

Career VIPs

5 People Who Can Fast Track Your Career Growth



Remember what school was like?

Whether you liked school or not, it at least provided a logical progression to the next step: A clear path and direct feedback to tell you if you were on the right track.

But now that you're in the workforce, the guide rails are gone.

Without that structure and guidance, how can you ensure your career progresses the way you'd like?

Whether you're a career beginner looking to find your place in the world, a mid-career professional considering a career change or anyone thinking about their next move, there are people in your life who can help fast track your career growth.

Ready to meet them?



Person #1: Nearest and Dearest - Your Boss

Your immediate supervisor probably knows you better than anyone – on the job at least. They see you in a professional environment daily and know how you work each day. Your boss can even observe what you may not have seen in yourself – both positive and negative.

- Are you focused and determined?
- Do you work well with others?
- Have you displayed leadership skills?

Take advantage of this resource.

If you are considering your next step on the career ladder, or just want to know where you stand, make time to talk to your supervisor.

Have a productive career-growth conversation:

- Set up a time that is convenient for both of you.
- Prepare for the meeting with success stories and areas you'd like to work on.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions about your performance and potential.
- Listen to hear – don't get defensive.
- Request clarification if you need to and specific action to take to improve.

Don't be afraid to talk to your boss.

Let them know you are committed to your job and the company. Ask how you can improve your skills and performance, and make a positive impact on your department and the organization.



How to Make a Great Impression on Your Boss

Your manager will be eager to help you in your career if they see you take your job seriously. They also look for factors such as dedication to excellence, commitment to company goals, and leadership skills.

Be a team player. Don't always focus on "What's in it for me." Look for opportunities to contribute to the success of the team and the organization.

Be low maintenance. Managers sometimes become micromanagers because they have been burned by employees whom they couldn't count on to stay on task.

Ask for help when you need it. Don't be afraid to ask questions or look for confirmation if you are uncertain how to approach a problem. It's usually easier to prevent an issue than correct one, so bring your manager in early in the process.

Share your career goals. Your manager will not know what you want out of your career unless you tell them. Be open about your short- and long-term goals.

Ask what has made them successful. Your supervisor is a level up from you. Chances are they've been where you are now. Why not tread the path they've already worn for you? They can give you resources and best practices that can keep you on target.



Person #2: One Step Up - the Boss's Boss

When you're ready to take a more strategic look at your career, your boss's boss can be your best resource. They often have a more "big picture" viewpoint than you or your boss will. Depending on the structure of your company, it's not always easy to get time to speak with them, but when you do get the opportunity, don't squander it.

Do your homework. Keep up with the company and the industry. Read websites, press releases, trade magazines. It will help your career and conversation.

Talk about company goals or plans. Show that you are invested in the company by talking about initiatives you're all working toward.

Don't show up your boss. The goal of talking to your supervisor's boss is not to jump the chain of command or otherwise make an end-run around your manager. You'll make yourself look good by making your boss look good.

Don't miss opportunities to socialize. Go to company happy hours, barbeques, whatever the other events are available. Sure, you could be doing something else – especially after hours – but it's a great way to find and strengthen common bonds in a relaxed environment.

Make a human connection. If you want to get promoted or otherwise recognized, people must know who you are. Get to know people in management. What are their interests? What's important to them? How did they reach this level of career success?



Person #3: Your Secret Weapon - a Mentor

While your boss and your boss's boss can be great resources, a mentor can offer a perspective that they often can't. Great bosses are invested in your career development, but self-interested ones may want to keep you where you are rather than helping you progress.

Acting as a neutral third party, mentors can:

Provide the voice of experience. They can act as a sounding board, help you make decisions and share ideas on how you can advance your career. Their first-hand experience can offer insight into the unwritten rules of the workplace.

Consult on your career plan. If you have goals in mind, your mentor can help you figure out the steps required to reach them. If you're unclear as to what you'd like to do for the rest of your professional life, your mentor can point out strengths you may be unaware of and teach you how to leverage them. They can also give you advice on overcoming your weaknesses.

Be part of your network. As someone with more professional experience, mentors often have connections that you do not. They can make introductions, tell you which organization to join, and help you identify opportunities to grow your network.

Help you overcome obstacles. If you make a mistake or are unclear about navigating the work environment, your mentor can give you the benefit of their experience. They may have faced a similar situation, or simply have the experience to understand the issue and help you deal with it professionally.



Person #4: You - Yes, You!

Whom can you count on more than yourself when it comes to your career? You know what you want from your career or what you wish to avoid. Take steps that ensure you can achieve your professional goals.

Think strategically. In today's work environment, people don't typically find one job and settle in for life. Today's workers change jobs every four years or so, and some completely change careers three times or more! Consider what you want out of your career and what steps or obstacles lie between you and that goal.

- **Ready for the next step on the career ladder?** Ask your boss what you need to work on. They won't know you're interested unless you tell them outright.
- **Do you have what it takes?** Review the job description of the desired position if available or look one up online. Identify the gaps in your skills and experience and create a plan to acquire them.
- **Do you require more education?** Take on a flexible role that works around your class hours. If formal degrees aren't required, investigate the wealth of online learning that is available.
- **Need to build your skills?** Seek opportunities to learn on the job even if that means taking a step back. Ask your boss for assignments where you can increase specific skills.
- **Have a dream employer you're targeting?** Talk to your mentor, your network or a staffing recruiter to see if there is anyone in your network who can help you get a foot in the door.



Be Your Own Career Manager

No one will ever be as invested in your career success as you are. Being complacent will only lead to wondering 10, 20 or 30 years from now how it all went off track. You owe it to yourself to take a proactive approach to your career.

Embrace the Gig Economy. Build multiple revenue streams, whether that means taking on a second job to boost your skills or income, launching your own business or building a career entirely of contract jobs. Rather than being someone who works for a company, many of today's successful individuals consider themselves to be their own company. It's a great way to recession-proof your career and insulate yourself from the whims of a single employer.

Block out regular review time. Once a week, or once a month, review where you are in your career or what you need to work on. Update your resume if anything has changed. Be sure your social media accounts represent you the way you would want. Schedule coffee with someone in your network.

Connect to your profession. Join professional organizations, attend conferences, network with others in your field. Step outside your comfort zone and write articles or create videos or podcasts to brand yourself as a thought leader in your field. Employers will come to you when they see you as an expert.



Person #5: Your Friend in the Business - a Staffing Recruiter

Recruiters can be an amazing career resource. They know what employers look for and where job seekers go off track. Your staffing recruiter can help by:

- Finding assignments that fill gaps in your resume or get your foot in the door with your dream employer
- Giving you access to unadvertised job opportunities
- Providing timely and honest feedback
- Helping you polish and target your resume
- Letting you practice your interview skills
- Answering questions you may not want to ask an employer
- “Talking you up” to hiring managers – they don’t have to be modest.

If you’re ready to fast track your career growth, speaking with a knowledgeable staffing recruiter is a great place to start.

