

Suggested Tips for Talking with a Supervisor About Career Development



Getting to Know Yourself

Identifying and understanding your interests is the first step in career development. Before talking with a supervisor, it is important to develop ideas around your career goals and interests. The guidance and tools outlined in the PREPARE and EXPLORE sections of MyCareer@VA are provided to help you with this process. The My Career Fit Tool, My Career Mapping Tool and VA Career Guides provide a structured way to develop preliminary thoughts about your interests and goals. Once you have identified these important points, you can begin asking for feedback.

Determine and Communicate the Focus of Your Conversation

Career discussions are more productive when they are organized and have specific goals identified. Depending on where you are in the career development process, you might want to focus on: gathering information on options, getting feedback on a first draft of a few career goals, or learning another person's experience in a new role you're considering. Clarity and specificity make it easier for people to help. For example, when communicating with your supervisor, it is best to be as specific as possible about your request for assistance. Consider using statements like: "I have completed a career development self-assessment and would really like to receive your advice on how we can work together to develop an action plan."

Determine Outcomes

Going into your conversation, it is best to have a particular outcome in mind from the career development discussion with your supervisor. Consider what you would like to take away from the conversation as next steps for you and your supervisor. For example, maybe you want feedback on your career goals or maybe a list of other employees who have made the change you are considering, or you would like suggestions for how you should develop the skills you need for that new job title. Knowing where you're going will make it easier to set up and manage the conversation.

Schedule a Time Free of Interruptions

The nature of career conversations makes it important to set aside dedicated time to have uninterrupted discussions. Since manager and employee schedules are often filled with meetings and work related activities, it may be difficult to find a time where you can both meet on short notice. Therefore, take steps to schedule your career discussions well in advance and if necessary, find a location where interruptions will be limited.

Follow-up Conversations

It may be beneficial to speak with a supervisor about a follow-up schedule to review the progress of your goals. This may occur monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, or annually. This provides an opportunity to discuss any obstacles or challenges you have been encountering while working toward your goals. These follow-up conversations could allow you to evaluate where you are with reaching your goals – you may need to adjust your goals accordingly based on your progress. Use this time to also seek more guidance and additional resources to continue your career development.