

Help
Them
Grow or
Watch
Them GO



**Second
Edition**

**REVISED AND
EXPANDED**

**Career Conversations
Organizations Need and
Employees Want**

Beverly Kaye & Julie Winkle Giulioni

*Coauthor of the bestselling **Love 'Em or Lose 'Em***

Praise for *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go*

“Deceptively simple. Absolutely relevant. Bev and Julie demystify career development and give managers the key to unlocking the potential around them.”

—**Heidi Brandow, Director, Global Learning and Development, Tesla, Inc.**

“Life and business are all about where you pay attention. Pay attention to the growth of your people . . . and they will grow your business. The authors do a great job in spelling out the how-tos!”

—**Chip Conley, author of *Wisdom@Work* and Strategic Advisor for Hospitality and Leadership, Airbnb**

“This edition takes us into the realities of today’s business landscape and shows that if we want to grow our business, we have to grow our people. It walks the reader through career conversations in a way that isn’t overwhelming and rather focuses on leaders being genuine and having meaningful conversations.”

—**Robin Cerrati, Vice President, Human Resources, Compass Group**

“Should be the career conversation bible for busy leaders!”

—**Marshall Goldsmith, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Triggers* and coauthor of *How Women Rise***

“Organizations in Asia need to take career development initiatives seriously, and managers need to be supported with simple skills and tools to build trust and overcome cultural barriers. This book offers an approach to career development that works cross-culturally and enables companies in Asia to deal more effectively with this talent management challenge.”

—**Tan Siew Inn, Founding Partner, The Flame Centre, Singapore, and author of *Wholeness in a Disruptive World***

“*Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go* is an important contribution to leading organizations where people and talent growth matters to success.”

—**Kevin Wilde, Executive Leadership Fellow, Carlson School of Management**

“In all my years coaching executives on career development, this is the best and most comprehensive resource available. It takes the complex issue of career development and simplifies it with real, action-oriented tips, tools, and insights. It’s relevant for new supervisors, senior executives, and HR professionals at any level in any industry.”

—**Sharon Silverman, Senior Vice President, Talent Acquisition, Gingerfinds**

“At last, a hands-on book that’s smart, practical, and honest. Everyone knows that people make all the difference; this book will teach you how to make a difference with your people.”

—**Alan Webber, cofounder of *Fast Company*, author of *Rules of Thumb*, and Mayor of Santa Fe, New Mexico**

“Improving the skills of our workforce is one of the country’s most important economic challenges. It has to start with employers, and *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go* tells you how to do it painlessly.”

—**Peter Cappelli, Director, Center for Human Resources, The Wharton School, and Professor of Management, University of Pennsylvania**

“Great read for those who want to help individuals develop. It is full of useful materials that are easy to access. Ideal for a manager who wants to learn about coaching others.”

—**Edward E. Lawler III, Distinguished Professor of Business, Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, and coauthor of *Management Reset***

“Improving retention and building engagement are the driving factors for the talent development strategy of the Hearst Capital Management group. We’re implementing *Help Them Grow* concepts because they provide managers and employees with an easy-to-follow yet impactful framework for career conversations. Through career conversations, we’re increasing engagement and, more importantly, supporting our employees’ careers.”

—**Heather Ragone, Senior Director, Talent Development, Hearst**

“Ingersoll Rand’s focus on development is improving year over year. Our leaders don’t just coach for performance, they coach for development. How does best-in-class engagement and employee retention sound to you? Does an organization filled with career coaches sound interesting? Read this book!”

—**Craig Mundy, Vice President, Human Resources, Strategic Business Units, Ingersoll Rand**

“*Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go* provides a practical road map for managers who know that they want to help their teams but may not know the clear, specific steps they can take. Managers, employees, and the organizations they serve will benefit from the wisdom in this book.”

—**Rebecca L. Ray, PhD, Executive Vice President, Human Capital, The Conference Board**

“I loved this book. Draw from the abundant list of simple yet powerful questions and become the best talent manager in your organization.”

—**Tina Sung, Vice President, Government Transformation and Agency Partnerships, Partnership for Public Service**

“A great guidebook for those whose job it is to help other people grow, with all the right questions we need to be asking!”

