Ten Ways to Improve Your Internal Mobility Programs

Attracting talent is challenging, and once you have brought an ideal candidate on board, the last thing you want is for them to leave.

Your existing workforce is the lifeblood of your organization, and can be one of the best sources of talent to tap when you have new openings. Retaining and growing your talent is especially critical as masses of baby boomers begin to retire, driving large gaps in leadership throughout many organizations. But despite this, the new reality is that employees aren’t staying in one position for the long term. They are aspiring to continuously build their careers, constantly thinking about how they can make an impact, and quickly looking elsewhere if those opportunities are not immediately apparent. For this reason, enabling internal mobility is more critical than ever.

Fifty percent of individuals who recently changed jobs said they wouldn’t have left their previous employer if there was a role that better fit their skills.

— LinkedIn study

A good internal mobility program can help retain your employees by keeping them productive and engaged, and facilitating their ability to take on new projects, roles and challenges throughout your company. Critically, internal mobility is not something driven entirely by the talent acquisition team, and requires the active involvement of recruiters, managers and employees. Below are 10 key tips to driving an effective internal mobility program, enabling you to encourage a culture of internal opportunity and continuously leverage your employee base as a key sourcing channel.

Tip #1 Engage and Empower Your Managers

Employees interact with and are influenced by their direct managers more than any other organizational leader. As such, managers need to be equipped with the skill set to engage and develop their teams. Ensure that manager training and development programs are in place to facilitate this — which might include formal training, self-paced learning, informal mentoring programs or ideally a combination of these. It’s also important to identify and discourage managers who are talent hoarders.
Tip #2  Perfect the Art of Listening
In most cases, employees know what their career goals are, but sometimes, they are unable to articulate them. In an organization focused on internal mobility, mentors and managers have a responsibility to ask questions, listen and re-communicate an individual employee’s career goals to ensure these goals are properly understood. This may not come naturally, so be sure you provide access to training to help managers with this critical skill.

Tip #3  Help Managers Help Their Teams Move Toward Their Goals
Encourage managers to ask employees about what they want from their careers, and then work with their employees to identify key projects and goals that will help each employee build their career over the short term and advance toward longer-term aspirations. Employees who feel they are progressing will be more engaged, stay with the company longer, and will be the leaders of the future.

Tip #4  Once Is Not Enough — Encourage Continuous Discussion and Coaching
Even if aspirations are understood and plans are in place, continuous discussion is key to keeping employees engaged and ensuring progress toward goals. Managers should already be meeting with their teams regularly, but ask them to identify specific and regular times to discuss career goals. If teams are not in a single location (as is often the case), suggest that managers go beyond phone conversations and leverage a video conferencing tool to make interactions more personal and enable response to body language — which is often an overlooked component, but critical to truly understanding whether an employee is engaged.
Tip #5  Enable Employees to Explore, Plan and Develop on Their Own
Employees should be accountable for their own career growth. Encourage them to schedule time to focus on their own personal development, goals and interests. Critically, ensure that employees have access to information on what opportunities are available, and what skills are required to get there. This could be in the form of an internal job board, or preferably a career planning system that enables employees to explore jobs in (or outside of) their career ladder, view skill gaps, identify mentors, and put a plan into place to get to the next step in their career.

Tip #6  Post Your Internal Mobility Process and Policies
Ensure that employees know not only about internal opportunities, but how to apply for them and when they are eligible. Put these in a prominent spot on the intranet or even in the halls so that folks will see them whether they are looking to change jobs or not. Consider leveraging services from third-party job boards (like LinkedIn) that can showcase internal opportunities to your employees as they begin to look at external opportunities on those channels.

Tip #7  Source From Your Internal Employee Base First
It’s easy to assume that the best talent works somewhere else, so be sure that your recruiting team is tapping your internal employee base before looking externally when new opportunities arise. Commit to posting jobs internally for a period of time before they are posted externally, giving employees the first opportunity to apply.

Tip #8  Proactively Identify Internal Talent
Your recruiting system should have the ability to serve up internal candidates that have the right skills for your job openings. If it doesn’t — look for a new one! Meanwhile, you can leverage tools like LinkedIn to monitor the skills and interests of employees, and internal social networks for employees receiving positive peer recognition. If career planning systems are in place, view what positions are targeted as part of employees’ plans and evaluate their readiness for openings.
Tip #9 Continuously Evaluate Your Compensation and Benefits
Forbes Magazine recently reported that employees who remain at a company for two years will earn 50% less than their job hopping counterparts. Compensation as well as flexible schedules, telecommuting, healthcare and other benefits are important considerations for employees and senior leaders, especially in this job seeker–driven economy. If possible, leverage technology (often within a talent management system) that can proactively flag employees that are at risk of departure due to factors such as compensation, and recommend what it would take to retain them (such as a compensation increase to stay competitive).

Tip #10 Monitor Trends to Focus on What Matters
Monitor key metrics across your employees to understand how talent is moving up, across or out of your organization. Understanding, for example, what positions, departments and locations are showing high attrition may indicate a lack of opportunities for internal mobility in those areas, awareness of those opportunities or other factors that could be addressed. In addition, understanding where employees are typically moving within your organization (e.g. from engineering into product management) can provide helpful insights for HR and managers when discussing career path options. As you implement your internal mobility program, identify what metrics and data sources are available to you, to not only track current trends, but the success of your program as it progresses.

References
