

Career Readiness and Goal Setting for Working Learners

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RESOURCE	Guide

Supporting Your Working Learner's Career Goals

Student employee positions provide immense opportunity for transferable skill development. Supervisors have a unique chance to positively influence their student's career journey by offering intentional roles within their office and supporting those they hire in connecting their current circumstances to their future goals. This may include setting short term goals that align with their position, exploring major or career field longer term goals, or even ongoing dialogue about strengths and areas of growth. These topics may seem daunting as a supervisor who does not specialize in career coaching, but it doesn't have to be!

Here are some manageable approaches to guiding a conversation with your working learner about their career goals and how they can think about their current position as a part of their bigger career plans.

Have ongoing and meaningful conversations

Depending on your institutional processes, appraisals, reviews, or evaluations may occur at least once a year and typically at the end of the academic year. Providing your working learner with feedback once a year does not provide them much time to improve, evolve, or strengthen skills. Instead of relying on your institutional process as the potentially one and only time to have meaningful conversations with your working learner about their goals and interests, have these conversations often from the moment they are hired in their role!

Start your semester (or working relationship, based on when you hire your student staff) off with some meaningful conversations with your working learners. This may look like providing a survey for them to complete that asks them targeted questions about skills they feel confident in or need support in and goals they have in their role. It could also be a different approach such as a more casual conversation between you and your working learner where you ask some intentional questions in a relaxed setting. Either way, gathering information and insight from your working learner on their goals and interests will allow you natural opportunity to work together in connecting those goals to their current position while providing you insight into their larger career journey.

Consider having weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly one on ones with your working learners and use this time as a chance to touch base on work related projects and deadlines as well as soft check ins on the goals you set together.

Explore your working learner's strengths and motivations

Your working learner is a student, which means they have some sort of motivation to be attending college and pursuing their degree. Explore that motivation with them and discover if it is intrinsic, extrinsic, familial, personal, etc. Then, seek insight into their motivation for applying for your working learner position, if you don't already know. This can begin the art of supporting the connection of your working learner's motivations and career goals, helping them find meaning in their work.



By asking intentional and open-ended questions, you can gain insight into how your student employee best learns, what they are hoping to gain from their role, and how *they* see it fitting into their future career goals. These conversations allow you to learn about your working learner, but also helps them learn more about themselves and gain a deeper self-awareness. This can be exceptionally helpful when setting goals because your working learner is not only being told what they are good at, but they feel confident in what they think they are good at as well. When considering long term goal setting, motivation is critical. Being able to support your working learner in establishing their 'why' is of great value in their overall career journey. You are also then able to remind them of that 'why' in more challenging times as a student.

Some potential open-ended questions to learn more about strengths and motivations of your working learners may be:

- What are you good at doing?
- What work or school related activities require less effort?
- What have you been told you are good at by others?
- Why did you choose your current major?
- What about this job excited you when applying?
- What do you like doing in your spare time?
- How did you decide on [insert institution's name] when looking into higher education?
- What inspires you to do well in school or at work?
- What are your passions or interests outside of school and work?
- What challenges are you currently facing?
- What would you like to do after graduation, if you could do anything?
- What is something you want to get better at?

In exploring your working learner's strengths, you are able to discover their areas of growth together. These may be gaps in skill development or experiences. Discussing how these areas of growth tie into their future goals can help them see ways to fill these gaps during their time as a student. Maybe they discover leadership is an area of growth for them and you can get them connected to a club or organization or even have them lead a team meeting for your staff. Consideration of strengths, motivations, and areas of growth can lead right into setting goals with your working learner that positively impact the work they do with you while connecting to their future career goals.

Set goals *with* your working learner

Setting goals *with* your working learner provides opportunity for buy in and intention. Collaborating on goals that are measurable and realistic and tie into specific strengths and motivations of your working learner will offer opportunity for ongoing growth in skills or areas they will need post graduation.

When setting goals with your working learner, consider goals they can create now that will contribute to their future, longer-term career goals. This could include strengthening a specific skill set or competency, utilizing their university role for networking across departments or industries, or introducing projects as appropriate that allow for connection to their chosen industry while, accomplishing tasks and needs of the department.

You may have heard of "SMART" goals as a tangible way to create short and long term goals. Using this model with your working learner can ensure they are being intentional and realistic with their goal setting.



[\(Rebound\)](#)

As discussed in [8 Things You Should Do During Your First One-on-One with a Student Employee](#) by Chelsea Jordan of Modern Campus, introduce a three-pronged approach to goals where one goal is personal, one is professional, and one is a longer term, big-picture goal. The goal itself does not have to be tied to their current position with you and likely may be connected to their future career goals - instead, it is how they accomplish this goal that could incorporate their student employment position and the skill building and opportunities that come along with it.

Continue the conversation

Career conversations do not end after the initial goal-setting discussion you have with your working learner and should not begin with their end of year evaluation. Instead, carrying out ongoing and intentional conversations continuously throughout the year will strengthen your relationship with your working learner as well as provide insight into the development and execution of their goals.

Don't be afraid to adjust the goals with your working learner as they work through them! Adapting and redefining the goals can be mutually beneficial as your students feel more comfortable and confident in their student position and with their future goals, overall.

Ensuring student's see the connection of skills they gain/strengthen in their on campus position and their future career goals is a hefty task, but continuing the conversation naturally while providing space for working learners to openly speak about their goals after graduation allows for that connection to be woven into each conversation along the way. Though they are hired by you to accomplish specific duties and responsibilities at the institution, the impact of their student employment position on their future career goals is immeasurable.

Resources:

[Here's How Managers Can Help Employees Set Meaningful Goals](#)

[8 Things You Should Do During Your First One-on-One with a Student Employee](#)