

Career Progression Toolkit:

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Career Progression Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Career Conversations

Introduction

Many professionals believe career progression happens naturally.

They assume that if they work hard, remain loyal, and consistently perform, opportunities will eventually appear.

Unfortunately, that is not how most careers evolve.

Career progression is rarely a reward for effort alone. It is the result of sustained value creation, visible contribution, intentional development, and effective communication.

The professionals who advance most successfully are not necessarily the smartest or hardest working. They are the individuals who understand how to:

- Demonstrate their value
- Communicate their ambitions
- Build key career assets
- Develop future-ready capabilities
- Position themselves for opportunity

This toolkit is designed to help you take ownership of your career and prepare for meaningful conversations about your future.

The New Reality of Career Progression

Many people still operate from an outdated belief: "If I do good work, someone will notice."

The reality is:

- Managers are busy.
- Organisations change rapidly.
- Restructuring happens frequently.
- Opportunities are often given to those who are visible and prepared.

A successful career is no longer built solely on technical competence.

It is built on your ability to demonstrate:

1. **Performance** What you deliver.
2. **Potential** What you are capable of doing next.
3. **Positioning** How effectively others understand the contribution you make.
4. **Professionalism** How you engage with stakeholders, leaders and opportunities.

Career progression occurs at the intersection of all four.



Why Career Conversations Matter

One of the most important career skills is the ability to have a proactive development conversation with your manager.

Unfortunately, many employees only initiate career discussions when they are frustrated, disengaged or ready to resign.

By that point, opportunities have often already been missed.

Instead, career conversations should become a regular part of your professional development.

Their purpose is to:

- Increase visibility
- Clarify career goals
- Identify development opportunities
- Build leadership readiness
- Create future pathways

A great career conversation is not about demanding promotion.

It is about building readiness for greater responsibility.

The V.A.G.A. Framework

V = VALUE What have I contributed?

Before discussing progression, establish your contribution.

Many professionals underestimate their impact because they focus only on activities rather than outcomes.

Instead of saying: "I've been working very hard." Say: "I improved client response times by 20%."

Focus on evidence.

Consider:

- What have I achieved?
- What problems have I solved?
- What improvements have I made?
- What stakeholders have I influenced?
- What feedback have I received?
- What projects have I successfully delivered?



Examples of Value

- Increased efficiency
- Improved customer experience
- Reduced costs
- Increased revenue
- Improved team performance
- Introduced new systems
- Mentored colleagues
- Led initiatives

Remember: Effort is invisible. Outcomes are visible.

A = AMBITION Where do I want to go?

Many professionals know they want change but haven't defined what that change looks like.

Ambition does not mean becoming the CEO.

Ambition means being intentional about your future direction.

Ask yourself:

- ✓ **What work excites me?**
- ✓ **What responsibilities do I enjoy most?**
- ✓ **What environments help me thrive?**
- ✓ **What impact do I want to have?**
- ✓ **What role would I like to move toward?**

The clearer your destination, the easier it becomes to identify development opportunities.

Examples

- Team Leader
- Project Manager
- Senior Specialist
- Functional Expert
- Business Partner
- Department Head
- Entrepreneur

You do not need a perfect answer. You simply need a direction.

G = GAP What still needs development?

One of the strongest indicators of leadership potential is self-awareness.

Future leaders understand both their strengths and their development areas.

Rather than defending weaknesses, they address them.

Ask yourself:



- ✓ **What skills are required for the next level?**
- ✓ **What experience am I missing?**
- ✓ **What capabilities still need strengthening?**
- ✓ **What feedback do I consistently receive?**

There are typically four development gaps.

Technical Gaps Knowledge or expertise required for future roles.

Examples:

- Financial planning
- Data analytics
- Project management
- Industry expertise

Leadership Gaps Capabilities required to lead people and influence outcomes.