—**Frances Hesselbein, President and CEO, The Frances Hesselbein Leadership Institute**

Help Them **Grow** or Watch Them **Go**

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Grow or
Watch Them
Go **CAREER CONVERSATIONS
ORGANIZATIONS NEED
AND EMPLOYEES WANT**

SECOND EDITION

Beverly Kaye and Julie Winkle Giulioni



BK

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a BK Business book

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From Julie,

To Peter for knowing I could do this—and making sure I did.

To Nick and Jenna for the constant joy and lessons learned
from watching you grow.

From Beverly,

To Barry for truly being the wind beneath my wings.

To Lindsey and Jill for showing me that I still have a lot to learn.

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INTRODUCTION

DEVELOPMENT DEBUNKED

Developing employees. Helping them grow. It's like eating properly or exercising.

You know it's good. You know you should. Yet, if you're like any managers today, you just don't do it as well or as frequently as you would like.

In survey after survey, year after year, employees express their dissatisfaction with how they are being supported in their careers. At the same time, managers across industries, regions, and levels uniformly report a moderate to severe lack of competence, comfort, and confidence in themselves in regards to this critical job expectation.

What IF...

- ▶ **you could more easily and frequently engage in the career development work that employees crave without sacrificing everything else that must get done?**
- ▶ **employees assumed greater responsibility for their careers?**
- ▶ **it was possible for career development to be integrated into the work that needs to get done as opposed to being a separate series of overwhelming tasks that have to be checked off a list?**

.....

You could. They can. And it can be. That's why we've written this book.

HELP THEM **gROW**

In the seven years since we wrote the first edition of this book, career development has only become more important. In today's business environment, talent continues to be the major differentiator. As artificial intelligence and other advances take hold, we're coming to terms with the reality that there's no substitute for what human beings are uniquely suited to contribute to the workplace. As a result, developing people to optimize their capacity has become a compelling and strategic priority across organizations.

Developing talent is also recognized as one of the most significant drivers of employee engagement, which in turn is the key to the business outcomes you seek: revenue, profitability, innovation, productivity, customer loyalty, quality, cycle time reduction, and more—everything organizations need to survive and thrive.

But the reality of career development continues to morph in response to the evolving business landscape. Boomers are living longer—and working longer. Belt-tightening efforts that led to delayering and downsizing show no signs of loosening. There are fewer and fewer levels of management to which to aspire. Work gets organized and done more organically these days. More jobs are being filled with contingent workers. All of this breeds a sense of scarcity and leaves the impression that there aren't as many opportunities as there once were. This makes career development more important and more complex than ever before.

OR WATCH THEM **GO**

Ignore the development imperative at your own peril. Every day, employees who believe that their careers are not getting the attention they deserve make the decision to leave. Some resign to pursue employment in organizations that offer greater opportunity. Others decide the freelance life fits them better, and they cobble together a variety of projects that become their career.

But an equally dangerous group is made up of those who stay but withdraw their engagement, motivation, and enthusiasm for the work.

And all of this matters. A lot. Economic researchers point to evolving skill gaps, changes to immigration policies, and changing demographics as indicators that we are in for a sustained labor shortage. Cities—looking to build their populations—are considering paying people to relocate. Buckle up. It's going to be a bumpy ride: retention—if it's not already—is going to keep managers awake at night.

THE “THEM” IN *HELP THEM GROW*: WHO ARE THEY?

When we wrote the first edition of this book in 2012, we loosely used the word *employee* to refer to the bulk of the people who work for you. Ah, what a difference a few years can make. Today, full-time employees make up just over half of the workforce. The rest is comprised of part-time employees, contractors, consultants, interns, and more. Gig workers are a significant economic and employment factor.

As the number of these nontraditional contributors grows, organizations and managers grapple with hard questions around effectiveness and equity. Let us offer a simple and proactive solution: Develop them all! It's time to take a more generous and democratic approach to growth. We know what you're thinking:

- ▶ Yes, gig workers may not be with you for long.
- ▶ Yes, the contingent workforce will build skills that they may pack up and take elsewhere.
- ▶ Yes, the same is true of your full-timers.

No longer are there lifetime employment guarantees or gold watches. You know it and so does your workforce. Today they're looking for other sources of security—skills, knowledge, and experiences. Offer these and—although there's no guarantee that people will stay longer—

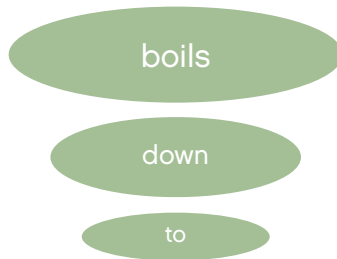
they'll be able to contribute more while they're with you. And you'll build an attractive employment brand in a competitive marketplace.

