

"CAREER COUNSELING CAN BE A VERY VALUABLE EMPLOYEE-DEVELOPMENT TOOL FOR THE ORGANIZATION. WHILE IT DOES TAKE TIME, THAT INVESTMENT WILL BE RETURNED MANYFOLD, IF DONE PROPERLY."

CAREER COUNSELING: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?

BY TED R. GAMBILL

I was recently talking to the personnel director of a major bank in Indianapolis about a problem he had. He stated that at a time when the bank was sorely in need of talented individuals to meet a multitude of future needs . . . employees were leaving because they could not see any opportunities in the future. He said that somehow the company's interest in building a career with them and the company's need for them in the future were not being communicated to the employees. Further investigation led he and I to the conclusion that a major reason for this paradox was a breakdown in the career-counseling process.

I would guess the problem facing that bank is not unique. Much of what we read today on human resource development is focusing on this problem of matching the employee-development process with future staffing requirements. Many researchers are concluding that the problem exists partially, if not primarily, because career coun-

seling is not being effectively performed.

Peter Drucker said in his book *The Practice of Management*, "The power of a company to attract good people is directly proportionate to its reputation as a developer of successful people for itself, as well as other companies." He goes on to state, ". . . every manager in a business has the opportunity to encourage individual self-development or to stifle it, to direct it or to misdirect it."

If employee development is such a fundamental personnel management responsibility of a manager and is so important to an organization, why is it then that career counseling is given so little time by the manager? Why is it that managers typically feel uncomfortable and inadequate in career counseling sessions?

One of the reasons may be that the manager is venturing into unfamiliar territory, discussing something other than the day-to-day job. The ambiguity of the discussion, plus lack of experience in career counseling, may often lead to shallow discussions. Such a ses-

sion can be frustrating to both the manager and the employee.

Furthermore, the manager may cling to what he or she knows best, career planning within his or her own division. Such an approach has the effect of limiting the employee's perception of available career routes. This may lead to the employee perceiving little opportunity for advancement in the organization.

Finally, the pressures of "putting out fires" may appear to be too great for the manager. He or she may feel he/she does not have enough time to spend "daydreaming" with the employee. It takes a professional manager to realize that time spent today in career counseling may have a greater payoff in performance than time spent on day-to-day responsibilities.

Career Counseling Objectives

In early 1977 when we began analyzing the employee-development and career-counseling processes at Meridian Insurance, we concluded that the above-mentioned factors were indeed contributing to poor

career-counseling results. In reality, very little career counseling appeared to be taking place in the organization.

Consequently, we planned and developed a *career-counseling program* which was implemented later in the year. While the program has not been completely developed, the first phase already is achieving favorable results in terms of:

- A greater awareness by managers of the need to provide career counseling to their employees
- A greater interest in career-path planning by employees
- A greater degree of employee development and preparation for future opportunities
- Greater utilization of our in-house resources to fill supervisory, professional and managerial positions. (For example, we have filled over 36 per cent of our upper clerical, supervisory, upper professional and management positions from within during the last two years.)

The objectives of our career-counseling program are as follows:

1. To facilitate employee development and growth so both organizational and personal goals can be achieved.
2. To encourage and assist personal growth and development so there is available the opportunity for each employee to attain and realize his highest potential.
3. To develop a reservoir of internal talent so as to ensure having the right numbers and kinds of people available in the organization at the right time.
4. To help managers be more aware of their personnel management responsibilities.
5. To integrate the career-counseling process with our performance appraisal system, training programs and other educational efforts so as to maximize utilization of the company's most important asset — its people.

Key Concepts

Rather than describing the details of our program, I am going to highlight some of the key concepts:

1. *Life-Long Process*: The fundamental principle of our program is that employee development is a life-long process. The ability to grow is limited only by senility and

death.

This growth can occur either in one position or in a series of positions. It is important to recognize, therefore, that employee development is not limited to just upward mobility. Becoming more knowledgeable, proficient and professional in the performance of current responsibilities can represent career development just as much as moving to a different assignment. Also, there is the potential for increasing the responsibilities in a position, as the employee grows into them.

