

## Invest in Yourself with a Professional Development Plan

Whether you've just graduated from school, you're mid-career, or nearing retirement, you absolutely should have your own professional development plan (PDP). Many organizations require their employees to create a PDP during the performance review process and while these are important for short-term development and evaluation, they don't often address your long-term career goals.

**Your PDP is one of the most important tools for achieving success, and shouldn't be left up to anyone but yourself to create, manage and own.**

**Below are six steps to help you create your own professional development plan.**

- 1. Create a compelling goal that you are driven to achieve.** While it may be difficult to know exactly where you want your career to go, it's important to pick an exciting end-point to direct your PDP towards. Work back from your goal and create specific milestones to achieve. ***Know what success looks like to you and start heading in that direction.***
- 2. Don't leave your professional development up to your employer.** Many people mistakenly rely on their current boss to drive the outcomes of their PDP. It's an oversight to tie your long-term career goals and development to your current manager because they likely do not have the time or resources needed to invest in the next steps you need to take. While you should consult with your current boss don't rely on them to decide your future for you. ***You are responsible for your career.***
- 3. Do an audit of your current skill-set** to identify gaps in your experience and where your strengths lie, do an environmental scan to determine what skills are trending in your field, or a field you would like to move into. Chart out which skills you are looking to improve upon or learn and the best next steps to do so. You might want to begin by listening to a podcast or signing up for a course, or practice your skills by creating content and material of your own. ***To successfully move to the next level it's important to improve yourself beyond your current expertise.***
- 4. Don't forget to enhance your relationships and broaden your network.** Developing clear connecting or networking goals is vital to create a solid strategy for your career. Outside of your network begin to identify influential people. Think about the thought leaders and organizations that matter to your field and begin to map out how you can make these connections. ***Make your connections matter.***
- 5. Set specific dates and target timelines.** When are you going to expand your network and present at or attend a conference? Is there a course you want to take offered in the fall, winter or spring? Who are you networking with next week? If you don't have specific target dates set, you risk losing momentum and accountability to your plan. ***Your development is an invaluable investment and deserves the time and careful planning needed to maximize the returns.***
- 6. Keep your PDP up-to-date.** A PDP should be looked at as a living document that will change overtime. As you move through your career, your values and priorities may change, or you may gain an interest in a specific specialization. Different factors will influence your goals and changing access to resources and time can also impact your ability to achieve your goals. ***Make a review of your PDP a yearly routine.***

While creating a useful and thorough PDP takes time and careful planning, it's important that you don't leave success and your future career up to chance. Creating your own PDP ensures that you aren't wasting time or resources as you develop your skills and take the next step in your career.