We'll still use the word *employee* throughout this book, but we strongly suggest that you read it as *everybody* and apply these ideas to the full range of people—regardless of employment status—with whom you work.

CAREER CONVERSATIONS ORGANIZATIONS NEED AND EMPLOYEES WANT

So what's a manager to do? Plenty. And it might be easier than you expect.

Quality Career Development



Quality Conversations

Quality career development boils down to quality conversations.

Throughout this book, we'll challenge you to reframe career development in such a way that responsibility rests squarely with the employee, and that your role becomes more about prompting, guiding, reflecting, exploring ideas, activating enthusiasm, and driving action. This role centers around talking about rather than actually doing the heavy lifting of development.

We'll offer a framework for thinking about conversations that help others grow. It involves three distinct types of conversations: hindsight, foresight, and insight.

- ▶ Hindsight conversations help others look backward and inward to determine who they are, where they've been, what they love, and where they excel. Chapters 3 and 4 provide questions and ideas for helping others look back as a basis for moving forward.
- ▶ Foresight conversations are designed to keep employees looking forward and outward toward changes, trends, and the ever-evolving big picture. Chapter 5 offers easy, straightforward tools that are long on value and short on your time investment.
- ▶ Leveraging the insights that surface from the convergence of hindsight and foresight is the focus of Chapters 6, 7, and 8. How do the employee's strengths fit into where the organization or industry is going? Where are there opportunities to carve out a space to grow and perform? How can we help others update their definitions of career success? Of the work that needs to be done, which activities will give people unique experiences and fodder for development?
- ▶ But how can you make all of this happen at the speed of business? Chapter 9 outlines how to grow with the flow or embed development into everyday life through heightened awareness and fluid conversation strategies.
- ▶ In Chapter 10 we'll wrap up with a discussion of the kind of culture that supports authentic, sustainable career development.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

You're probably doing a pretty good job so far. Here are a few thoughts to get the most from the experience.

This book was written for anyone who has a role in developing others. The titles vary from organization to organization: supervisor, manager, director, team lead, vice president, CEO. Seasoned executives to first-time frontline leaders. Line and staff personnel. For-profit and nonprofit leaders. Small business owners. Readers have told us that the

ideas we share apply equally well at home to the very human domain of parenting and even life in general.

We've chosen to use the term *manager* generically. Whenever you see it, *manager* means you.

This book is all about the career conversations employees want. So we'll draw heavily upon the employee's voice. These are real individuals in the workplace whose eloquent insights make the point far better than we could. They aren't the entitled whiners with unrealistic expectations. They're your solid citizens. The ones you count on to produce. The ones you're hoping will stick around.

► **TRY THIS**

You'll find lots of questions and activities you can use with your employees. We'll call them out like this. Have an upcoming career conversation? Scan the pages for an exercise, tuck the book under your arm, and you're ready to go.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

So you're somebody's employee too, right? And, if you're like many managers, you get caught in the middle, doing the right thing for your employees, but not necessarily having it done for you. As you read this book, you may find yourself thinking, *This sounds pretty good, but what about me?* Answer: do it yourself!

The tools and questions throughout this book are highly flexible. Change *you* to *I* and you're ready for some self-discovery. You might find it helpful to review the answers with someone at work or at home. A fresh set of eyes may pick up clues and offer a different perspective and new insights. Bottom line: as you invest in building skills to support your employees' development, don't be afraid to be selfish and apply what you're learning to yourself and your own career as well.

We'll close each chapter with some what-ifs. We know that as a manager responsible for delivering business results, you must keep your feet planted firmly on the ground. So, from that grounded position, take a moment to consider what just might be possible.

What IF...

- ▶ **you kept reading and tried out even one or two ideas with your employees?**



They would *grow*.

1

Develop

Me

OR I'm

History!



Spending forty-sixty-eighty hours somewhere each week...I want it to mean something. I want to feel like I'm moving forward somehow. If I can't grow here, I've gotta look elsewhere.

—An employee (perhaps yours)

The decision to assume a management role in today's workplace comes with a front-row seat to some of the greatest business challenges of our time. Day in and day out, you must

Do more with less. It's become cliché, but it permeates life at work. You've likely become a master at finding ways to reduce costs, time, and other resources below levels you ever imagined were possible.

