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Why Your Employees Aren't Developing

**And It's Not Because
They Don't Want To**

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What You Will Learn

- Why employee development stalls in most organisations even when budgets and training are in place
- The four real reasons people in teams stop progressing at work
- Why this is a design and leadership problem, not a motivation problem
- Four practical steps to make skill-building part of how everyday work runs

A surprising number of business leaders believe their people have lost ambition. They look at available courses and approved budgets and conclude that staff simply aren't opting in; yet the data tells a different story.

Studies show that 80% of businesses think employees need to leave their current organisation to develop new skills. Yet 94% of employees say they would be more likely to stay somewhere that genuinely invested in their progress.

Most of the time, the issue isn't effort or enthusiasm. It's fit. The opportunities on offer don't line up with what people need day to day. Many employees are already carrying a full workload and are then expected to squeeze demanding training in around everything else, with no explanation of how any of it connects to the work they are trying to do.

People don't stop wanting to grow. They stop seeing how growth is meant to work in real life.

It's a Design Problem, Not a Motivation Problem

Professional progress often lets people down because it's treated like a one-off. A course gets booked, time gets blocked, and that's meant to be the answer. Once it's done, everyone goes straight back to the same work, under the same pressure.

Recruiters see this pattern repeatedly. The people who move forward fastest do so because their role changes slowly around them. They're trusted with something new, receive feedback while it still matters, and stretch in ways that feel realistic rather than added on.

When skill-building is reduced to training alone, two things happen. First, it gets postponed the moment work gets busy. Second, even when it does happen, the gains disappear quickly because nothing in the role changes to support them. People return to the same tasks and the same expectations.

Real progress shows up in three places: what someone can do well, what they are trusted to handle, and where their work has visible impact. When those three things stay static, growth stalls regardless of how many resources exist on paper.

The Real Reasons Employees Aren't Progressing

No time or headspace to learn

In most businesses, skill-building is supposed to happen around the work. The assumption is that if someone wants to improve, they'll find the time. But most employees already have calendars full of priorities. Client needs come first. Internal deadlines follow. Anything labelled "development" sits at the edge of the week, waiting for a gap that rarely arrives. Around 42% of learning leaders confirm this, citing lack of time as the primary reason growth doesn't happen.

Managers acting as bottlenecks rather than multipliers

Most managers aren't blocking progress intentionally. They're coping. They were promoted because they know the work, not because they've been taught to coach others. Delivery stays front of mind. One-to-ones slide into task check-ins. Feedback arrives late or only when something has gone wrong. Over time, talented people stop putting themselves forward. They start assuming growth will have to happen elsewhere.

No clear picture of what progress looks like

In many roles, advancement only becomes visible when someone leaves. If there's no promotion available, people struggle to see what "moving forward" means. Responsibilities blur. Expectations are implied rather than explained. Recruiters hear this constantly. Candidates say they were doing more work, but not different work. When they asked what came next, no one gave a clear answer.

Learning feels risky in the current environment

In some teams, upskilling stalls because trying something new carries an invisible cost. Research points to 218% more revenue in organisations that invest seriously in capability building. Yet when recognition only follows short-term output, skill investment becomes optional. Coaching feels like a nice extra. People take the hint.

When Progress Stalls, Leaders Need to Look at the System

When a team stops growing, the instinct is to look at individuals. Who's putting the effort in? Who's drifting? It feels logical. But progress is shaped far more by the environment people work in than by personal motivation.

Leaders and owners set more of that environment than they often realise. They're the ones deciding what gets rewarded, how managers are supported, and whether time for skill-building is treated as real or theoretical. When managers aren't given the tools to coach, protect learning time, or have proper career conversations, progress depends on individual goodwill rather than structure.

WHY YOUR EMPLOYEES AREN'T DEVELOPING

Four Practical Steps to Fix It

1. Build it into how work already runs

Progress works best when it stops being a separate conversation. Anchor it in regular one-to-ones. Teams that make genuine headway talk about current work, obstacles, and career direction in the same conversation. They revisit it often, not once a year.

Research on retention of new information shows that learning without follow-up disappears within days. When skill-building lives inside regular conversations and connects to real tasks, it sticks.

2. Make progress visible beyond promotion

One of the fastest ways to stall a team is to make promotion the only visible sign of progress. In smaller businesses, titles are limited. When nothing else is made visible, people assume advancement means leaving.

A single clear framework showing what solid, strong, and standout performance looks like in a role gives people something concrete to aim for. Recognition can be simple: calling out visible progress in team meetings, highlighting achievements publicly, or showing someone their work influenced a decision.

3. Protect time rather than just give permission

Microsoft's Work Trend Index shows around 80% of workers already feel they lack time or energy to do their jobs. Asking people to learn on top of everything else rarely succeeds.

Teams that do make progress protect small amounts of time and treat it as non-negotiable. Two hours a fortnight. A short block in the diary that managers defend the same way they would a client meeting. Stretch assignments often work better than courses here. Temporary ownership of a process, a short project outside the usual role, a thirty-day trial.

4. Teach managers the basics of growing people

Many managers are expected to support team development without ever being shown how. When progress breaks down, a lack of manager capability is almost always close to the surface. They aren't ignoring it. They're juggling delivery, people issues, and pressure from above simultaneously. Coaching slips because nobody showed them how to do it well in the middle of a busy role.

Simple, practical guidance on running better career conversations and handing off work that stretches people without overwhelming them makes a measurable difference.

From Blame to Ownership

When a team isn't growing, frustration makes sense. Budgets were approved. Training was arranged. Progress was supposed to be part of the conversation. When nothing moves, it's easy to assume the problem lies with the people.

Recruitment gives a different view. Good employees arrive in new roles and do well almost immediately, not because they changed, but because the set-up around them did. Clear expectations. Protected time. A manager who knows what they're developing each person towards.

Most people don't stop caring about their work. They stop believing effort will lead anywhere. When days are full and progress is unclear, improvement slips out of reach. Ownership doesn't mean blame. It means recognising that progress follows structure, and being willing to change the structure when it isn't working.

A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd



Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk if:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.

Now - #1 Bestseller on Amazon -

Scale Up!: The Founders' Guide to Accelerating Growth by Building Dream Teams by Sarah Bishop

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