Those employees who feel they are "too old" to grow and those managers who share that perception are suffering grievously from the errors of their own thinking. They err when they assume that growth is possible only for younger people. They err when they think of growth as mere change of skill. They err when they get caught by the common misconception that a slowing of physical alertness, a stiffening of the growth muscles, is necessarily accompanied by an inability to learn new facts and adapt to new understandings.

The still-growing employee also recognizes the opportunity to aid younger employees' growth and views his or her role in the organization as broadening to include stimulating, encouraging and assisting the development of younger employees. Peter Drucker has described this emerging role of developer by saying, "*The best performers in any profession always look upon the people they have trained and developed as the proudest monument they can leave behind.*"

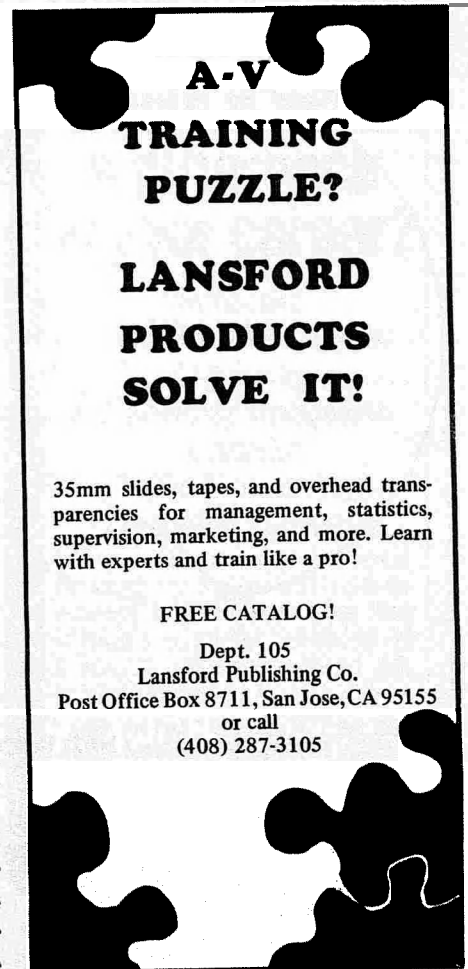
2. *Personal Responsibility for Growth*: The employee must assume primary responsibility for career planning and personal development. The company cannot develop an employee who does not wish to be developed. The employee must be willing to govern and control his or her own destiny.

Consequently, it is important that the employee knows him or her self. He or she must define personal goals, determine whether these goals are attainable, take time to evaluate the skills and

knowledge needed to achieve these goals and set priorities for starting on the chosen career path. Only the employee can answer the crucial questions of — "*Where do I want to go?*" and "*How much am I willing to pay to get there?*"

3. *Interdependent Roles*: While the employee does have primary responsibility for personal development, the manager and the Human Resource Development Department also have a responsibility and accountability for employee development. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the employee, manager, and Human Resource Development Department have interrelated roles in the career-counseling process. Dual commitment from the employee and the organization is required if the career-counseling process is going to be effective.

The manager's role is to encourage growth and to create a climate which will stimulate and facilitate this growth. The manager must be willing to invest time, share experiences and knowledge of the or-



**A-V
TRAINING
PUZZLE?
LANSFORD
PRODUCTS
SOLVE IT!**

35mm slides, tapes, and overhead transparencies for management, statistics, supervision, marketing, and more. Learn with experts and train like a pro!

FREE CATALOG!
Dept. 105
Lansford Publishing Co.
Post Office Box 8711, San Jose, CA 95155
or call
(408) 287-3105

Circle No. 137 on Reader Service Card

ganization and think creatively of how the employee's and the organization's goals can be integrated.

The Human Resource Development Department's role is to aid both the manager and employee in the thinking process. This department should help them consider potential career routes, possible developmental needs and available resources for accomplishing needed development.

4. *Nurturing*: The employee must realize the importance of nurturing, or developing, in each assignment. This nurturing is important for two reasons.

First, the employee needs to develop a successful track record. The employee needs to understand that future success and attainment of career goals depend to a great extent upon performance in the present assignment. Growth must be clearly visible in job accomplishments. The employee should learn the current assignment's responsi-

bilities and raise his or her performance of them to an above-average level. The employee must not become so engrossed in preparing for some future assignment that he or she stops performing in the current position.