Navigate unprecedented uncertainty and complexity. The unknowns outnumber the knowns today. Yet others look to you for clarity and direction in an increasingly unpredictable environment.

Meet ever-expanding expectations. Every quarter, you're asked to do a little (or a lot) more. Bigger sales. Greater numbers of service interactions. More projects. Higher scores.

Continuously improve quality. Good enough isn't. Given the competition in today's global market, perfection is the standard—until it's met and you have to do even better.

Deliver the next big thing. Most organizations believe that if they're not moving forward, they're sliding backward. Innovation gets its picture on business magazine covers because it represents the promise of greater success.

And, no matter how long, hard, or smart you work, you can't do all of this alone. Success depends upon tapping the very best that everyone has to offer. (By *everyone*, we're not just talking about employees—because the workforce has dramatically grown to include gig workers, contingent support, contractors and consultants, interns and even

Career development

is among the **most**
frequently **forgotten**
tools for driving
business results...

yet

it's completely within
a **manager's**
sphere of **influence**.

externs.) So today, your success rests upon finding ways to continuously expand everyone’s capacity, engagement, and ability to contribute to the organization.

Study after study confirms that best-in-class managers—those who consistently develop the most capable, flexible, and engaged teams able to drive exceptional business results—all share one quality: they make career development a priority.

A “HISTORY” LESSON

Even during challenging economic times, your best and brightest have options. Failing to help them grow can lead employees to take their talents elsewhere. They become “history.” But what can be equally damaging as this talent drain are the employees who stay and become disengaged. Their bodies show up for work every day but their commitment has quit.

So, if career development is a tool that can deliver what organizations need most—productivity gains, expense reduction, retention, quality improvements, innovation, and bottom-line results—why isn’t everyone using it?

DEFINING TERMS

Perhaps it’s frequently forgotten because the term *career development* strikes fear into managers’ hearts.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Take a moment to think about what *career development* means to you? What’s involved? What’s your role?

Whatever your answer, we’ll bet that ours is simpler. You see, many managers are intimidated by or steer clear of career development

because they have a mistaken, outdated, or overwhelming definition of the term.

So try this definition on for size:

Career development
is nothing more than
helping others grow.
And nothing **less.**

Helping others grow can take a nearly unlimited number of forms. On one end of the continuum, you help employees prepare for and move to new or expanded roles in obvious and visible ways. But far more frequently, growth shows up on the other end of the continuum, in small, subtle ways that quietly create greater challenge, interest, and satisfaction in a job.

The problem is that too often, career development evokes images of forms, checklists, and deadlines. And let's be honest—the organization needs you to comply with these processes and systems to support important human resources planning work. But administrative details are not career development. Unfortunately, these artifacts too frequently overshadow the true art of development.

Genuine, meaningful, and sustainable career development occurs through the human act of conversation.

Whether it's a formal individual development planning (IDP) meeting or an on-the-fly connection, it's the quality of the conversation that matters most to employees. That's how they judge your performance and their development. That's also how they make the decision to go or stay—or to stay and disengage.

So, if it really is as simple as just talking to people, why isn't career development a more common feature of the organizational landscape?

Careers
are
developed
one
conversation
at a **time...**
over time.



IMMOBILIZING MYTHS

Over the years, managers—by sharing oral history and spinning lore—have created and continue to propagate several myths. And these myths (read: reasons or excuses) keep them from having the very career conversations their employees want. Which are familiar to you?

Myth 1 — There is simply not enough time.

No one will argue that time is among the scarcest resources available to managers today. But let's get real. You're having conversations already—probably all day long. What if you could redirect some of that time and some of those conversations to focus on careers?

Myth 2 — If I don't talk about it, they may not think about it and the status quo will be safe.

Why invite problems? Developing people could lead them to leave and upset the balance of your well-running department, right? Wrong. Employees have growth on their minds—whether you address it or not. Withholding these conversations is a greater danger to the status quo than engaging in them.

Myth 3 — Since employees need to own their careers, it's not my job.

No one will argue that managers own the development of their employees' careers. Employees do. But that doesn't mean that managers are completely off the hook. You have an essential role in helping and supporting others to take responsibility. And that role plays out in large part through conversation.

Myth 4 — Everyone wants more, bigger, or better: promotions, raises, prestige, power.

