

11. **Encourage "Walking Meetings":** Encourage taking short walks outside for creative problem-solving.
12. **Create Internal Think Tanks:** Allow team members dedicated time to work on passion projects.
13. **Introduce a Newcomer's Mindset:** Encourage managers to approach issues without preconceptions.
14. **Rotate Facilitators:** Change who leads meetings to bring new styles and perspectives to the forefront.
15. **Use Engaging Tools:** Use toys, visual aids, or games in meeting rooms to promote a relaxed, creative atmosphere.

Shifting Perspectives

16. **Pose "What if...?" Scenarios:** Challenge the team to flip their assumptions about products or processes.
17. **Seek External Perspectives:** Invite someone from a different industry or department to brainstorming sessions.
18. **Work Backward:** Describe the desired future state, then work backward to determine what is required to achieve it.
19. **Rotate Roles:** Allow team members to step into different roles to see the work from a new angle.
20. **Use Visual Mapping:** Use tools like mind mapping to visualize connections that aren't obvious in lists.

TO DO:

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MANAGING TASKS AT WORK

25 STRATEGIES

Managing a workplace to-do list involves using strategies to reduce mental clutter and increase productivity. These strategies can help you move from reactive task management to intentional task planning.

Prioritizing Tasks

1. Dive into the most difficult or most important task first thing in the morning.
2. Group tasks into four categories before tackling them: Urgent/Important, Not Urgent/Important, Urgent/Not Important, and Not Urgent/Not Important.
3. At the end of each day, write down only the 5-6 most important tasks for the next day in order of importance.
4. Assign letters to tasks on a scale of A through F (A=essential, F=exclude) and address them appropriately.
5. Identify the 20% of your work that produces 80% of your results and focus there (the "80/20 Rule").
6. Identify three non-negotiable goals for the day.
7. Rank tasks by Seriousness (importance), Urgency (time sensitivity), and Growth potential (potential to get worse if ignored). Rank each task on each factor using a scale (such as 1-5 or low-high), total the "score" for each task, and pursue the high-SUG tasks first.
8. Cap your daily list at 5-8 tasks to ensure completion and avoid burning out.

Structuring Time

9. Dedicate blocks in your calendar for specific tasks.
10. Set a strict time limit for completing a task to force focus ("time boxing").
11. Group similar tasks (answering emails, making calls) to minimize context-switching ("task batching").
12. Work in 25-minute, high-focus "sprints," followed by 5-minute breaks.
13. If a task requires less than two minutes, do it immediately rather than adding it to a list (the "two-minute rule").
14. Track your workflow using a graphic with columns like "To Do," "In Progress," and "Done."
15. Designate days of the week for specific kinds of work ("Meeting Mondays," "Focus Fridays").

Using Technology Tools

16. Use to-do list apps ("task apps") to organize tasks.
17. Use AI tools to auto-schedule tasks and prioritize based on deadlines.
18. Ensure your task manager is accessible on desktop and mobile (sync across your devices).
19. Use software to automate task creation from emails or Slack messages.
20. Set up email filters and folders to automatically label or archive non-urgent messages.

Making Productivity and Accountability Visible

21. Spend 10-15 minutes at the end of each day reviewing what you did and planning what you will do tomorrow (your "shutdown routine").
22. Follow a NOT-TO-DO LIST of personal habits to avoid (such as "do not check social media until lunchtime").
23. Place completed items in a separate list (your "done list") to boost morale and track productivity.
24. Share daily or weekly goals with a team member or manager to publicly encourage your personal accountability.
25. Delegate or automate non-essential tasks.

GETTING MORE FROM MONDAYS

Loving the start of a new work week may be too much to expect, but everyone can do something to get more from Mondays.

Preparing for Monday

Plan for Monday on Friday. Avoid losing your Sunday to Monday. Create your next week's to-do list at the end of this week. Set a goal for the day (Monday). Begin the list with a task you enjoy. Plan something pleasant to anticipate on Monday, such as lunch with a friend or a fun after-work activity. Integrate a creative sprint: Carve out 30 minutes on Monday, if possible, for focused effort on innovative work or a passion project to boost your engagement. Slot it into the day when it works best for you.

Close out your email inbox. Spend 15-20 minutes on Friday afternoon cleaning up your inbox so next week is free from this week. Unsubscribe ruthlessly.

Make regular social plans on Monday nights. Live your life on weeknights, not just on weekends.

Mind your peas and queso. Watch what you eat (and drink) over the weekend so your body can start the work week in top form.

Stay close to your weekday sleep and wake times on the weekend. Staying up or sleeping in late on the weekend can disrupt your sleep on Sunday night. Try to stay within one hour of your weekday average schedule.

Refocus with intent. Shift your mindset to reconnect with your purpose. Unplug early from technology for better thinking and sleeping.

Delay the dentist. Avoid adding any optional but unpleasant tasks to the first day of the work week (unless you really need to see the dentist).

Ready yourself on Sunday to relax your pace on Monday. Choose confident clothing for starting the work week. Set out favorite breakfast items. Pack in advance for workouts or other weekday after-hours activities. Plan to order takeout food or eat weekend leftovers for Monday's dinner.

Getting a Positive Start

Rise early. Give yourself extra time to avoid rushing.

Start mindfully to address body, mind, and spirit. Follow a positive routine like listening to music (your morning "wake-up song"), meditating, reading or listening for personal growth, journaling, or exercising. Enjoy your favorite morning beverage. Delay checking your phone.

Seize the day(light). Seek natural light early to boost your mood and reset your internal clock.

Reflect on the good. Think about the things you like about your work.

