

Creating a Skills-Based Pathway for Frontline Employees

A practical, step-by-step process for building career pathways that replace degree requirements and tenure clocks with what actually matters: the skills people need and how you can help them build those skills.

STEP 1 IDENTIFY HIGH-IMPACT ROLES

Which frontline roles have the largest concentration of employees? (Your "source" roles — where the pathway begins.)

e.g., Retail associate, call center agent, patient access rep, warehouse technician...

Which roles are hardest to fill, highest in demand, or critical to your organization's future strategy? (Your "destination" roles.)

e.g., Team lead, IT support specialist, operations supervisor, data analyst...

What "gateway" positions exist between source and destination — roles that build transferable durable skills without requiring a degree?

e.g., QA coordinator, floor trainer, frontline operations manager, shift supervisor...

STEP 2 BREAK DOWN THE DESTINATION ROLE

For your top destination roles, decompose what someone actually needs to succeed. Use the three skill types: Foundational (literacy, digital, language), Durable (communication, problem-solving, leadership), and Perishable (role-specific processes and systems).

What does this role DO? <i>Key tasks & responsibilities</i>	What must they KNOW? <i>Systems, products, processes, context</i>	What skills make them EFFECTIVE? <i>Foundational / Durable / Perishable</i>

STEP 3 MAP FRONTLINE CAPABILITIES TO ROLE REQUIREMENTS

Which skills do your frontline employees already bring that transfer to destination roles? (Think: adaptability, customer interaction, time management, data entry, compliance awareness)

Existing transferable strengths...

Where are the most critical skill gaps — and are any foundational (literacy, digital fluency, language) that must be addressed before anything else?

Critical gaps to close | Any foundational needs to address first?

STEP 4 DESIGN TARGETED DEVELOPMENT PLANS

What are the 3-5 specific learning experiences that close critical gaps? Focus on experiences — not a content library: on-the-job projects, stretch assignments, credentialed programs, mentoring, cross-training.

1.

2.

3.

How will you ensure learning happens during work — not exclusively on employees' personal time? Who owns accountability for each intervention? (L&D, manager, HR partner, employee)

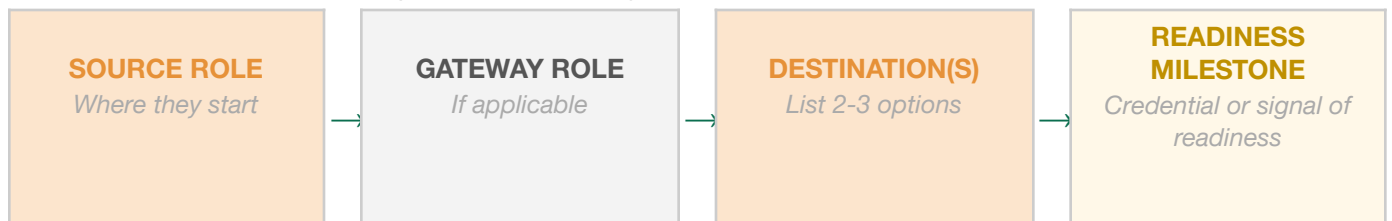
In-work learning plan | Owner(s) by intervention...

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STEP 5 SIMPLIFY THE PATHWAY — MAP THE JOURNEY

Sketch the pathway below. At each step, offer 2-3 potential roles — not a single rigid ladder. Employees should be able to envision multiple directions, not just one.



How will employees discover and trust this pathway? Where will you communicate it, and whose success stories will you use to make it feel real and achievable?

Communication channels

Stories to tell

Who's already made this journey?

STEP 6 EQUIP MANAGERS TO ENABLE – NOT BLOCK – MOBILITY

Can your managers clearly explain available career pathways to their frontline teams – and do they see developing and advancing their people as part of their job?

Current state

What needs to change?

Are managers currently incentivized to hold onto top performers at the expense of mobility? What would need to change to reward managers who develop and advance their people?

Current incentive structure

Proposed change...

Before You Launch: Key Decisions

- Which 1-2 pathways will you prioritize first – and why are they the right bet for your business right now?
- Who is the internal owner/champion accountable for building and sustaining this over time?
- How will you measure success? (Internal promotions, retention, time-to-fill, program completion rates)
- What systemic friction must be removed? (Degree requirements, relocation barriers, manager approval bottlenecks, ATS access for frontline employees)