If you believe this one, you likely view career development as a confounding no-win situation. Because these things you imagine others want are in woefully short supply, it's understandable that many managers would avoid a potentially disappointing and demoralizing conversation. But based on our research, the fundamental assumption behind

this response is patently inaccurate. When asked about what they want to get out of a career conversation with their managers, the number-one response from employees is “ways to use my talents creatively.”

Myth 5—Development efforts are best concentrated on high potentials, many of whom already have plans in place.

This one’s a cop-out. You can indeed see a significant return on the development you invest in your high potentials. But they make up only about 10 percent of your population—maybe less. You probably have another 10 percent of marginal performers who are on a very different kind of plan—hopefully fewer. But what about the 80 percent in between—the massive middle responsible for doing the bulk of the work? Imagine what even a small investment in their development might yield.

If you’re like most managers, a few of these myths likely make sense to you. Dog-ear or bookmark this page and come back to it after you’ve completed the book. We predict that when you are introduced to a different way of looking at your role, you may also look at career development and these myths a little differently.

But, until then, remember this: growing the business means growing people. Forget that—and the rest is history.

What IF...

- ▶ you reframed how you think about career development?
- ▶ growth really was as simple as conversing with employees?
- ▶ managers could break through the myths that undermine their success and their employees’ growth?



2

Can
We
Talk?



I'm realistic. I know your time is tight and that you've got lots of other priorities. My career probably isn't at the top of your list. Don't worry—I've gotten the message that I own my career. I just need a thinking partner who'll help me step back every once in a while and focus on my development.

—An employee (perhaps yours)

If you're like most managers, you care. You've become accustomed to taking on more and more, expanding your job description with countless "other duties as assigned"—and even some that aren't. Developing the careers of the people who report to you is on a growing (read: crushing) list of to-dos.

What if you could reimagine your role around helping others grow? What if you reframed this task (which, let's face it, gets put on the back burner most of the time anyway) in such a way that responsibility rests squarely with the employee? What if your role was more about prompting, guiding, reflecting, exploring ideas, activating enthusiasm, and driving action rather than actually doing all the work?

Guess what? That's how it should be. And that's how you help people take responsibility for their careers. That's also how you can fit career development into your already full day.

Somehow the simple human act of helping people grow has gotten very complicated—processes on top of checklists with references to resource guides—and the to-do list keeps growing. Is it any wonder that you want to steer clear?

But managers who do this well cut through the clutter and have figured out what employees really need. And it's much more basic than you might imagine.

“I got tired of orchestrating these development experiences for people who just blew them off like they were nothing. I finally saw that the gift of heavy lifting I was giving my people was not appreciated. If I owned their development plans, they didn't. So I backed way off. Now, I'm totally there for them, will talk it all out, explore possibilities, help them think it through. But, when it comes to making it happen, they've got to take the lead. That's their job.”

—Manager, logistics

For years we've heard that talk is cheap. Not true.

Astute managers have gotten comfortable with talking more and doing less. These are no slugs—they're strategists. They appreciate the power of conversations to inspire and generate change in others.

Conversation has the power to touch employees' hearts and minds more deeply than the well-intentioned steps you might take on their behalf. You need nothing more than your own words to inspire reflection and commitment. From that can spring employee-generated actions, actions that employees own, actions that will help them realize their personal definitions of success.

Career development is all about the conversation.

“The action is in the interaction.”

—Douglas Conant, former Campbell Soup CEO
and author of *Touchpoints*

Genuine career development is not about forms, choreographing new assignments, or orchestrating promotions. It's about the quality of the conversations between a manager and an employee, conversations that are designed to

- ▶ Facilitate insights and awareness
- ▶ Explore possibilities and opportunities
- ▶ Inspire responses that drive employee-owned action

When it comes
to the
manager's role
in development,

talk is

**actually the
most precious
and results-driving
commodity
you have to share.**

ONE AND DONE IS DONE

Responding to the ever-quickenning pace of business, many organizations are rethinking a variety of time-honored (and time-consuming) practices. For instance, performance appraisals, once the centerpiece of management, are being eliminated or reconstituted in very different ways.

So what about career development? If you're like the vast majority of managers expected to operate at the speed of business, you may no longer feel that you have the luxury of annual or semiannual career dialogues.