Powering Up

Show up strong for yourself. Own your worth. Practice self-care. Say "No" with confidence. Cut yourself some slack.

Focus on progress over perfection. Appreciate that small steps contribute to great strides.

Work your plan. Follow the list you made on Friday.

Tackle the fun task early. This task (from your Friday list) can give you momentum for the rest of your day.

Build in buffer time. Set aside time for ideation (thinking of ideas or options) before dealing with critical issues or participating in group discussions.

Be mindful about email. Avoid early morning inbox checks; it makes you reactive, not proactive. Use "inbox rules" to automatically sort incoming messages into folders (especially non-urgent messages). Time-block your email check-ins throughout the day, such as three times for 20 minutes each time, rather than constantly checking. Pause before responding to stressful messages. Follow the "one-touch" rule: When you open an email, decide immediately to Delete/Archive, Delegate, Do (if it requires under 2 minutes), or Defer (flag it for later).

Minimize distractions. Avoid scrolling through social media posts. Turn off notifications on your phone. Close unnecessary browser tabs.

Get up and move. Take mini-breaks throughout the day. Get up to stretch, grab a healthy snack, or take a short walk to boost your energy level or reconnect with colleagues.

Take a gratitude break. Continue a personal "gratitude challenge" for the week or month.

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GETTING REFOCUSED ON FRIDAYS

25 STRATEGIES

Friday is ideal for closing out the current week and shifting focus toward the next week. Here are some tasks for Fridays in the workplace.

Wrapping Up the Week

1. **Organize your inbox:** Sort, archive, or delete emails to start Monday with a clean slate.
2. **Refresh your workspace:** Clear surfaces, organize documents, and wipe down your desk and screens.
3. **Tackle your tabs:** Close, bookmark, or save tabs to reduce digital clutter.
4. **Organize your documents:** Sort downloaded documents from the week and scan and file paper documents that accumulated.
5. **Update your KPIs:** Review your key performance indicators for the week.
6. **Update performance reports:** Review and update weekly status reports.
7. **Submit administrative reports:** File travel expenses or complete time sheets.
8. **Sideline the competition:** Cancel non-essential subscriptions that compete for your attention.
9. **Scan the "parking lot":** Review ideas and topics you noted during the week for further discussion.

Getting More from Monday

10. **Create next week's to-do list:** Identify the top 3-5 goals to accomplish for Monday.
11. **Prepare for Monday meetings:** Glance over meeting agendas to avoid surprises.
12. **Identify "future me" tasks:** Assign yourself tasks for next week to reduce planning time on Monday.
13. **Batch emails to expedite replies:** Use the "two-minute rule" to identify outstanding emails that you can quickly answer on Monday.
14. **Block focus time:** Set aside work sessions on your calendar for the coming week.
15. **Set the stage:** Organize your desk for a productive morning on Monday.
16. **Plan what to wear and eat:** Lay out Monday's clothing and prepare Monday's lunch to lead off the week without rushing.

Investing in Personal Growth

17. **Catch up on reading:** Read professional articles, white papers, blog posts, or newsletters that arrived during the week.
18. **Update your network:** Summarize new contacts from the week.
19. **Take care of training:** Watch recorded webinars or do online tutorials.
20. **Review personal goals:** Assess your progress on career goals or personal priorities.
21. **Reconnect with your network:** Use the relaxed end-of-week vibe to reach out to members of your network and to recent contacts from the past week.

Strengthening Team Engagement

22. **Express your gratitude:** Recognize team members for their work or check off some items on your personal gratitude challenge.
23. **Hold a weekly chat:** Have coffee or a chat with a colleague with "no work talk" rules.
24. **Share a "Fun Friday" tradition:** Organize a casual dress code, trivia contest, lunch get-together, or other activity. (You could even assign a different activity to each Friday in the month.)
25. **Share something great:** Share something great from the week with your team and/or supervisor.

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HOW WOMEN CAN BUILD LEADERSHIP SKILLS

ADVICE FROM WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP



Successful women leaders develop personal leadership skills by blending technical expertise with emotional intelligence, proactive networking, and a growth mindset. The guidance that follows comes from successful women in leadership positions.

1. Build a Growth Mindset and Resilience

Embrace Setbacks as Feedback: Women in leadership suggest embracing failure to remove its stigma, treating redirection as a learning opportunity.
Step Out *Before* You're Ready: Successful leaders often "jump in" to new roles or assignments before they feel 100% prepared, recognizing that *confidence is built through action* rather than preceding it.
Amplify Your Achievements: Overcome imposter syndrome—and build team trust—by maintaining a "win list" or "failure resume" to acknowledge both successes and mistakes transparently.

2. Practice Strategic Networking and Relationship Building

Seek Sponsors, Not Just Mentors: While mentors offer advice, sponsors actively advocate for you when decisions are made. A sponsor uses their influence to highlight your value to others.
Establish a "Personal Board of Directors": Build a diverse network of peers, mentors, and industry authorities who can provide different perspectives and help you navigate workplace complexity.
Practice "Climbing With, Not Over": Foster a collaborative environment by celebrating the successes of others and elevating team members, which creates a stronger, more innovative organization.

3. Master Leadership Presence and Communication

Lead with Authenticity: Focus on being your "true self" rather than conforming to traditionally masculine leadership styles. Authenticity builds deeper connections and long-term loyalty.
Refine Your "Why": Shift from being a manager (the "what" and "how") to a leader by clearly articulating a compelling vision (the "why") that aligns your personal values with workplace goals.
Hone Decisive Communication: Use powerful, direct language and avoid over-apologizing or using subservient phrasing ("I'll do whatever you decide," deferring to another's opinion, deprioritizing your own needs, etc.) to ensure your competence is clearly seen.

