

YOUR GUIDE TO PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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15

YOU'VE LANDED A JOB – WHAT'S NEXT?

Congratulations! You're now on the job, and things are going great! Time to sit back, relax, and enjoy a long and rewarding career. But wait. It's not that easy.

These days, if you want to reach your full potential, you have to proactively manage your career – from the day you enter the workforce until the day you retire.

Developing Throughout Your Career

To contribute at a high level throughout your career, you need to actively pursue personal and professional development opportunities. You can take various paths to reach your developmental goals, but the first step is to establish a personal development plan.

Establishing a Personal Development Plan

You can use various methods to develop your personal development plan. Write down where you want to be in one, five, ten, and fifty years. What types of skills will you need to reach your goals? What knowledge will you need to acquire? What talents will you need to develop? Understanding what you are going to need in the future will help you to begin developing yourself into that person today.

Now look at the gaps in your personal development plan – these are the areas you need to focus on. Here are a few ways you can fill these gaps and manage your career development:

1. Networking

One of the most important keys to personal and professional development is networking. Why? First, professional connections can be especially useful for staying on top of industry trends and developments – things that are going to affect you and your career progress. It's difficult for you to stay on top of everything that will affect your career, but by having a network that you can depend on, you'll be able to stay aware of the information that affects you.

Second, the days of working for a single employer throughout one's career are over. Most people these days are very comfortable with the fact that they are going to work for several different companies throughout their career. This is partially due to the fact that career

development in its truest sense is about seeking out new challenges. You may find that, at some point, your current job is no longer challenging or satisfying, especially if you have been in the same role for a couple of years. If your employer is unwilling or unable to adapt your role to bring out new challenges, it may be time to begin exploring new opportunities outside of your organization. If you have built up a network of like-minded professionals, you will have a much easier time finding the role that will help you to pursue your personal developmental goals. In fact, if you have a strong network, the job offers may find you, without your having to seek them out!

2. Training

The need for training doesn't stop when you graduate from school. You need to be constantly seeking out training opportunities. This will help you keep your skills up-to-date, ensuring that you can continue to make valuable contributions to your company and your team throughout your career.

Start by making it clear to your manager and team members at your company that you're eager to learn. Let them know you would appreciate any learning opportunities they can offer. If you would like to learn something specific don't be afraid to ask for it. Being seen by others at your company as a lifelong learner is a good thing!

Pursue formal training, either in a classroom or online. If your company has a progressive approach to training, they may have a budget that will pay for all or part of training programs that are relevant to the work that you do. If your company doesn't have this type of program in place, don't worry. Many events and programs in cities across the country relate to personal and professional training and development – and they aren't always expensive. Some are even free!

Although interacting in person with an expert is valuable, you may find that the most convenient way to learn about things that interest you is via the Internet. Want to learn about sales? Type "sales training" into YouTube. Need to know about best practices in talent management? Do a quick Google search, and you'll come up with dozens of blog posts and webinars dedicated to the topic.

3. Mentorship & Reverse-Mentorship

Many of the most successful people throughout history are quick to thank their mentors – people who guided their development during

their formative years. You should have mentors, too. A good mentor can be from any industry, in any job function, and at any point in their career. If your company doesn't have a formalized program, how do you meet a mentor? You may come across a potential mentor by networking – something that you say may spark their interest, and the conversation will spring from there. Or you may choose to pursue someone more actively – perhaps a business leader you look up to, or manager of a different business unit, or someone with a different profile entirely. In many cases, you may be able to reach out to someone like this online, perhaps via email. Simply use this as an opportunity to introduce yourself, explain why you chose to contact them specifically, and then ask if they'd be willing to chat for 15 minutes over coffee or on the phone. Use the time to ask them about their career and the decisions they've made – find out how they became who they are today. By connecting with your potential mentor every so often, you may turn what was once a stranger into a true role model and mentor – and they might just find themselves invested in you and the chance to influence your growth and development.

4. Professional Associations

As you progress in your career, you may find that you need more "clout" to take on more responsibility – and drive bigger and better business results. It may be time for you to take out membership in a professional association. By seeking out membership in one of these associations, you become instantly more credible and can improve the way that stakeholders perceive you. If you're looking to take this to the next level, consider volunteering for a professional association or group. Offer to plan and run an event that is of interest to the group's members, or pursue a leadership position.

Your Career is in Your Hands

Depending on who you are and your specific developmental goals, you may pursue all, some, or none of the suggestions above. The point is: You have to take the responsibility for yourself and your career into your own hands.