And that's not a problem—it's actually an opportunity. Because you don't have to hold lengthy summits with employees, solving all of the career problems of the world in one big meeting to help others get results. In fact, in many cases less can be more.

“After a few years, I realized what the annual development process reminded me of—New Year's resolutions! It was energizing to set out the plan, and we paid attention to it for a while. But pretty soon, it was tucked away until the following year when we'd smile at our folly and rededicate ourselves to a new batch.”

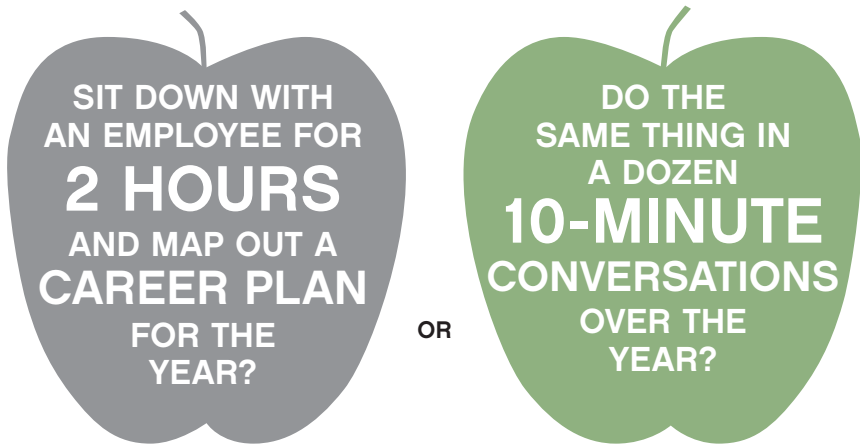
—Marketing director

When you reframe *career development* in terms of ongoing conversations—rather than procedural checkpoints or scheduled activities—suddenly you have more flexibility and the chance to develop careers organically, when and where authentic opportunities arise.

LESS IS MORE

An interaction doesn't require a minimum threshold to count as a conversation. You don't get more points for length. You get more points for stimulating thinking.

Would you rather . . .



Note: Do the math. It's the same 120 minutes just offered up in smaller, bite-size servings.

Increasingly, organizations and the time-starved managers within them are opting for shorter, more frequent conversations that can cover the same ground as their heftier cousins (maybe more) but in an iterative and ongoing fashion. The benefits are compelling:

- ▶ Shorter conversations fit better with the cadence of business today.
- ▶ Frequent, ongoing dialogue communicates a genuine commitment to the employee and development.
- ▶ Iterative conversations allow employees to layer awareness, insights, and action more naturally.
- ▶ The ongoing nature of the conversation keeps development alive in everyone's mind (as opposed to tucking it away for a formal meeting).
- ▶ These frequent exchanges sustain momentum, fuel progress, and act as an ongoing reminder of the organization's commitment to employee learning, growth, and progress.

Some call it *embedded*. Others *on-the-fly* or *in-the-moment*. We call it a contemporary solution to a perennial problem. Short, targeted, ongoing career conversations are efficient—for you and the employee—

because they happen within the workflow where genuine opportunities exist.

BECOME UNBALANCED

Think about the most interesting and engaging conversations you've experienced. Either you got to do most of the talking or the dialogue moved fluidly back and forth, allowing everyone to share airtime evenly. Now, forget all that.

A career conversation is completely unbalanced in favor of your employees. If you do your job well, they will be doing 90 percent of the talking. If you're talking more than the remaining 10 percent, you're likely taking on too much responsibility for employees' development and robbing them of ownership for their careers.

Striking this unbalance requires a particular skill on the part of the manager: asking quality questions.

“My first real manager had this way of asking these questions that wormed their way into my brain and ultimately demanded answers.”

—Supervisor, finance and accounting

If the work of career development happens within the context of conversation, the primary tool of the trade must be the question.

Thoughtfully conceived and well-timed questions make things happen. They

- ▶ Provoke reflection, constructive discomfort, insight, ideas, and action in others
- ▶ Keep the focus squarely on the employee
- ▶ Demonstrate that you respect and value the other person
- ▶ Reinforce the shift of ownership for development to the employee

We are so sold on the value of questions, that we've included one hundred throughout this book.

You **don't**
have to have
all the
answers.

But,
what's **not** negotiable
is that you
have the
questions.

??????????

CULTIVATING CURIOSITY

Questions are a powerful tool. Add the spirit of curiosity, and you've got an unbeatable combination.