4. Prioritize Well-being and Intentionality

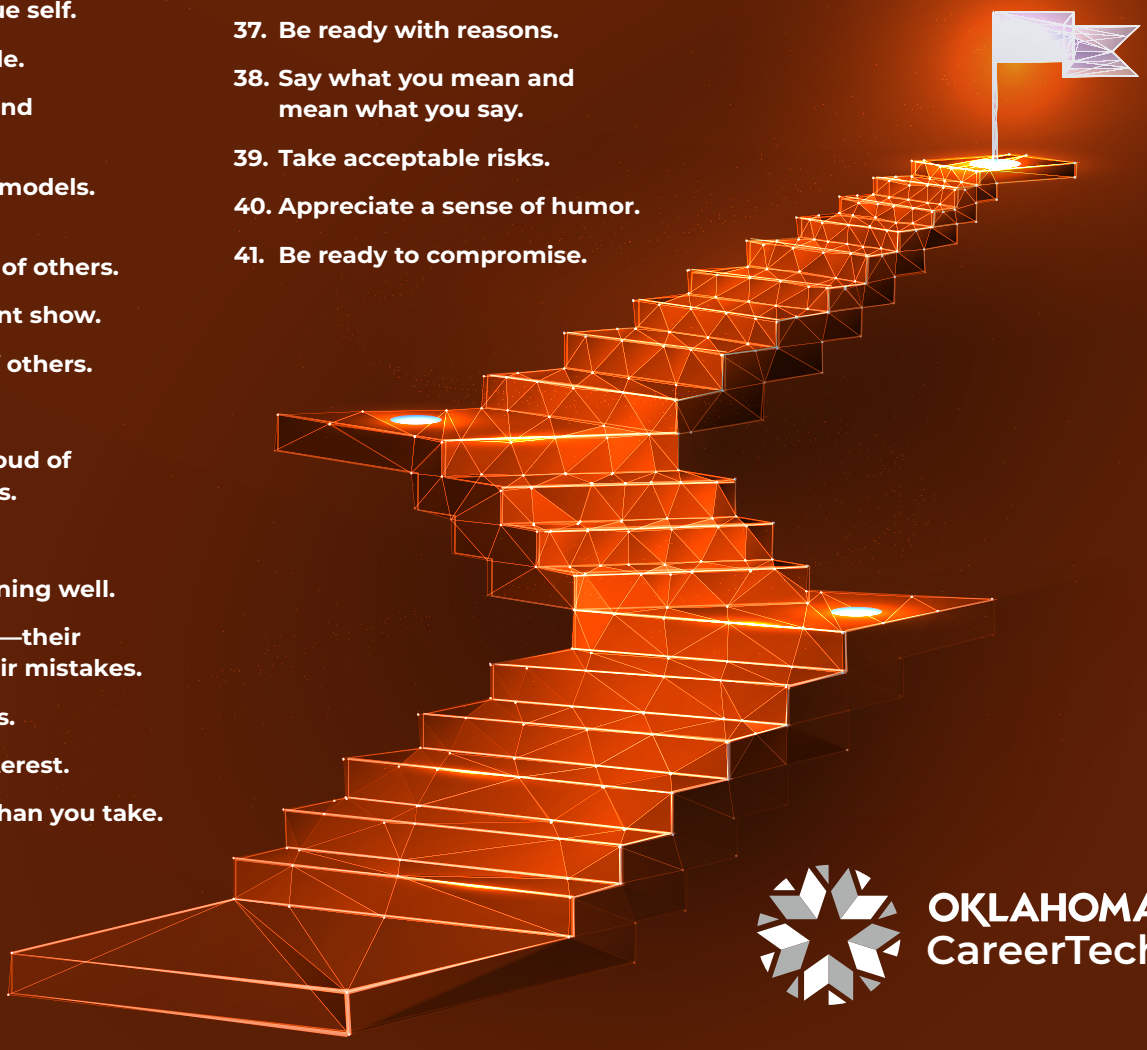
Model Work-Life Alignment: Leadership is inseparable from personal well-being. Setting boundaries and prioritizing self-care prevents burnout and allows you to lead more effectively.
Be Strategic About Time: Ditch perfectionism and focus on impact over volume. Use the "8-8-8 Rule" (8 hours work, 8 hours family/giving back, 8 hours sleep) and related strategies to maintain a sustainable pace.

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50 Ways to Lead

Everyday Actions that Set an Example

1. Invest in yourself—Never stop learning.
2. Teach others.
3. Look for leadership skills in others.
4. Cultivate a positive environment.
5. Stick to your principles.
6. Be buoyant.
7. Think first.
8. Be a good follower.
9. Be confident.
10. Always be your true self.
11. Learn to like people.
12. Earn the respect and trust of others.
13. Choose good role models.
14. Recognize the accomplishments of others.
15. Let your excitement show.
16. Expect the best of others.
17. Keep your cool.
18. Be humble but proud of your achievements.
19. Be tactful.
20. Work hard at listening well.
21. Learn from others—their successes and their mistakes.
22. Search for answers.
23. Show a sincere interest.
24. Give more credit than you take.
25. Be consistent.
26. Be a team player.
27. Act as you believe.
28. Criticize constructively.
29. Take responsibility.
30. Learn from your own mistakes.
31. Share the ball.
32. Hear more than you say.
33. Stay positive.
34. Give praise in public, criticize in private.
35. Reach your own opinions about people.
36. Keep a confidence.
37. Be ready with reasons.
38. Say what you mean and mean what you say.
39. Take acceptable risks.
40. Appreciate a sense of humor.
41. Be ready to compromise.
42. Eat lots of moral fiber.
43. Lend a hand.
44. Know when to apologize—and do it.
45. Do the worst, first.
46. Show respect for different opinions.
47. Do the math on your own ideas.
48. Keep your promises.
49. Know when to change course.
50. Accept new challenges.



