

Tips, Insights & Tactics

Sure-Fire Career Development Plan

The basis of financial security is investment for the future. The same concept applies to personal development. Technology is driving continuous change in our personal lives and careers. To keep pace, or stay ahead of the changing landscape, a personal development plan is an investment in your future success.



Goals and Objectives

Put yourself first.

We all have roles and responsibilities to fulfill at home and on the job. Don't fall behind by allowing things to languish. Make personal growth a priority, even if you can only find a few minutes a day to invest.

Decide what's most important.

It's easy to be distracted by the volume of information and communications we're exposed to every day. Without a specific objective in mind, it's challenging to maintain your focus. Think strategically. Make time to prioritize your personal development goals and objectives, and revisit your plan as your situation changes.

Download the template.

We've prepared an editable template that provides a guide, with examples, to help you create your own Personal Development Plan. It's available now at xerox.com/templates

Define and refine.

Use the SMART system to create your objectives. It's a proven technique to help ensure your growth is effective and efficient. Make your objectives Specific, Measurable, Attainable (realistic), Relevant and Time-bound (set a reasonable deadline).

Maintain your focus.

Opportunities to build your knowledge and skills are everywhere. Webinars, workshops, downloads, books, colleagues, presentations, social media, and more. Simply taking the time to define your goals and objectives will help. Armed with this focus you should be able to quickly sort opportunities as goal-supporting, unrelated, or worth noting for future consideration when you review and revise your development plan.

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Training

Start local.

Training is nearly synonymous with personal development. Formal training in workshops and classes are available from professional and public organizations, and educational institutions like community colleges. Large companies may also provide free, relevant courses online.

Be proactive.

Many opportunities will come to you—you simply need to recognize them. You can help the process by conscious effort. Raise your curiosity level. Ask questions whenever there's an opportunity to learn. Leverage the web and other sources to uncover the latest information and insights on your priority areas of interest.

Sign up and tune-in.

There is a vast marketplace of resources available today, online. Videos, webinars, white papers and downloads are available for free. A trip to a local bookstore or library provides a chance to browse a wide variety of resources on a topic, to help narrow or broaden your focus to address your objective. Online booksellers like [Powell's](#), [Alibris](#), [Audio Editions](#), and [Amazon](#) offer vast selections of educational titles—including audiobooks, for training on the go.

Leverage your network.

High value informal training may be available simply for the asking. Reach out to coworkers and colleagues in your network to tap their expertise. You may learn more from a couple of hours in a face-to-face conversation, than you would from reading several books on a subject. Better yet, do both.

Networking

Give, before you receive.

Many of us only make time to network when we're looking for work. That's not the best strategy because it's focused on your needs. The single, most important rule in networking is: it's not about you, it's about them.

Networking is about building relationships, and “building” means offering something positive or useful to someone else, usually over a period of time. Until a relationship is established as something valuable, there's considerably less incentive to help you with your objectives, like finding a job.

Listen to connect.

The key to connecting with people is listening to them. Ask easy questions. When you practice active listening with a new acquaintance they'll begin to open up, and you'll begin to build rapport. Make every subsequent exchange positive and useful to build the foundation of a strong relationship.

Ask for advice.

Instead of asking for a job, ask for advice. For example, “I want to focus on social media, what sort of experience do you recommend?” The question acknowledges their expertise on the topic and invites them to respond with as much detail as they'd like. If the topic engages them, there are plenty of follow-up questions to add.

Build your network.

Don't expect to expand your network by attending one industry or social event. It takes time. Focus on quality over quantity. It's better to know ten people you can count on, than 100 who feel no real connection with you. Stay in touch with the people in your network and ensure the bond remains strong by remembering to give, before you receive. If the day ever comes when you really need assistance, for a job, or to achieve a personal development objective, your chances of receiving help will be greatly increased.

Mentoring

Find a supportive expert.

If your company doesn't provide a formal mentoring program, don't worry. You can pursue a “mentor” on a regular or occasional basis on your own. Simply find someone in a senior position or with expertise in the area you want to develop, and ask them for advice. If you like what you hear, tell them, and ask if they'd mind if you spoke with them again.

Be ready and responsive.

Whether your relationship with a mentor is formal or informal, be respectful of their time. Come prepared. Be positive. Ask clear and concise questions. Practice active listening, and ask for the underlying reasons for their advice and recommendations to increase your understanding.

Summary

In today's world, change is constant. When the next change arrives you're better off joining than fighting. Stay flexible and open to doing things a new way. A personal development plan will help you make the most of the advances (and stumbles) along the way to a more productive, efficient and effective life, at home and at work.

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