EMPLOYEE CAREER EXPLORATION WEEK

Influencing and Leading as an Individual Contributor

Participant questions from the live virtual session with responses from the presenters and panelists

Career Development

How can new graduates or early career employees find job opportunities when many roles ask for more experience or higher degrees?

Focus on preferred/most desired roles you are interested in. Identify what the needed skillsets are for those positions and decide if you already have experience with the various skills. For the skills/qualifications you already have, decide how you will highlight those in places such as LinkedIn, job applications/resumes/cover letters/interviews. For skills/qualifications you need more experience in, identify where you might acquire that experience. It may be through your current position, volunteering, attending training, further education. You could also try looking at similar type positions that are more entry level but lead to the position that asks for more experience. - Alexis Factor, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)

I would suggest seeking training opportunities as well as shadowing with your colleagues to gain skills to advance in your career. - Marquetta Stokes, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

Consider getting involved in a workgroup or team at your agency, an ERG or Community of Practice and take on roles that will offer the experience you need. - Betty Tapias-Heinrich (MDE)

How can individual contributors grow their careers when many pay increases come only with supervisor roles?

Decide what growth means to you. If growth is specific to compensation and you are at the top of your range and not interested in supervisory roles, look for opportunities that broaden your scope, such as lead roles on projects, serving as a subject matter expert (SME) on a topic, and/or mentoring other employees. you may need to explore positions that are in other classifications and potentially have a higher pay range. If you are at the top of the range for all potential types of positions and agencies you could work in, pay increases may not be an option and trying to find growth and satisfaction other ways is something to consider. - Alexis Factor, MPCA

I would suggest serving on Committees; helping to improve processes; trainings or overseeing projects. Taking a lateral position can also lead to advancement later on. - Marquetta Stokes, MDE

You may want to consider some of the ideas in the answers to the prior question. - Betty Tapias-Heinrich, MDE

What can you tell an employee who did everything required but wasn't able to secure a career change or move up the ladder?

Don't give up, there are potentially many reasons beyond your control why it didn't work out...this time! It could be someone bidders on a certain job posting, many very qualified applicants, challenging conditions in the industry such as a decline in available opportunities and/or budget constraints. Continue to reflect on what has gone well in your pursuits, as well as what may need adjusting. Seek feedback from others that know/interact with you professionally. - Alexis Factor, MPCA

Evaluate the skills you gained, relationships you built and never count yourself out. - Marquetta Stokes, MDE

It's important to think of it in terms of "yet." It hasn't happened "yet." Think about asking for a follow-up meeting with the hiring manager to ask what they saw as strengths and opportunities for growth. - Betty Tapias-Heinrich, MDE

Where can staff learn more about learning and development groups and other ways to grow skills?

- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)
- Communities of Practice and Workgroups
- Learning and Development Community of Practice - You can request to be added. There are opportunities to learn and practice with the help of the Steering Committee.
- LinkedIn Learning - If your agency offers LinkedIn Learning licenses, take advantage of that gift to learn.
- Upcoming Courses offered through Enterprise Talent Development and other agencies.

Who can help staff summarize their experience, update their resumes and show the value they bring?

See if your agency HR Consultant can help with that. You might want to ask a leader you trust to help you.

Did you take any classes or complete any certifications to become a leader? If so, what classes, certificates or programs did you take?

We all had different paths. I have a Master's degree in Educational Leadership and spent many years developing curriculum and teaching at the University of MN. I held workshops and classes for other colleges, universities and MDE. I also completed the Emerging Leaders Institute. - Betty Tapias-Heinrich, MDE

Building Influence

How can someone new to state service or new to a state agency build influence and learn how to work in a complex government system?

It's important to look for people that are in the fields you want to work in and make connections. Ask for informational interviews. Attend meetings. Check out ERGs and Communities of Practice where you can become involved and build your network.

How can we lead and influence as individual contributors when we may not agree with the decisions of our leaders or supervisors?

See where you can find common ground and work from there. You may find ways to lead outside your agency. The ERGs and Communities of practice have been mentioned a few times already and they are a good way to get involved and lead. Also, look for teams or workgroups at your agency.

Do you feel like others in your group are willing to follow your lead, or have you learned to discuss your contributions to get buy-in? Are others in your group willing to listen to you?

All these situations can happen at different times. The type of leadership or response depends on the need. It can also depend on the skill and experience of the leader.

What inspires you as a leader to do your job well to benefit the people you work with and the communities you serve?

The desire to do good work is part of who I am. Seeing a need and filling it or helping to fill it inspires me. A group of people that share the same vision also inspires me. A positive mindset for myself and others around me is also important. - Betty Tapias-Heinrich, MDE

How can experienced workers support newer staff and encourage them to shine and guide them without taking over?

It's important to be willing to let go and be willing to see things worked out in a different way than I thought it would or done in a different way than I would have done it, as long as the objectives are met. Offering to support the person is important. Many times I find it's important to ask questions instead of telling people what to do when they need guidance. It can be something like "Could you share more about that?", "Tell me more", or I'd like to hear more about that. "Have you considered any other options?" - Betty Tapias-Heinrich, MDE

How do you avoid getting taken advantage of when accepting extra tasks and responsibilities?

It's important to know your capacity and be able to graciously decline of you don't have the capacity. Maybe it's something that can be done later and you can say, "I'd be happy to do it if I can start on xyz date. Would that work?" Learn what energizes you and focus on those opportunities.

What should employees do when leaders turn down their requests for stretch work, extra duties or growth opportunities?

Don't give up. It could be that the timing isn't right. Ask, "when would be a good time to talk about this opportunity again?" or "Is there something I can do to better prepare for this kind of opportunity?"

Solving Problems and Handling Challenges

How do you solve a new challenge when there is no guide, backup plan or past example to follow?

There is always the first time and it's possible you may need to create it. This is a great time to do so because you can document the steps as you go. It may require extra time to figure things out.

How do you handle the awkward moment when you're learning something new and have to ask questions that show you're still figuring it out?

Don't be afraid to share that you don't know or are new to something. Ask for recommendations of who to talk to about it. Ask if you can have additional time. Show interest in learning more.

How can new employees ask for more training or guidance when their leaders already feel stretched thin?

Consider the timing of your request. Are there changes happening that will subside at a later date? Ask when would be a good time to check back about it.

How should employees handle setbacks, failures or disappointing moments while still trying to lead and build influence?

Those experiences can all be difficult at first. Work to see them as opportunities to learn.