

Seven Suggestions for Developing your Staff

You want the people working for you to be engaged, motivated and producing excellent work so it's important to think about whether they are developing in their role. Development can be about getting someone up to speed with work they need to do now or building their confidence and capacity to do more.

1 Create a learning environment

How does the working culture in your area support learning? Can people admit when they have got something wrong without fear of being judged harshly? Can they ask others for help without feeling a fool? Team culture will be set in part by what you do, so if you admit your mistakes and say when you don't understand something it gives others permission to do the same. In a good learning environment people have high expectations of themselves and others and a sense of "I can do this". There is a sense of pace and forward momentum but also space for fun and rest, not just a constant treadmill. You could try building practice-sharing into group meetings on occasion to give people the chance to be both student and teacher at different times.

2 Be a good mentor

[David Clutterbuck](#) defines a mentor as "a more experienced individual willing to share knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust". There will certainly be times when you have more experience and knowledge that it would be useful to share with others to support their development. This doesn't mean telling someone all the answers but sharing some of your hard-won insights to accelerate the person's learning and encourage them to reflect on their own experiences. Mentoring may be particularly helpful when you have a specific store of information or wisdom on a subject that the other person would not access on their own.

3 Be a good coach

Coaching is different from mentoring because a coach does not share knowledge with an individual but rather helps them to access their own insights. You can be a good coach for the people that work with you by deeply listening to them and asking [incisive questions](#). It's important to take the time to do this in a way that feels safe to people. If you use coaching questions to support someone's thinking, make sure you give your full attention and time to enable the person to answer them without pressure to 'give the right answer'. Coaching is particularly useful when you believe that the person can work the answer out for themselves but needs the support to do this.

"There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it"
Edith Wharton

4 Share responsibility for career development

You are not solely responsible for the future career trajectory of your researchers so alleviate yourself of that burden if you have taken it on. However, you do have an important part to play in helping people to fulfil their potential in their current post with you and to make the most of networks and contacts. People who want to stay in academia will appreciate your time, thoughts and advice about their next steps. If people ask for your advice then make sure you really listen to what they want to achieve before you give it; don't assume they want the same career that you have had. It is not realistic for all researchers to continue in academia and it's important to respect and value alternative career paths. You may have useful contacts in other industries or public services to offer. Try not to lose interest in people who have a different future trajectory. They still have an important and valuable contribution to make in this role with you.

5 Be fair

Being fair doesn't necessarily mean giving everybody exactly the same thing. The important thing is that you approach the same situations consistently and that you are open and transparent about this. For example, if you had two researchers and one spent additional time developing something new and the other one just did what was required for the job, then it would not be unfair to send the first to a conference to present their new idea. These situations can cause resentment so ensure that you do two things: be very clear about your line on this in advance so that people can make informed choices, and value and support both individuals. The person 'just doing the job' might be capable of equal brilliance later on so don't alienate them with favouritism for others who have greater capacity in the present moment.

6 Find different ways to meet development needs

You don't have to provide support for everything yourself. [Staff development](#) provides free training in many areas as well as support for career development. All research staff are eligible for [career coaching](#) and anyone experiencing stress or anxiety about their next move could benefit from exploring their options with a [staff counsellor](#). Conferences, external training programmes and foreign travel all cost money which may not always be available. Development opportunities do not have to be costly. Consider instead job shadowing, visits to colleagues in other teams and mentoring opportunities with peers or colleagues in your field. [Public engagement](#) or [widening participation](#) talks offer a way of developing presentation skills and are useful for demonstrating impact.

7 Recognise diversity of ambition

Not everybody will have the same motivations and ambitions as you. Some will have more and sail past you to Nobel recognition in future years, others will be satisfied with less. We all have our own assumptions and prejudices about what people should want in terms of their career success. People are different. Some will be content doing a good job for you and have no desire to rise through higher echelons. Others want to be a Professor by forty. We live in a world that approves of and values the latter more than the former, even though in practice we need both kinds of people. See if you can be open minded enough to value everyone for their contribution and genuinely demonstrate this.