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WHAT HISTORY CAN TEACH US
LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM TEDDY ROOSEVELT



Act Decisively and Lead from the Front

ACTION, ACTION, STILL MORE ACTION

TR believed in taking the initiative, refusing to wait for events to unfold. He famously said: "Whatever I think is right for me to do, I do... I act."

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Whether in the Spanish-American War as a Rough Rider or negotiating in the White House, he placed himself in the danger or drudgery alongside his team rather than issuing orders from safety.

Make Courage the Foundational Virtue

OVERCOMING FEAR

TR was not naturally fearless; he acted "as if I was not afraid" until he eventually ceased to be. He believed physical and moral courage must be cultivated.

DARING GREATLY

He advocated taking risks, believing that if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly.

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Build Character Through Self-Creation

LEADERS ARE MADE

TR overcame childhood asthma and physical weakness through a "strenuous life." He viewed his leadership as a "project of self-creation," demonstrating that anyone can remake themselves into an effective leader.

LIVE YOUR VALUES

He was authentic, striving to live by demanding virtues — hardihood, decency, and courage — to set a standard.

'Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick'

PRAGMATIC DIPLOMACY

This famous maxim summarizes his foreign policy: be polite, courteous, and diplomatic (speak softly), but maintain a credible, powerful force (the big stick) to defend national interests.

OPEN CHANNELS WITH ADVERSARIES

He believed in communicating with opponents, working with the tools available to achieve results rather than refusing to work with those he disagreed with.

Be a Voracious Learner

CONSTANT CURIOSITY

TR was a polymath: a reader of two books a day, a historian, a naturalist, and a statesman. He believed that when a leader ceases to learn, they cease to be useful.

Put the Team Ahead of Self

SERVICE OVER STARDOM

He championed the Square Deal, which aimed to ensure fairness for workers, consumers, and business alike. He was loyal to his men and sought to lift them up, rather than using them to elevate his own reputation.

Balance Work and Play

'PLAY HARD; WORK HARD'

TR was known for his immense energy, attacking each day with zeal. However, he believed in total focus during work, and total relaxation during play, a technique that allowed him to maintain intense stamina.

Theodore Roosevelt on Glacier Point, Yosemite Valley, Calif., 1903, by Underwood & Underwood

CREATING A SHARED TEAM VISION
SIGNS OF SUCCESS

When It's Working

- ☑ Each team member knows the goals he or she is working toward and how they relate to the team's overall goals.
- ☑ Team members share a sense of purpose and ownership.
- ☑ A high level of commitment, responsibility, and accountability exists among all team members.
- ☑ Team members support—rather than compete with—one another.
- ☑ In achieving the shared vision, members are just as willing to share credit and criticism.
- ☑ Team members tend to stay late even after the workday has ended.

When It's Not Working

- ☒ Team members have difficulty understanding how their individual goals relate to the big picture.
- ☒ Team members are focused on their own individual achievements above the overall focus of the group.
- ☒ Team members tend to compete with—rather than support—one another.
- ☒ Cohesiveness among team members is weak; individuals are focused on personal projects, sometimes at the expense of another's work.
- ☒ Team members find it difficult to share data and credit, leading to conflict and tension within the group.
- ☒ People tend to leave work early or as quickly as possible at the end of the workday.

Source: Collaboration and Team Science Field Guide, National Institutes of Health

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LEADING A TEAM
SIGNS OF SUCCESS

When It's Working

- ☑ Leaders understand their strengths and weaknesses as well as those of the team members.
- ☑ Leaders hold themselves and their groups accountable.
- ☑ Leaders can detect when there is tension and effectively intervene to resolve it at the earliest stage possible.
- ☑ Leaders create environments where people feel safe sharing ideas and bringing up interpersonal issues related to the team.
- ☑ Leaders engage others to take on tasks where they are less skilled or competent.
- ☑ Leaders are fully supportive of the people around them succeeding and taking on leadership roles.
- ☑ Leaders are fully present both physically and when interacting with team members.

When It's Not Working

- ☒ Leaders have little or no self-awareness and as a result also have little awareness of the dynamics that surround them.
- ☒ Environments of trust and psychological safety are not created.
- ☒ People are hesitant to share concerns about others' work.
- ☒ Interpersonal conflicts are avoided or work arounds are created.
- ☒ Members are more likely to blame and make excuses than take responsibility or act with accountability.
- ☒ Members are too busy to meet regularly.
- ☒ When in meetings, members are often checking email or engage in side conversations.

Source: Collaboration and Team Science Field Guide, National Institutes of Health

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COACHING A TEAM

Questions for Managers to Ask Team Members

Coaching for...

Engagement

Everyone is different and perceives the context differently. Focus on each person's engagement needs and try to find what motivates them. Regularly review your own level of engagement. It can influence the quality of engagement in others.

HINDSIGHT

How well have we been supporting each other through recent uncertainty and rapid change?

Looking back at your current and previous jobs, what aspects have helped you feel engaged?

What examples illustrate our team's ability to be mindful of each other's engagement needs?

How has technology had an impact on our team's capacity to maintain engagement?

