



# *Growth* INDUSTRY

**7 smart ways to train & develop your staff.**

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The word ‘moxie’ means ‘spirited energy, facing difficulty with courage, force of character and know-how’—and these are all qualities we aspire to in our culture.

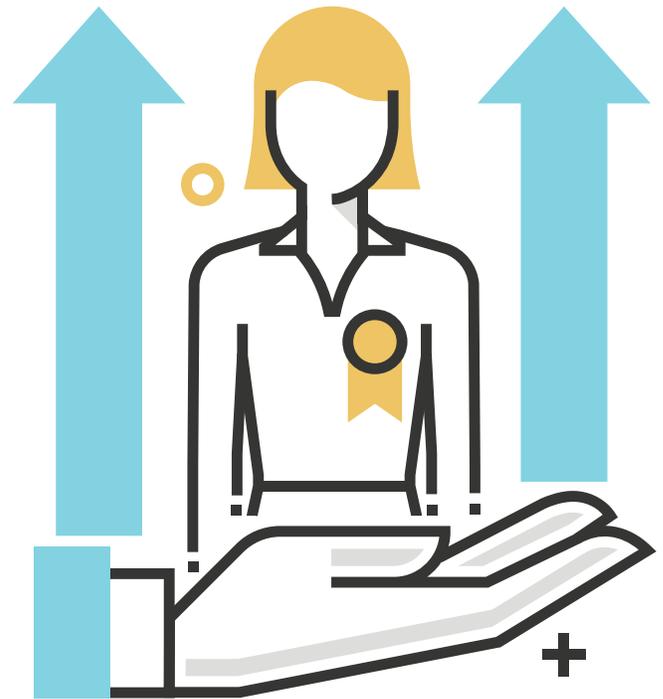
—SANDY BALL, chief human resources officer, Global Bankers



**If you're like most businesses, you already know that good pay and benefits alone aren't enough to motivate and retain the A-players on your staff. In today's low-unemployment environment, your company is likely vying with other companies for the same small pool of employee prospects, so you've got to forge a competitive edge.**

If you want to be able to hire and retain the very best employees, you must devote thought, strategy, time, and resources to coaching and developing your staff. Not only does this make employees more likely to stay at your company, it also prepares them to take more advanced managerial or leadership roles, saving you considerable expense compared to recruiting and developing leaders from outside your company.

But what is the best way to grow and develop entry-level staffers into future managers, and new managers into experienced and effective leaders? We rounded up experts at Global Bankers and CBLife, who share the following tips.



## 1 Ownership is everything.

When CBLife Director of Training and Product Nick Argol sits down with an employee to review their progress, he goes out of his way to let them take the reins. “My number one criterion for measuring growth in an employee is: What’s their level of ownership?” says Argol. “In the review process, they tell us where they want to go, and from there we develop the plan to help them move into greater responsibility.”

**ALL IN:** Before an employee takes ownership of their future career path, however, they must show that they’ve taken ownership of their current position. A coach must look for subtle signs that the employee is taking the reins, from something as small as “staying an extra five minutes to return an email” to something as big as “jumping into a project that’s way over your head only because there’s nobody around to do it and you know it has to get done,” Argol notes.

Either way, the first step to employee growth is that they have a personal stake. “I don’t believe a person has the ability to change anyone else,” cautions Argol. “You can show them ways for them to change themselves, and if they want to latch onto that, it’s up to them to do so.”

## 2 Provide learning opportunities.

Many employees crave learning and certification opportunities just as much—or even more—than they crave salary, benefits, or titles. This trait is especially true for many Millennials. Some forms of compensation are for the here and now only, but when you invest in an employee’s expertise, you clearly communicate to them that you are investing in their future.

“‘Never Stop Learning’ is one of our key values at Global Bankers,” says Sandy Ball, Global Bankers’ chief human resources officer. “We provide a variety of learning and growth venues for our employees—from traditional training, to stretch projects, to taking risks and making mistakes and learning from them, we encourage and support them all.”



**MIND & BODY:** “Employees bring their whole selves to work each day and our training reflects that,” Ball adds. The company offers frequent lunch-and-learn sessions on a variety of topics, both work-related and life-related.

Life-related workshops have focused on financial planning, chair yoga, healthy eating, and ergonomics. “We are excited to expand those offerings when our new fitness and yoga facility is completed at the end of this year,” she says.

The company also offers work development opportunities that are industry-specific. “We want our employees to have access to resources that enhance their business acumen,” Ball says. “Not only do we offer our employees the

opportunity to take these classes at no cost, we reward them upon successful *completion*.”

**For example,** the most advanced certification option for employees is a course series offered in partnership with the Life Office Management Association (LOMA). Participants who pass a series of 10 examinations earn the Fellow Life Management Institute (FLMI) designation.

The exams cover insurance, accounting, marketing, information systems, finance, law, management and technology. Employees who complete the designations receive financial incentives. In addition, they become eligible to go on the annual LOMA conference trip to continue their learning and networking opportunities.