But, let's face it—curiosity doesn't come quite as naturally or easily to us as adults as it did when we were kids.

Blame it on time scarcity or information overload or our search-engine culture that reinforces a laserlike focus on what we think we want to know.

Whatever is to blame, there's a powerful case for overcoming it, because curiosity is not just informative—it's also transformative.

People recognize and respond deeply to genuine curiosity on the part of their leaders. It leaves them feeling cared for, valued, validated, and like they matter—all of which fuels stronger relationships, retention, and results.

Take the quiz on the next page to evaluate your level of curiosity.

If you answered “no” to four or more of the questions, you have an opportunity to cultivate greater curiosity. But you're likely an over-achiever and realize that even one “no” offers a chance for improvement.

Curiosity might be the most under-the-radar and undervalued leadership competency in business today. Think about it: What could you accomplish if you practiced passionate listening—really listening with intention and a true sense of purpose to learn and understand? What possibilities could you cultivate if you honed your ability to wonder out loud with those around you? What innovations and breakthroughs might you spark if you could bring new eyes and genuine inquisitiveness to old relationships and problems?

Developing the ability to approach individuals, situations, and conversations with curiosity can affect your own energy and enthusiasm, relationships with others, and hard business results—not to mention the quality of your career conversations.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

You might be able to fake listening, but not curiosity. Test your own Curiosity Quotient (CQ).

- I am comfortable entering a conversation not knowing how it will turn out. YES NO
- I can suspend judgment and skepticism. YES NO
- I expect to be surprised when I talk with others. YES NO
- I can suspend my need to fix situations and solve problems. YES NO
- I am sincerely interested in what most people have to say. YES NO
- I believe that there's no shame in admitting I don't understand something. YES NO
- I ask questions without having a "right" answer in mind. YES NO
- I am energized by finding out what makes others tick. YES NO
- I am motivated to dig deeper when I sense hesitancy or want to learn more. YES NO
- I enjoy learning things about people that I didn't know before. YES NO
- I am comfortable following someone else's lead in a conversation. YES NO
- I believe that people are interesting and complex. YES NO

HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES

Four high-impact practices can help cultivate and bring greater curiosity to your interactions with others.

Lo^se c^ont^rol.

Curiosity is all about becoming comfortable with what's not known. Successful and curious managers know that this means consciously entering a conversation not knowing how it will turn out and asking questions you don't know the answers to. It means not guiding others toward the *right* answers you have in mind. It frequently means following someone else's conversational lead rather than your own. Curiosity means taking a leap of faith, letting go of the need to control, and trusting that all will unfold—perhaps even better than if you continue to force it.

***Jettison* judgment.**

Be honest. How many words does someone speak before you've decided who they are, what they're like, or what they're trying to communicate? There's an epidemic of judgment and skepticism in the workplace. Perhaps it's because of time pressures. Perhaps it's due to confidence that our instincts will guide us. The reason matters less than this: curiosity and judgment cannot coexist. The most successful and curious managers have developed the ability to suspend judgment. They engage fully without the need to put people or issues in tidy boxes. They appreciate the value of getting the whole story—especially when it comes to development.

GAG your “fix it” reflex.

You've risen to your management role because you're good at solving problems. Yet overused, this skill can at the least endanger (and in some cases completely extinguish) curiosity. It's all too common for a manager to volunteer a resolution or generate elements of a development plan—all with the best of intentions. But engaging the other person promotes greater growth and allows managers to learn more in the process.

WOO the cue.

Successful, curious managers are not passive “consumers” of information. They engage actively with others. They are on high alert for signals and cues that require exploration. An emotionally charged word. A facial expression. A pause or hesitance. A reaction. All are invitations to dig deeper, follow up, ask for examples, or just invite the other person to say more. These cues are like traffic signs, helping managers navigate the career conversation with curiosity and purpose.

Quality questions asked *without* curiosity will signal to employees that you’ve just come back from training.

Quality questions asked *with* the spirit of curiosity will facilitate conversations that will allow others to literally change their lives.

CLOSURE IS OVERRATED

Given this focus on asking questions, it bears repeating that you don’t have to have all the answers. Neither does the employee, for that matter. In fact, not having all the answers may actually drive more thought and energy.