What new skills or behaviors have we learned as a team?

INSIGHT

How much fun do you have at work?

Why does it matter that we talk about engagement as a team?

How would you support a team member who is experiencing disengagement?

What issues might currently threaten your ability to get excited about work?

How do we express our appreciation for each other in the team?

FORESIGHT

How can we support team members when they take on stretching or challenging assignments?

What would be a creative way to increase the quality of our relationships, as we continue to work?

How can we strengthen our team's ability to thrive through change?

What would you like to see more of to help you feel more excited about work?

What would you like to ask of senior leadership that could help boost our level of engagement?

Source: Canada School of Public Service, Coaching for Resilience (TRN4-J33), Coaching for Engagement (TRN4-J35), and Coaching for Empowerment (TRN4-J34). See the job aids at https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/catalogue/topics-eng.aspx. Edited by Craig Maile, February 2026.

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COACHING A TEAM

Questions for Managers to Ask Team Members

Coaching for...

Empowerment

Pay attention to your trust-building behaviors and mindset. Reflect daily through journaling or conversation with a buddy, mentor or coach. Deepen your self-awareness and genuinely explore how you can amplify your empowering actions or shift your thinking.

HINDSIGHT

Think of a time when you felt truly empowered at work. How did you feel? What impact did it have?

Tell us a teamwork story when you felt a surge of confidence. What contributed to it?

What recent examples demonstrate that you can inspire or innovate?

How inclusive have you been in your conversations at work?

In times of change, how have you been able to sustain confidence while balancing competing needs?

INSIGHT

What does empowerment mean to you?

Which of your strengths would you like to leverage more? How can we support you?

What does it take for you to trust me, and me to trust you?

What does “meaningful work” mean for you? for the team?

How can we tweak our decision-making processes to generate more autonomy for everyone?

FORESIGHT

How can we sustain meaningful work in a fast-evolving environment?

Where would you like to expand your skills?

What would give you the confidence to take smart risks when you see a need for improvement?

How can we ensure everyone’s voice is heard to create an empowering workplace?

What if each of us were more empowered to make a difference? What would that look like? How do we get there?

Source: Canada School of Public Service, Coaching for Resilience (TRN4-J33), Coaching for Engagement (TRN4-J35), and Coaching for Empowerment (TRN4-J34). See the job aids at https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/catalogue/topics-eng.aspx. Edited by Craig Maile, February 2026.

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COACHING A TEAM

Questions for Managers to Ask Team Members

Coaching for...

Resilience

Building and sustaining resilience is a continuous process. Leaders who pay attention to the importance of resilience in themselves and their teams will see positive gains in areas such as well-being, fulfillment, and performance.

HINDSIGHT

As a team, what are some of our best "failures" that bring us to the edge of learning?

What aspects of a recent experience can we celebrate as a team accomplishment?

What beliefs or expectations in recent months might have prevented us from bouncing back faster?

Over recent months, how have we helped each other cope with feelings and emotions?

INSIGHT

Why does it matter that we talk about our team resilience?

How can we draw on our diversity to strengthen our resilience?

What assumptions do we make about the impact of external changes on us?

What is within our control to manage as a team?

What aspect of resilience seems particularly relevant to our team right now?

FORESIGHT

What specific practices would help us adopt a positive mindset in evolving situations?

If we demonstrate more group resilience, what kind of behaviors would we see?

What kind of support do we need to build our team resilience?

Based on what we have experienced together over recent months, how can we thrive as a team?

How can we adapt our team norms to be more inclusive, so that the whole team can thrive in the face of challenges?

Source: Canada School of Public Service, Coaching for Resilience (TRN4-J33), Coaching for Engagement (TRN4-J35), and Coaching for Empowerment (TRN4-J34). See the job aids at https://www.csps-efpc.gc.ca/catalogue/topics-eng.aspx. Edited by Craig Maile, February 2026.

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BUILDING **TRUST** AT WORK

What **Leaders** Can Do

Trust means to have faith or confidence. In the workplace, team performance can suffer when individuals have doubts. Although trust takes a collaborative effort, leaders play a significant role in sustaining trust at work.

Commit to a climate that enables. Maintain a positive environment that demonstrates care about the workers and the work.

Take a comprehensive approach to health and wellness. Be an advocate for personal mental, emotional, physical, and financial health.

Empower personal and team accountability. Provide goals and support to facilitate achievement.

Replace rigidity with flexibility. Provide options and guardrails that respect competence and creativity.

Prioritize partnership. Support individuals through apprenticeship (sharing domain expertise), mentorship (providing guidance and support), and sponsorship (creating opportunities).

Listen actively. Use skills for paraphrasing, clarifying, reflecting, and summarizing.

Communicate consistently. Communicate clearly, early, and frequently about performance expectations and how you can help.

Practice transparency. Be as open as possible to reduce uncertainty. Admit mistakes, share challenges, and acknowledge when you lack the answers.

Demonstrate empathy. Listen to concerns and focus on individual well-being.

Strengthen credibility through reliability. Keep your promises, meet your commitments, and speak with honesty.

Specify destinations but not directions. Delegate authority to seek innovative solutions.

Recognize effort and accomplishment. Spotlight efforts and progress, not just outcomes.

Embrace a mindset of growth and resilience. Encourage stretch assignments and learning from setbacks.

Model lifelong learning. Seek and support professional development from formal and informal sources.

Invest in relationships. Respect employee needs and strengthen a sense of belonging. Build rapport into meeting agendas.

Act with integrity and equity. Be guided by standards and principles, not pressure. Seek to raise all boats rather than favoring a few.