Secondly, the employee must nurture in a job for a long enough time so as to derive all possible experiences from that position. Being able to draw upon a variety of experiences will enable the employee to broaden his or her perspective and apply a comprehensive outlook to later job assignments. The current job assignment should serve as a building block for later opportunities.

5. *Honesty*: Both the organization and the employee must be honest with each other and with themselves. The employee must take an honest look at his or her abilities, skills and potential, and must realistically assess whether he or she has the ability to perform

at a higher level. Furthermore, the employee must honestly determine whether he or she is willing to invest the time, money and effort that will be required to achieve a higher position. If he or she does not have the ability or is not willing to make that additional investment, for whatever reason, then he or she should not feel guilty nor "blame" the company for not progressing.

At the same time, the company must be honest with the employee as to whether career objectives are feasible in terms of future organization needs. The manager needs to make it very clear that the company cannot make any promises to the employee. All the company can guarantee is that it will do its best to provide resources which will facilitate that employee growth which is in keeping with the attainment of corporate objectives. In the final analysis, the employee's career progress is contingent upon future organizational needs, the degree of the employee's commitment to grow and develop and how well the employee's strengths match corporate staffing needs.

Career-Launching Checklist

To help our managers initiate and guide in-depth career-counseling sessions, we developed a *Career-Launching Checklist* and a *Career-Counseling Model*.

The Career-Launching Checklist is given to the employee before the actual career-counseling session. Its thought-provoking questions should help the employee prepare for the session. The employee should be specific in writing down answers and not respond with "yes" and "no" answers. It might be good for the employee to complete the checklist, leave it for a few days and then come back and answer the questions again before actually meeting with the manager.

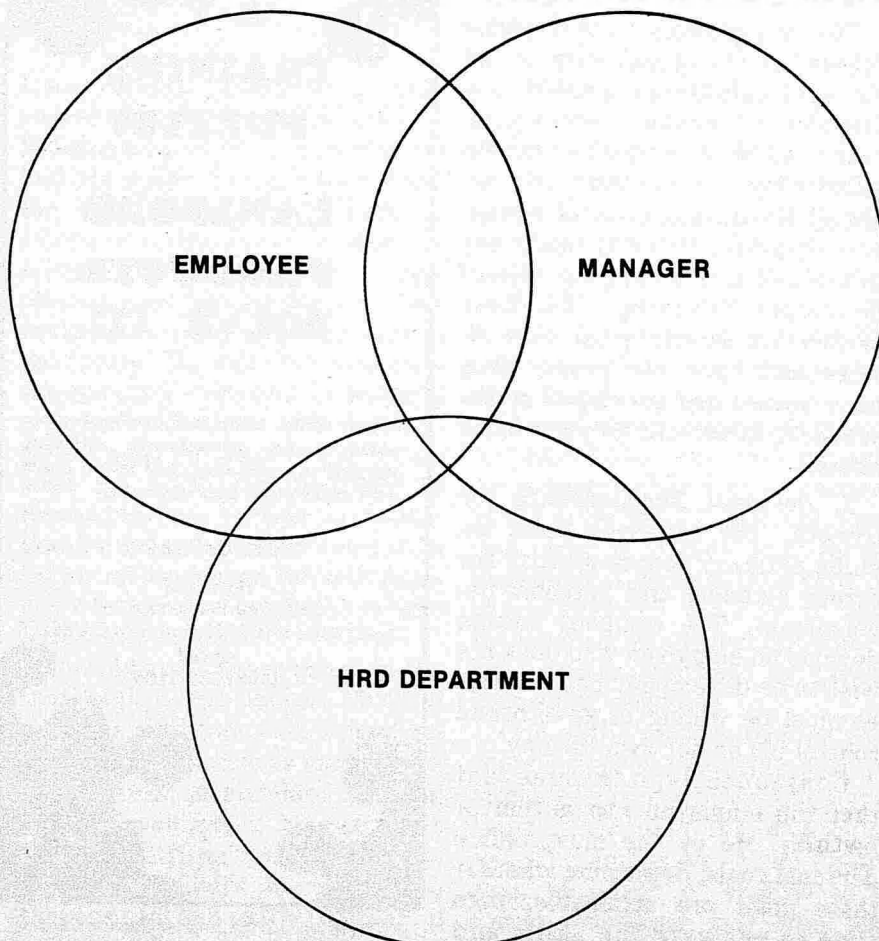
Questions the Career-Launching Checklist* asks include:

- Do I know the things I do best? What are they? Why?

