

Pay, classification, and advancement: what a supervisor can change and what needs a partner

Advancement barriers are often invisible: unclear pathways, visible work given by habit, and classification questions that no one owns. This note separates what a supervisor can change this month from what needs Human Resources, labor relations, or leadership.

Why it matters

DSD staff described inconsistent recognition of work and lived experience, classification and pay concerns, and unclear pathways. These are patterns, not individual failings, and they respond to practice.

Content

What you can change now. Say out loud what advancement requires in your unit and write it down. Rotate visible assignments deliberately instead of by who is closest. Hold a career conversation with every person, not only the ones who ask. Sponsor people into rooms where decisions are made, not only mentor them about how rooms work.

What needs a partner. Classification questions, reclassification requests, pay equity reviews, and anything governed by a labor agreement go to Human Resources and labor relations. Bring the pattern you noticed and the people affected in general terms, not a case for one person.

What to watch for. Reverse mentoring can be valuable, but it should not become unpaid equity labor for staff from underrepresented communities. Development plans should not be treated as proof of competence or as a hidden record.

Questions to ask yourself. Who on the team has had a stretch assignment in the last year, and how did that come to be? Who has been told plainly what the next step requires? Whose work is visible to leadership, and whose is not?

Next steps

- **Mentoring, sponsorship, and reverse mentoring** — program page </library/pn-mentoring-sponsorship>
- **Stay conversations and retention** — program page </library/pn-stay-interviews-and-retention>
- **Strengthen team climate (Practice path)** — program page </practice/gp-4>

Practice paths this supports

- Workplace culture and team climate