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HAVING CAREER DEVELOPMENT CONVERSATIONS

Questions for Managers to Ask Team Members

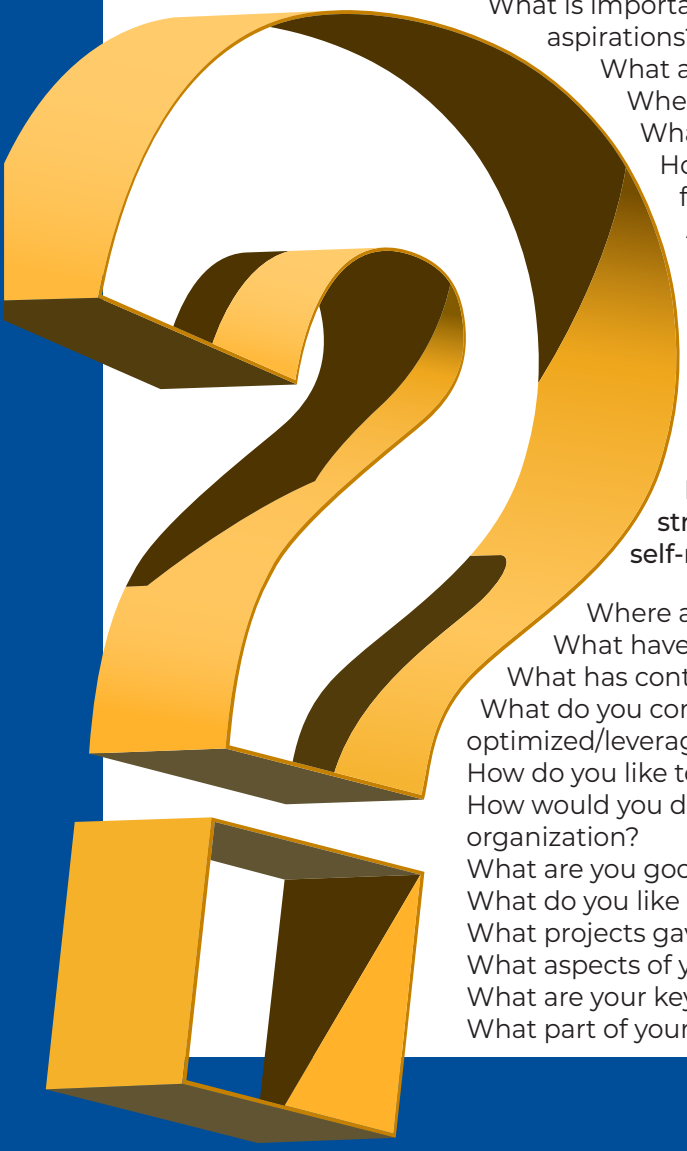
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When taking a coaching approach, managers can use the GROWTH framework below. It allows the manager to listen and ask questions. It can help team members clarify what they want to achieve for their professional development and how they will achieve it. The questions for each of the GROWTH steps are meant to build a conversation. It isn't necessary to use all the questions or follow a particular order. Other questions may come to mind during a conversation. Multiple conversations may take place with each team member.

G = the **goal**
R = the **reality**
O = the **opportunities**, **obstacles**, and **options**
W = a **way** forward from among the possible options
T = a **timeline** for action plans
H = **how** success will be achieved

Goals

Helping the team member identify a growth goal. This could be about enhancing a current job, learning a new skill or exploring career progression.



What is important to you right now in terms of your development or career aspirations?
What are you aiming for in the short/medium/long term?
Where do you see yourself in terms of your professional growth?
What goals have you set for yourself? Why are they important?
How interested are you in progressing within your current function–or another function?
Are you interested in a move that requires different skills or a new application of existing capabilities (in a different function or area)?
Have you considered which skills, competencies, roles and types of work the organization will need in the future?

Reality

Exploring where the team member is now. This includes strengths and desires. This also helps the team member with self-reflection.

Where are you now in relation to your goals?
What have you done to get there?
What has contributed to your success so far?
What do you consider to be your strengths? Which of your strengths could be optimized/leveraged to achieve your goals?
How do you like to learn new things? What gives you energy?
How would you describe your transferable skills in relation to other roles in the organization?
What are you good at that you want to continue?
What do you like or dislike about your current work?
What projects gave you the most satisfaction?
What aspects of your job motivate you to excel?
What are your key skills and competencies?
What part of your current role do you find most challenging?

