

Employee Guide: Managing a Difficult Career Conversation



CEB Corporate Leadership Council™

Instructions: Use this guide to structure a career conversation with your manager if you are disappointed with your career achievements to date because you feel you have missed out on a promotion, a colleague has been promoted and you feel unfairly overlooked, or you have missed out on a raise.

Discuss Your Career Aspirations

- Explain your career aspirations and why you are dissatisfied with the progress you have made.
- Walk your manager through the type of work you enjoy and don't enjoy doing. Talk to him or her about the types of projects you might want to be involved in more frequently.
- Communicate aspects of your career that you value the most (e.g., prestige, compensation, autonomy, project management).
- Communicate your openness to moving to different locations, business units, or functions and what drives your mobility.

Discuss Your Strengths and Development Areas Relevant to Your Career Aspirations

- Discuss your strengths and how they support your career aspirations.
- Understand the skills and capabilities that are necessary for your career aspirations and which experiences will help you progress.
- Discuss some of the unique skills and capabilities that differentiate you from your peers.



Conversation Tips

- Be honest about your aspirations and your understanding of different careers or industries that match your interests. Ask questions and welcome feedback.
- Do not use the career conversation to discuss performance issues or why you didn't get a promotion.
- Discuss your assessment of your strengths and interests (e.g., based on results of any personality tests you may have taken) and how that affects your thoughts about the jobs you might like.

Understand the Organization's Future Business Needs and How You Can Grow Within the Organization

- Ask about the time frame for your advancement, and discuss how this matches your expectations.
- Understand whether your skills match the organization's future skills and capability needs. Check to see which opportunities you could pursue that will equip you with the skills and experience necessary for future needs.
- Understand the skills and experiences your peers have acquired that have enabled them to move across roles in the organization and whether you currently lack any skills.
- Ask your manager about his or her opinion on external opportunities for career growth based on what other people in your position have done.

Identify Action Steps

- Understand how your manager or other leaders can support you in achieving your career aspirations.
- List the skills and experiences you should focus on to achieve your career aspirations.
- Understand how you can improve your visibility within the organization. Ask your manager to help you with exploring other parts of the organization through networking or one-off projects.
- Based on your articulation of your strengths and aspirations, build out your personal brand.



Use the Building Your Personal Brand guide to identify and communicate the value you bring to the organization, the work, and the customers.