*Adapted from *Career Management*, Marion S. Kellogg, American Management Associations, Inc.

FIGURE 1.

RELATIONSHIP OF EMPLOYEE, MANAGER AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT IN CAREER-COUNSELING PROCESS



• Have I found some things I like to do very much? What are they? Why?

• Do I work better by myself or with other people? Why? What sorts of other people?

• Do I know what talents I do not have? What are they?

• Do I know the things I very much dislike doing? What are they? Why?

• Have I gotten professional advice on the fields of work I ought to consider for myself? What has that advice been?

• Does my education prepare me for these fields, or do I need further education or specialization courses or some sort of internship before making a full-fledged beginning? What kinds of continuing education?

• How hard am I willing to work physically and mentally? Can I work long hours? How much additional time per week am I willing to invest in my career?

Career-Counseling Model

The Career-Counseling Model suggests six areas that need to be explored by the manager and employee in a career-counseling session:

1. Where am I?
2. What career do I want?
3. Why do I want it?
4. What knowledge and experience do I need?
5. What job assignments, training programs and self-study resources offer the needed knowledge and experiences?
6. How long will I need to nurture in each assignment?

There are several questions that the manager can ask to gain information about each of the six areas. For example, questions that can be asked to help the employee answer the question "Where am I?" include:

• What are the various roles and responsibilities that I have had in my business career?

• What technical strengths do I have in my current position?

• What aspects in my present position do I like the most?

• Based on my present capabilities and desires, do I want to further my career?

The second consideration in the

process is — "What career do I want?" Some questions you may want to ask in this step include:

• What is the nature of the assignment that I would like to have in the future? (This does not refer to specific job titles but to general responsibilities.)

• What sort of responsibilities and challenges do I expect from a new position?

• Do I have the time and energy to pursue such a career path?

To gain information for the question — "Why do I want it?" — you might want to ask the questions:

• What things in my past career experiences would I like to take with me into the future?

• What things in my past career experiences would I like to leave behind me?

• What things about my proposed career make me feel alive?

The fourth consideration in this career counseling process is the question — "What knowledge and experiences do I need?" Some questions you may want to ask in this step include:

• What are the skills, abilities and knowledge needed in my proposed career that I presently do not have?

• What do I need to learn?

• What should I stop doing now and what should I start doing?

The fifth question in this process is — "What job assignments, training programs, educational courses and self-study resources offer the needed knowledge and experiences?" Some questions you may want to ask in this step include:

• Is the organization flexible enough so that I may have various job assignments?

• Will the organization support me in my career path development?

• What developmental position assignments are most important to achieve the objective of my career plan?

• What internal and external resources are available to aid my growth?

The sixth step in the process is — "How long will I need to nurture in each assignment?" Questions

you might ask in this step include:

• Am I patient enough to take time to learn the position?

• Have I extracted all that I possibly can from this position in order for it to be a profitable stepping stone in my career development?

• Am I realistic in the time I have left to develop my career?

In summary, career counseling can be a very valuable employee-development tool for the organization. While it does take time, that investment will be returned many-fold, if done properly. Growing employees, increased productivity, reduced turnover, higher employee morale and having the right numbers and kinds of people prepared when the company needs them all will contribute to ensuring the company's prosperity and survival.

Ted R. Gambill is manpower planning and development manager at Meridian Insurance, Indianapolis, Ind. He is a member of ASTD, ASPA and the Indiana Personnel Association.

BACHELOR, MASTER, DOCTORATE

Would it make a difference in your career?

PROGRAMS

- Business Administration
- Engineering
- Engineering Management
- Education
- Public Administration
- Counseling Psychology

College credit for work experience. No residency. Studies build upon experience, related to your career. Time is flexible and studies self-paced. For a no-cost personal evaluation call, or send resume.

Calif. Toll Free 1-800-852-7777, Ext. 310
Other Toll Free 1-800-824-7888, Ext. 310
(213) 278-1094

Century University
9100 Wilshire Blvd
Dept. 75
Beverly Hills, Ca. 90212

Circle No. 142 on Reader Service Card