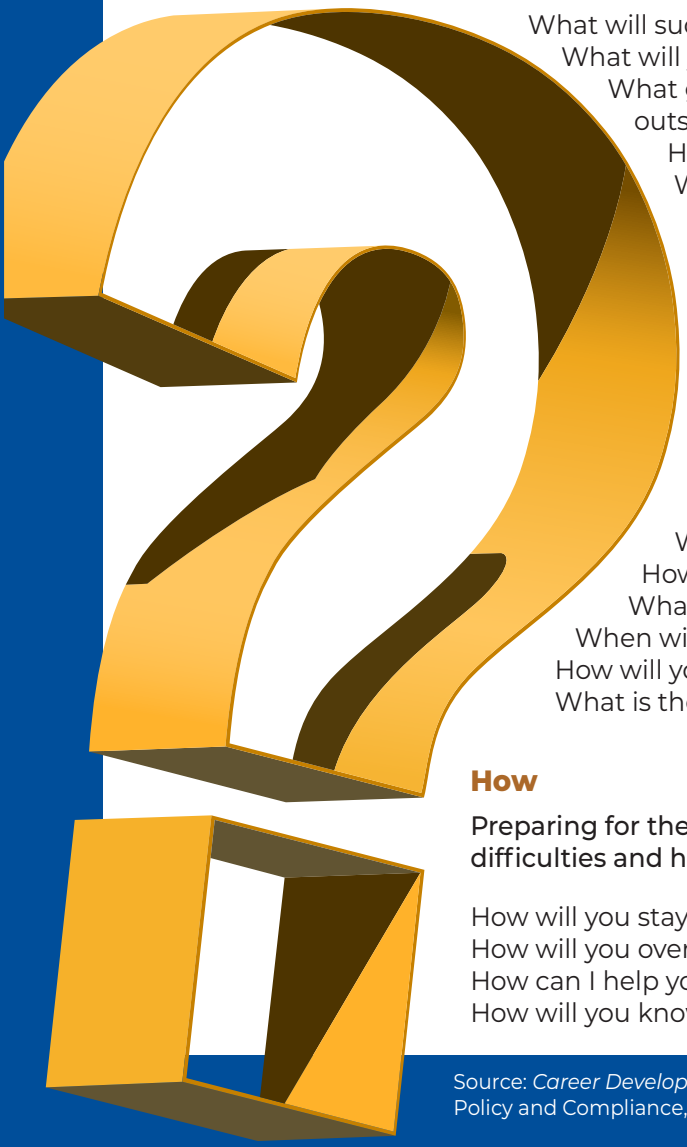
Opportunities, Obstacles and Options

Exploring the opportunities, obstacles and options. Explore a range of options for learning such as shadowing, mentoring, networking, and professional development. Obstacles can be both internal (such as motivation) and external (such as availability of resources). People view obstacles differently. Acknowledge their point of view. Start by encouraging the team member to imagine possibilities. If you see opportunities and options, share them.

What are some ways to achieve your growth goals?
Which options interest you the most?
What opportunities exist to practice achieving the goals?
What networks have you built to support your career progression? How can you leverage these networks to achieve your goals?
With whom should you network to get a different perspective on your career goals?
What other resources could I help you with?
What resources do you have to help you?
What holds you back from achieving your goals?
What obstacles could derail your progress? Are they internal or external?
What competing demands might distract you?
If you had no constraints, what would you do?

Way Forward

Starting the planning process with a commitment to take specific actions identified in the previous step. It is enough to have 1-3 action steps. Help the team member identify something doable – set them up for success. It is the responsibility of the team member to do something for their own growth and not be talked into something.



What will success look like?
What will you do? What steps will you take?
What growth experiences and development opportunities outside your current tasks would help you achieve your goals?
How will you manage this in terms of your workload?
What is the smallest step you can take to get started?
How motivated are you to carry out your plan?
What else could I do to support you?

Timeline

Setting a timeline to commit to taking specific actions. Encourage the team member to schedule GROWTH actions to ensure they are not forgotten. Put any agreed check-ins on your own calendar.

When will you start?
How long do you think it will take?
What milestones can you set?
When will you check in or ask for feedback?
How will you track your progress?
What is the one thing you need to move forward today?

How

Preparing for the growth journey. How will the team member deal with difficulties and how will she or he recognize success?

How will you stay on track? Stay motivated?
How will you overcome obstacles?
How can I help you? Who else might be able to help you?
How will you know you have succeeded?

Source: *Career Development Conversations: A Guide for Managers,* Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, United Nations. Edited by Craig Maile.

CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



25 STRATEGIES FOR MANAGERS

Creating psychological safety means building an environment where employees feel comfortable speaking up, asking for help, admitting mistakes, and challenging the status quo without fear. Facilitating psychological safety can help ensure that diverse ideas are shared, empower teams to take calculated risks, improve retention, and identify issues before they become problems.

Modeling Vulnerability and Openness

1. **Admit your own mistakes openly:** Share your failures and what you learned. This will help to normalize imperfection.
2. **Say "I don't know":** Admitting gaps in your knowledge shows you are only human and encourages others to do the same.
3. **Ask for help:** Asking your team for assistance signals that needing help is not a sign of inability.
4. **Practice active listening:** Use your skills in paraphrasing, clarifying, reflecting, and summarizing.
5. **Request feedback on your own leadership:** Ask, "What could I have done better?" or "What do you need from me?"

Facilitating Open Communication

6. **Invite dissenting voices first:** When asking for opinions, call on people who may disagree before sharing your own view.
7. **Use anonymous feedback tools:** Create safe spaces for shy or hesitant team members to contribute.
8. **Appoint a "devil's advocate":** Explicitly give team members the role of questioning plans to ensure robust discussion.
9. **Frame the work as learning, not just implementing:** Acknowledge when a project is complex or unique, making it okay to repeat and improve.
10. **Use "Jazz Dialogues":** Implement rules of communication based on the interactive communication among musicians during a performance, such as listening more than speaking and building upon others' ideas (the "yes, and..." approach).
11. **Ask open-ended questions:** Instead of "Is everyone okay with this?", try "What assumptions should we challenge today?"

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CREATING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



25 STRATEGIES FOR MANAGERS

Establishing Supportive Norms and Team Culture

12. **Establish team contracts:** Create agreed-upon team rules for communication, conflict, and feedback.
13. **Celebrate "failing forward":** Support thoughtful risk-taking that did not pay off, focusing on the learning gained.
14. **Capture the learning before "cleaning the slate":** After a less-than-successful effort, focus on credible process improvements rather than excuses or blame.
15. **Rotate meeting facilitators:** Shift power dynamics by allowing different team members to lead discussions.
16. **Bring everyone along:** Ensure all team members have ownership of a problem or issue.
17. **Set clear expectations:** Reduce fear of the unknown by defining roles and the criteria for acceptable behavior.