According to Russian psychologist Bluma Zeigarnik (in “The Retention of Completed and Uncompleted Actions,” which appeared in *Psychological Research* in 1927), we remember better what’s incomplete. The problem is that this lack of closure generates an internal tension for many. The mind, uncomfortable with what has been left unfinished, continues to focus on the question or problem.

So what does this science have to do with helping your people grow? Many managers shy away from hard questions and conversations where they might not have all the answers. If you’re one of them, you don’t have to do that any longer. Quite the opposite. Go ahead and courageously ask the challenging questions and even end the conversation with a real tough or thought-provoking one that the employee can contemplate for a while.

Don't feel the pressure to wrap up every conversation with a bow.

Closure is overrated. Unfinished business . . . that's what will cause employees to continue to ponder and will ultimately spark action and feed progress.

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► **TRY THIS: OPEN-ENDED**

End your next meeting or conversation with a question. Explain that there's no time for a discussion, but that you've been thinking about it. The next time you are with that person or those people, ask if anyone remembers the question. You'll be surprised that not only do they remember the question, they'll also have quite a few answers for you.

HINDSIGHT, FORESIGHT, INSIGHT

So what are all these unbalanced, curious, unfinished conversations supposed to be about? More than you might expect. Too frequently we limit the scope of career conversations, thinking they're only about jobs, promotions, or stretch assignments—the actions employees can take to move forward. Important? Yes. But that's just a drop in the bucket of conversations you can have with employees.

Whether your conversations are more formal and lengthy or shorter and iterative, helping others pursue their career goals involves facilitating an exploration of three key areas: hindsight, foresight, and insight.



A Venn diagram consisting of two overlapping triangles. The left triangle is light gray and labeled 'HINDSIGHT'. The right triangle is light green and labeled 'FORESIGHT'. The overlapping area in the center is a darker shade of gray and labeled 'INSIGHT'.

HINDSIGHT

FORESIGHT

INSIGHT

Framing the Conversations

Hindsight. This is a look backward to develop a deep understanding of such things as where employees have been, what they love, and what they're good at. Self-perception is key; and it becomes even clearer when enhanced (and sometimes moderated) by feedback from others. This backward glance—on the part of the employee and those around them—is essential for moving forward.

Foresight. This involves a bigger-picture look at the broader environment and the business in order to determine what's changing and what those changes mean for the future. Since nobody wants to pursue a career direction for which no need exists, foresight is critical.

Insight. This is the sweet spot where hindsight (where you've been and what you want to be doing) converges with foresight (organizational needs and opportunities). It's where you jointly determine with the employee the full range of ways to move forward and the actions to take to achieve career objectives.

This is not an academic model cooked up in a social science lab. It's a framework (based on more than forty years of working with real people and their real challenges) that flexes to address the many types of career conversations available to managers. This framework operates and supports you on three different levels.

Micro — You can ask a question from any of the three areas to informally spark reflection and interest.

Macro — You can blend the three areas into one short conversation that can occur spontaneously in the workflow to help employees advance their career thinking.

Mega — You can apply this framework and the questions associated with hindsight, foresight, and insight to your organization's formal individual development planning (IDP) process for richer results.

The following chapters delve into hindsight, foresight, and insight and how you can use them to keep employees satisfied, engaged, and always growing.

What IF . . .

- ▶ **employees really owned their own careers?**
 - ▶ **your job was to facilitate conversations rich with insightful questions that would guide others toward greater awareness and action?**
 - ▶ **these conversations were shorter, more frequent, and occurred within the natural flow of the work?**
 - ▶ **you didn't pressure yourself to have all the answers?**
-

Careers are **developed**
one conversation at a time—
 ver time.

Talk

is the **most precious** and
result-driven commodity
managers have to share.

“Filled with great examples, questions, and real-world approaches that fit into the workflow, this book brings a much-needed simplicity and personal touch back to career development.”

—David Rodriguez, Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer,
Marriott International

“Employees crave authentic conversations about their careers. Too often, managers shy away or simply don’t make the time. Bev and Julie remind us that it can be as simple as asking good questions—and they show us how with tips, examples, and suggestions that build confidence and competence.”

—Louise Keefe, Global Senior Leader, Organization Effectiveness, Eaton

“Every manager will find this short book to be long on practical ways to make career development happen.”

—Jack Zenger, CEO, Zenger Folkman, and coauthor of the bestselling *The Extraordinary Leader* and *The Extraordinary Coach*



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