Examples:

- Delegation
- Coaching
- Stakeholder management
- Executive communication

Strategic Gaps Capabilities that allow you to contribute beyond your current role.

Examples:

- Commercial awareness
- Business acumen
- Systems thinking
- Organisational awareness

Exposure Gaps Experiences needed to demonstrate readiness.

Examples:

- Leadership projects
- Presentations
- Managing stakeholders
- Cross-functional initiatives

A = ACTION What opportunities can I take on now?

Too many professionals end career discussions with vague intentions. Strong career conversations end with action.

Ask yourself:

- ✓ **What opportunity would help me grow?**



Examples include:

- Leading a project
- Shadowing a senior leader
- Managing a client relationship
- Mentoring junior colleagues
- Participating in strategic initiatives
- Attending development programmes

The goal is to move from intention to evidence. Each opportunity creates a stronger case for future progression.

The Career Assets That Accelerate Progression

Based on years of career development and executive coaching work, progression usually depends on more than qualifications and experience.

The following assets consistently differentiate professionals who advance.

Visibility People need to know the value you create.

Ask:

- Who knows about my achievements?
- Who has seen my best work?
- Am I communicating my impact?

Visibility is not self-promotion.

It is helping others understand your contribution.

Credibility Your reputation is built over time.

Credibility comes from:

- Consistency
- Reliability
- Quality results
- Professional behaviour

Trust is a career accelerator.

Influence Career progression increasingly depends on your ability to influence others.

Ask:

- Can I build stakeholder relationships?
- Can I gain buy-in?
- Can I align people around ideas?



Influence becomes essential as responsibility increases.

Adaptability Future-focused professionals embrace change.

They demonstrate:

- Learning agility
- Resilience
- Flexibility
- Growth mindset

Employers invest in people who can evolve with changing requirements.

Leadership Readiness You do not need a leadership title to demonstrate leadership.

Leadership is shown through:

- Initiative
- Accountability
- Problem-solving
- Ownership
- Collaboration

Often, leadership responsibility follows demonstrated leadership behaviour.

Preparing for Your Career Conversation

1. Gather Evidence

- Results achieved
- Projects completed
- Positive feedback
- Contributions beyond role requirements

2. Clarify Your Goal

- **Answer:** What do I want to move toward?

3. Identify Development Areas

- **Answer:** What still needs strengthening?

4. Determine Your Request

- Additional responsibility
- Project leadership
- Mentorship
- Training opportunity
- Stretch assignment



5. Schedule the Conversation

Avoid raising career discussions casually.

Request dedicated time. Example: "I'd appreciate an opportunity to discuss my longer-term development and growth within the organisation."

Sample Career Conversation Script

Thank you for making time for me today.

I've really enjoyed contributing to the team and I'd like to discuss my future development and career growth.

Over the past year I've taken responsibility for [VALUE], and I've achieved [RESULTS].

Looking ahead, I'm interested in moving towards [AMBITION].

I recognise there are still areas I need to develop, particularly [GAP].

I would value your perspective on what capabilities would be most important for me to strengthen.

I'd also appreciate discussing opportunities, projects or responsibilities that would allow me to demonstrate readiness for the next level.

Together, I'd like to create a development plan and define what successful progression would look like over the next 6-12 months.

Reflection Worksheet

My Value

What evidence demonstrates my contribution?

My Ambition

What role, responsibility or opportunity am I working towards?

My Development Gap

What skills, experiences or capabilities do I need to strengthen?



My Action Request

What specific opportunity will I discuss with my manager?

Career progression is not something that happens to you. It is something you actively participate in creating.

The professionals who progress most consistently learn how to communicate four things clearly:

- **The value they create.**
- **The direction they want to grow.**
- **The capabilities they still need to develop.**
- **The opportunities they need to demonstrate readiness.**

Remember: Don't ask, "When will I be promoted?"

Instead ask: "How can I create more value, build greater capability, and demonstrate readiness for the next level?"

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