



# Career Guru at Google: The Case for Internal Coaching

“Career Guru receives average employee satisfaction ratings of 4.8 out of 5, and it’s this coaching program that is frequently cited as one of the key reasons why Google is among the world’s best employers.”<sup>2</sup>

The coaching industry is booming, and yet two thirds of businesses’ top leaders do not receive outside advice on their leadership skills. What’s more, the issue isn’t that executives are unreceptive – a survey done by Stanford University and The Miles Group confirmed that 43% of leaders would be ‘very receptive,’ and the remaining 57% of leaders would be ‘receptive’ to coaching.<sup>1</sup>

Many businesses balk at the idea and expense of hiring coaches for senior leaders let alone for entire management teams. However, there are other options. Coaching networks can be established internally. In 2010, Google provided an exemplary model for this type of internal employee development with its launch of the Career Guru coaching program.

## THE QUESTION

In 2008, Google began investigating what makes a manager great. They dubbed the R&D program “Project Oxygen” and by the end they had developed a list of 10 behaviors that Google’s best managers share. The greatest common denominator was being a good coach.<sup>2</sup> In response to these findings Google launched Career Guru to incorporate coaching at every step of their employees’ careers. Let’s take a look at what happened.



## → WHAT HAPPENED

Career Guru was an immediate success. Over 900 Google engineers took advantage of the program within the first two years alone<sup>2</sup> and it has since expanded internationally. Career Guru receives average employee satisfaction ratings of 4.8 out of 5, and it's this coaching program that is frequently cited as one of the key reasons why Google is among the world's best employers.<sup>2</sup> You may be wondering how Google built such a strong coaching program without third-party support. The answer lies in the internal talent pool they had at their disposal.

## → HOW THEY GOT THERE

Career Guru takes advantage of the talent that Google intentionally attracts and retains. Through Career Guru, the company connects its employees (Googlers) with one of Google's 350 internal coaches (Gurus) from around the world. Gurus use Hangouts video conferencing to provide one-on-one support, and Googlers choose their Gurus based on short descriptions of their skills and areas of expertise.

Google makes coaching available to all its employees, from new recruits to seasoned executives. However, to become a guru, employees must have been with Google for at least two years, work at the senior level, or be subject matter experts. Prospective gurus must also have their manager's support and be in good standing with their manager and HR business partners.<sup>3</sup> Gurus then receive three hours of training, practice, and feedback before their first coaching session.<sup>2</sup>

Google's coaching model was based on research that compiled six crucial components of good coaching:

1. Providing timely and specific feedback
2. Delivering difficult feedback in a motivational and thoughtful way
3. Tailoring approaches to meet individual communication styles in regular one-on-one meetings
4. Practicing empathetic "active" listening and being fully present
5. Being cognizant of your own mindset and that of the coachee
6. Asking open-ended questions to discover a coachee's acumen

These six components of coaching summarized by Google's GROW model. All gurus are trained to use this framework in their sessions to ensure they remain consistent and productive:

**GOAL** Clarify the person's objectives and the key results they want to accomplish

**REALITY** Understand the employee's current situation and what's stopping them from achieving their goal

**OPTIONS** consider what the person could do to overcome their challenge, helping them brainstorm and explore all the possibilities

**WILL** Discuss the specific steps the employee will take to accomplish their goal

## ABOUT GOOGLE

Google's mission is "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful". The company began in 1995 at Stanford University, where Larry Page and Sergey Brin struck a partnership. Brin was assigned to show Page around when he came to Stanford for grad school, and a year later the two young men formed a partnership. Together, Page and Brin built a search engine called Backrub, which used links to determine the importance of individual pages on the World Wide Web. Google was incorporated on September 4, 1998 and went public six years later in August 2004.<sup>4</sup>



## WHAT'S ON THE AGENDA

Google's Career Gurus coach on a range of topics. Coaching engagements usually consist of 1-8 sessions, and focus on one of the following 12 areas:<sup>3</sup>

- Sales
- Career
- Team development
- Leadership
- Manager – for people managers on people management-related topics
- Parent – for employees transitioning to parenthood
- Innovation
- New employees
- Well-being
- Presentation – for learning to give reports and TED Talks, for example
- Respect – for employees facing work or personal obstacles

Today, CareerGuru is not the only way Google fosters internal employee development. The company also uses Googler-to-Googler (g2g) to provide training through an employee-to-employee network. 80% of Google's employee training is facilitated internally through this program, where volunteers teach courses, provide mentoring, and design learning materials from every department across the globe. In addition to CareerGuru, the g2g program demonstrates how Google has taken coaching seriously and provides an exemplary case for how strong coaching systems can be established internally.

## → KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT** Google would not have been able to establish an internal coaching network without having previously developed a strong talent pool. For this reason, it's important to invest in attracting and retaining talented staff so that your organization can coach and promote from the inside rather than outsourcing to third-party providers.
2. **MODELS MATTER** Coaching is more than just a conversation. Google created a scientifically based coaching model, and the result was a systematic approach that allowed them to effectively develop their people and scale the program internationally.
3. **COACHING IS FOR EVERYONE** Google made CareerGuru accessible to all employees, from new recruits to seasoned executives. This type of accessibility is a key success factor for employee engagement, and it ensures talent can be identified and developed from all corners of an organization.

## → HOW SIGMA CAN HELP

Like Google, you can build a network of internal coaches – and SIGMA is here to help! Over the last 50 years SIGMA has worked with more than 8,500 private and public organizations to develop people potential and increase organizational effectiveness. We use an evidence-based approach to provide individual and group coaching, as well as a host of assessments to guide your development efforts. We also offer a range of coaching and succession planning workshops. To learn more about our solutions, click [here](#), or contact us directly for more information. ■





## FUN FACTS

- Page and Brin's search engine was originally named 'Backrub,' but was later renamed 'Google,' as a name play on the mathematical expression for the number 1 followed by 100 zeros<sup>4</sup>
- Google's first office was a garage in suburban Menlo Park, California, owned by Susan Wojcicki (Google employee #16, and now CEO of YouTube)<sup>4</sup>
- Google's initial server was made of Lego<sup>4</sup>
- Google has expanded its products to include the Pixel (smartphone), Pixelbook Go (laptop), Chromebook (laptop), Wear OS (smart watch), Google Nest (connected), and more. The company also owns Google Translate, Chrome, Maps, Youtube, Google Play Movies & TV, and Youtube Music in addition to its traditional search engine.<sup>6</sup>

## PROJECT OXYGEN

Project Oxygen was launched in 2008, with the goal of identifying what makes managers great. They originally identified eight common behaviors among their highest performing managers and began training all managers to develop these behaviors. As the company grew, two completely new behaviors were added to the list, and a few were revised. This is the current list of 10 behaviors Google's best managers share:<sup>5</sup>

1. Is a good coach
2. Empowers team and does not micromanage
3. Creates an inclusive team environment, showing concern for success and well-being
4. Is productive and results-oriented
5. Is a good communicator – listens and shares information
6. Supports career development and discusses performance
7. Has a clear vision/strategy for the team
8. Has key technical skills to help advise the team
9. Collaborates across [the company]
10. Is a strong decision maker

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