Recognizing and Empowering Individuals

18. **Praise in public, correct in private:** Make recognition visible and public, but handle constructive criticism privately.
19. **Send agendas in advance:** Give introverts or slow processors time to think through their contributions before meetings.
20. **Actively draw in quieter voices:** Ask for input from team members who have not spoken up.
21. **Provide a wellness policy:** Legitimize the need for self-care by encouraging rest.
22. **Offer flexible work arrangements:** Support work-life alignment to support each employee as a complete person.

Addressing Conflict and Feedback Positively

23. **Respond constructively to bad news:** Thank people for raising concerns, even if the news is uncomfortable.
24. **Resolve conflict promptly:** Step in early to manage disagreements fairly and respectfully.
25. **Act upon feedback:** When team members give feedback, show you've heard them by taking visible and appropriate action.

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CREATING A LEARNING CULTURE
20 ACTIONS MANAGERS CAN TAKE

Cultivating a learning culture requires intentional, daily actions from managers—such as modeling curiosity, providing dedicated development time, and framing mistakes as growth opportunities.

Leading by Example

1. Model the Learning Journey: Share your own learning journey, mistakes, and lessons learned to show that continuous improvement applies to everyone.
2. Foster a Growth Mindset: Praise the effort and learning process, rather than just the result.
3. Encourage Curiosity: Actively ask “Why?” and “What if?” to stimulate critical thinking.
4. Adopt “No-Blame” Retrospectives: After a project, especially if it fails, focus discussions on what was learned rather than who is to blame.

Embedding Learning in the Workflow

5. Assign “Stretch” Projects: Provide assignments that challenge team members to develop new skills.
6. Implement “Lunch and Learns”: Organize informal, lunchtime sessions where team members share knowledge on a specific topic.
7. Create “Learning Days”: Dedicate a regular, meeting-free day or time block for training.
8. Rotate Roles or Tasks: Allow team members to temporarily take on different responsibilities to gain broader perspective.
9. Debrief and Recalibrate: Review projects immediately after completion to capture lessons learned.

Sharing, Mentoring and Coaching

10. Set Up a Mentorship Program: Pair new employees with colleagues for structured guidance.
11. Use Peer Coaching: Encourage team members to observe each other and provide feedback.
12. Start a Knowledge-Sharing Routine: Begin weekly team meetings with one team member sharing something new they learned.
13. Create Communities of Practice: Form groups for sharing best practices relating to specific skills, such as AI fluency, project management, etc.

Encouraging Professional Development

14. Provide Access to Learning Opportunities: Invest in online courses, industry-specific certifications, and other professional development opportunities.
15. Offer Tuition Support: Support learning that aligns with career growth.
16. Serve Up a Menu of Options: Reinforce awareness about opportunities for learning from the work, learning from colleagues, learning with others, learning through teaching, and learning through reflection.

Recognizing Growth

17. Reward Applied Knowledge: Recognize team members not just for completing training but for applying it in the workplace.
18. Include Development in Performance Reviews: Make learning goals a key part of regular reviews.
19. Celebrate “Aha!” Moments: Publicly recognize when a team member learns a new insight.
20. Map Career Paths: Align learning initiatives with career opportunities.

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CONVERSATION MODEL

Use this model to prepare for effective conversations that maintain respectful relationships.

	What You Might Say…	Your Reason for Saying It…
1	*Is now a good time to talk?*	Demonstrate respect by asking for permission.
2	*Thanks for taking the time to speak with me right now.*	Express respect and appreciation for the person.
3	*My purpose in talking with you is to ensure that we…*	Identify a mutual purpose or goal related to the conversation. *(Examples could include good customer service, improved safety, timeliness, productive teamwork, etc.)*
4a	*When we were [specific situation] and you [the person's behavior or performance]…*	Describe the specific situation and the person's specific behavior or performance issue you are speaking about. DO NOT JUDGE the behavior. Simply state what the person did.
4b	*…I observed [describe impact on co-worker, workplace, or customer/stakeholder].* *OR* *…I felt that [describe the impact on you].*	Describe the impact the behavior or performance had on workplace objectives, customers or stakeholders, co-workers, or you.
5	*Can you tell me more about how you understood what happened? I might not be seeing everything.* *OR* *What was your perspective on what happened?*	Be curious. Use inquiry *(asking questions).* Suspend assumptions. Listen with an open mind to learn more.
6	*I imagine that you might have thought that [a rational perspective the person might have had].*	Give the benefit of the doubt and attribute positive intent. Show empathy by expressing that you could appreciate why the person might have done what he/she did.
7	*I need for you to [state the expected behavior].* *OR* *It would be helpful next time if you would [state the behavior you would appreciate].*	Advocate for what you need. State the expectation.
8	*Doing this will help us/you to [restate the mutual purpose or goal].*	Clarify the mutual goal. Confirm that you both share some common ground.
9	*What do you need from me to help make this easier?* *OR* *Is there any way I can help?*	Demonstrate teamwork. Show you are willing to assist if needed.
10	*I appreciate your time. Thank you for speaking with me.*	Affirm the relationship. Express appreciation *(and respect).*

Adapted by Craig Maile from Human Resources, University of Washington.

Additional Statements/Questions

- I want to see you succeed.
- What are your takeaways from our conversation?
- Do you see any roadblocks?
- I feel confident you can do this!
- I know this was a challenging conversation.

Thank you for your attention.

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