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### 3 Develop emotional intelligence.

Emerging leaders need industry knowledge and skill, but leadership roles also require emotional intelligence that they may not have developed yet as entry-level employees. You can't create emotional intelligence from scratch, but you can provide learning and coaching opportunities that help employees develop and harness the emotional intelligence they do have.

"We have customized a six-month leadership program we call 'Managing with Moxie,'" Ball says. "The word 'moxie' means 'spirited energy, facing difficulty with courage, force of character and know-how'—and these are all qualities we aspire to in our culture," she explains. "We want to equip our leaders with the tools and competencies they need to be authentic leaders and inspire others," she adds.

### 4 Ditch tired, old performance review formats.

Almost every company conducts annual performance reviews, which usually involve looking *back* at the previous year and setting goals for the year to come. Such retrospective look-backs often fail to forge career paths or paint a vision for the future, so they become just one more bureaucratic task for the manager and employee to complete.

**RETOOL:** If handled differently, with an emphasis on lessons learned from the past and plans for the future, a performance review can be an engine for the employee's growth, not just a task to be completed.

A review becomes an opportunity for growth and development only if it includes a frank discussion of the employee's career goals, rather than dwelling solely on last year's performance and next year's goals.

Nick Argol begins the career path part of the review with a series of simple questions: "What is your career path short-term and long-term, where are you now, and where do you want to go from here?" By answering these questions (and then taking ownership of the ensuing career path), the employee and coach can develop a growth plan going forward.

#### TIP:

Keep salary negotiations separate from performance reviews, Ball suggests. Why? Because salary discussions almost always overshadow development discussions. "What I've seen in the past," Ball explains, "is conversations that go: 'blah, blah, blah, what's my raise?'" Unyoking the two discussions allows both coaches and employees to focus one conversation solely on the future career path.



#### DO THIS:

Don't save up suggestions for improvement and other development conversations for once a year only, Ball adds. Feedback is a gift," she says. "I encourage people to assemble their own personal 'board of directors'—people they trust to give them candid feedback in meetings, on presentations, on their leadership skills, and on other career development topics. This helps to accelerate growth."

## 5 Grow the employee by broadening the job description.



If we're growing, we're always going to be out of our comfort zone."

—JOHN C. MAXWELL

Ball says she is skeptical of purely vertical work cultures where moving up in rank and title are the only ways the company measures career growth. "Growing horizontally by broadening your skillset can be just as powerful to one's growth and your career," she explains.

Having a broad skill set makes an employee more well-rounded and more prepared to seize career development opportunities as they come up. "Because we cultivate a start-up culture, we are able to offer our employees stretch assignments

in different parts of the business, assignments that are outside of their current skillsets," Ball explains.

These stretch assignments give employees opportunities to build new skills or create something brand new for the company. Stretch assignments can be scary, and outside of a perceived comfort zone, but that is when the growth and learning really happen.

"I have an HR coordinator on my team who is fresh out of college," Ball relates. "She thought about beginning her career in one of the big companies,

but she knew a job there would be much narrower in scope than what's available to her here." As a result, she opted for a start-up experience.

"In the one year she has been here, she has had the opportunity to touch, own, or lead a variety of projects and initiatives—more than she ever thought possible at her age and experience level," Ball reports. "The opportunity for her to develop and excel through a series of stretch assignments and seeing her confidence in her ability to master ambiguity and take on challenges has been fun to watch."

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## 6 Tailor your coaching for maximum engagement.

Even though employees can benefit from expanding the breadth of their responsibilities, development is not a one-size-fits-all technique. It's vital for managers to recognize that each person responds differently to different tactics. "Everybody wants to be recognized," notes Argol, "but everybody is different. You want to take the time to get to know what it is that gets them going."

Employees may also learn differently depending on their aptitude and role. "Each one's going to take a different type of approach to nurturing," Argol says. "Why take a swimmer and try to make them a shot-putter? It's not going to fit." Spend the time to get to know each employee's learning style, and then tailor their growth opportunities accordingly.



## 7 Teach developing staff to grow themselves by questioning everything.

When it comes to self-directed growth, Nick Argol has three pieces of advice for the employees he coaches:

1. "Ask questions."
2. "Ask questions."
3. "Continue to ask questions."

"You have to challenge the status quo by first understanding why it is the way that it is," Argol tells his team, "And the only way you're going to be able to do that is to ask. Ask why, and if that answer isn't clear, ask why again. Until somebody asks the question, we may continue to do the same thing wrong over and over and over again."

An ownership mentality spurs the kinds of questions that propel growth, Ball adds. "We want employees to really feel 'This is MY company. What I do every day impacts our success.'"

"If you have that mindset, you begin to challenge yourself and others to ask 'Is there a better, faster, more efficient way to do business?' 'How can I fix that broken process?' 'How can I help that team that's under water right now?'"



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