

Career Compass helps staff chart career paths

Canadian Wheat Board embraces program

by Martin Cash

Winnipeg Free Press, March 19, 2010

Photographer: Wayne Glowacki

CANDACE Gauthier had a fine job at the Canadian Wheat Board working in treasury services, but after 10 years, the 32-year-old with an MBA from the Asper School of Business wanted a change.

“I had gotten to a stage in life,” she said. “I had my MBA, I had children, but I really didn’t know what opportunities there were for me.”

She landed a new position at the CWB and then she had the opportunity to participate in a career-management program the corporation deployed called Career Compass.

“It really was a huge life experience for me,” she said. “I used to think ‘Where will my career take me?’ Now I think ‘Where am I going to take my career?’”

Being able to keep young, talented, skilled workers engaged in their work and furthering their career with their current employer is something more and more companies are realizing is not such a straightforward undertaking.

Diane Wiesenthal, a CWB executive whose title, fittingly, is vice-president people and organizational services, said the corporation has switched its human resource management model.



Canadian Wheat Board’s Candace Gauthier said Career Compass’s program gave her a new perspective on her career.

“We now approach it as talent management,” she said. “The idea is to build jobs around the skills and strengths of the individuals. That’s how you get people to be passionate about the work they are doing.”

The CWB retained KWA Partners, a division of People First HR Services in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, to run the Career Compass program that’s designed to encourage employees to do exactly what Gauthier did -- take personal responsibility to map their own career.

Dave Gallant, another CWB employee who’s been with the organization for 20 years, went through Career Compass and said it has empowered and energized his career.

As a chartered accountant, Gallant said he took positions that were offered to him throughout his career.

“My career was a series of fortunate events and good luck. I really didn’t manage the course myself,” he said. “Now I have the tools to do that.”

Those tools include a better understanding of his own skills and attributes and also a better understanding of the opportunities that exist at the CWB.

Brita Chell, chief financial officer of the CWB, said the 450-person global grain marketing organization must depend on its people to an extent that may be greater than other enterprises.

“We do not have tangible, hard assets,” she said. “Our employees are our intellectual capital. We have to invest in them and try to link our strategic plan with their career development as well as our budget process.”

Chell said she realizes younger professionals might want to seek new challenges at a greater pace than has been the case in workplaces of the past.

“We need to be able to retain those innovative Generation X and Y people with real career opportunities,” she said.

For all sorts of reasons, managing that process requires a great deal of personal input from the employee as well as their managers.

Many people have a hard time articulating in their own mind just what their careers goals are or what sort of position or department in an organization they would be most productive in.

On top of that, it can be a daunting proposition to have that sort of probing personal development conversation with one’s manager.

“That’s why it’s best to have those kinds of conversations with someone from outside the organization,” said Eileen Kirton, regional vice-president of KWA Partners.

A key element of the six-step Career Compass program is two hour-long, one-on-one sessions with a career consultant.

But the program also includes extensive briefings with managers so that in the future there are better and more comfortable lines of communication from top down and across departments.

The Six Steps

The Career Compass six-step program is designed to encourage employees to map out and grow their careers within the organization they are already in.

Self-assessment – identify skills, interests, personality and work preferences.

Reality testing – obtain feedback to validate strengths and weaknesses.

Targeting – identify career opportunities within the organization.

Researching – investigate options using a variety of resources.

Action planning – set personalized objectives/actions to achieve career goals.

Sustaining the plan – overcome roadblocks to reach career goals.