Creating a Development Plan

Step 1: Focus on Critical Priorities

Begin your development by deciding where to focus your time and attention. Your focus should be based on a thorough understanding of what you want out of work and what your organization needs from you. With this knowledge you can set your development priorities. Where does your agenda overlap with your organization's agenda for you? This, hopefully, is where you will find energy and the support to carry out your Plan for Development.

- Begin with personal insight – know yourself
  - Focusing on both strengths and weaknesses. You may need to get help from others to clarify strengths and weaknesses
  - People succeed on the basis of strengths (assuming weaknesses don’t get in the way)
  - Focus on the critical 2 or 3 development priorities. Not on a list of 10-15

- Look for GAPS in your skills/competency portfolio
  - Goals: What do you want to do? What are your internal motives and values that drive your behavior? What is important in work and life and why?
  - Abilities: What can you do? What are the ways in which you apply your knowledge and skills? Where have you been successful? Not successful? And why? What have you learned about your personality, skills, and potential from the professional assessments?
  - Perceptions: How do others see you? How can you get a whole view of yourself through the eyes of others with whom and for whom you work?
  - Standards: What do others expect from you? What are the criteria for success in your job/position?

- Reinforce commitment to your development goals.
  - Clarify your personal incentives to reach your goals. Important to my current work success? My future work success? Relevant to my organization? Will the results be worth the investment in my efforts?

- Anticipate obstacles so you can head them off at the pass.
  - Make an inventory of possible roadblocks for each development. Write down all the possible reasons you might get stuck. Be honest with yourself – and be better prepared for challenges.

Step 2: Implement Something Every Day

Used with Permission—Based on DevelopmentFirst (Peterson and Hicks (1996))
All planning for development is useless without action. Like in physical conditioning, a little development every day targeted at specific objectives gets better results than trying to do all you development in one chunk.

Set triggers to alert yourself to take action. Think of it like a beeper or a watch alarm; when it goes off, it signals someone to do something – to respond with a behavior. Ask yourself: What will trigger me to act on a targeted behavior daily? Making a set time to do something daily/weekly/etc.? Being in certain situations? With certain people? A discipline?

Below are some tips and tools to help you analyze how to set your triggers strategically to get the most mileage out of your daily development action.

- Face your barriers – procrastination? inertia? lack of time?
  o Set a regular time that becomes routine. Make public commitments to due dates. Start with smaller, easier, reasonable goals to build on. Write your goal where you’ll see it every day. Revisit your incentives – are they still motivators? Make development a job priority, as part of your annual objectives.

- Look for high-voltage situations where:
  o Stakes are high and outcomes are noticed. You’re forced to think or act in new ways. You have to do more with less or faster and better than ever. You have to work with or through others more skilled than you or on a new team, or with a larger group than ever before.

- Be proactive
  o Make your own opportunities by reframing and adding challenge to what has become routine. Look for new assignments and responsibilities related to your priorities. Get into networks of people focused on what you want to learn. Get involved across functions or departments.

- Take intelligent risks
  o Reframe your definition of failure to overcome your fear of it. Remind yourself you don’t have to be perfect yet – you are still learning. Separate learning from performing; think about what you just learned instead of how you did. Think of yourself as a scientist and your development activities as experiments. Build on small steps toward your goal when you’re venturing into the unknown. Remind yourself that, in some cases, the more you fail, the more you can learn. Choose risks that have both a reasonable chance for success and a reasonable measure of doubt.

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- Overcome fear of failure
  - Try to determine real risk; ask others to assess the likelihood of failure. Test your fears by facing them; see that nothing really terrible happens. Start low profile/low risk; find a safe place to test your wings. Read about the importance of risk taking

- Move past feeling stuck
  - Start with a low hurdle – something to ease into; then raise it to more challenging levels
  - Ask others for suggestions or options
  - Read a book
  - Take a training course

**Step 3: Reflect on What Happens**

Plan for reflection on short-term and long-term learning. How will you retain and consolidate what you learn each day? How will you take stock and evaluate progress toward your goals and priorities at major milestones. Use the following questions as a guide for reflecting:

What am I learning from:

**The Short-Term View:**
- What worked? Why?
- What didn’t work? Why not?
- What could I have done differently?
- What assumptions do I need to challenge or change?
- How did I conquer my barriers and how did they get in the way?

**The Long-Term View:**
- How does my current skill level compare with what it was when I started?
- How does my current skill level compare with my goal?
- What progress can I feel good about?
- Which challenges keep arising?
- What midpoint changes do I need to make?

**The Context:**
- What people or situations do I handle best?
- What people or situations are particular challenges? What are their common elements?
- What barriers in the situation or inside me limit my effectiveness?

**My Successes:**
- Am I assessing myself honestly?
- How am I leveraging what I learn into other situations?

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• Do I stay open to unexpected or hidden learnings?

My Mistakes:
• Do I get up, dust myself off, and keep playing? (No one is perfect)
• Am I viewing the situation from a systems perspective? (What realistically can I control and what can I not?)
• Do I own my share? (What could I do better next time?)

My Emotions:
• Do I listen to my frustrations, surprises, satisfaction, relief, anxiety, etc.?
• Do I identify the causes and what I could do differently next time?
• Do I pay attention to my pain and find out how I can use it to change and grow in the future?

*Step Four: Seek Feedback*

Getting others' ideas, perspectives, and feedback is key to helping you track your progress. Ask yourself: How will I seek feedback and other information to measure my progress? How will I get the information I need continuously, not just at major milestones? Here are some tips as a guide.

What is feedback?
• Information that is personally relevant (if it's not, you'll ignore it)
• A conversation, a give-and-take dialogue – not a hit-and-run message
• Informative, nonjudgmental, and nonevaluative
• Instructive and descriptive

Get information and feedback from:
• Get it from a variety of people (both friend and foe) from many perspectives.
• Consider the source; assess their expertise and opportunities to judge you accurately
• Cultivate key sources – tow or three people you trust and who trust you enough to be honest.
• Be opportunistic enough to get it from anyone who has opportunity to observe you and will be honest.

The kind of information and feedback to ask for:
• Broad if you're just beginning; more specific as you advance in skill
• Specific if you are working on leveraging a strength
• Different types if you are working on more than one kind of skill

How to prepare for feedback:
• Tell them what kind of information you need before they begin to observe you

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• Let them know you’re serious – share your development goals with them
• Ask them to watch for particular points if you’re building on specific strengths or fine-tuning skills

How to time feedback right:
• Get information when it’s fresh; keep discussion short and focused.
• If you want feedback on how you’ve done over a period of time, discuss what you need and give them time to think

How to make it easy:
• Focus on visible behaviors – ask what they saw
• Listen; don’t argue, debate, explain, etc. Ask questions only to understand what they said.
• If you don’t get helpful information, ask them specific behavioral questions (e.g., Did I interrupt? Did I exclude someone?)

Look ahead:
• Ask for advice about what to do differently
• Thank people; let them know you appreciate their willingness to give you feedback
• Put relevant feedback to visible use so others can see that you act on their feedback

Step Five: Transfer Learning into Next Steps

Once you have reached this step, it’s time to take a break, reflect on where you’ve been, where you are now, and where you will want to go next. Take time to celebrate your accomplishments and share them with others who have helped you. Feel your self-confidence building. Stay sharp by creating opportunities to try what you’ve learned and continue to get feedback.

Do you want to develop and hone a particular strength toward mastery?

Do you want to deepen your expertise and grow personally by teaching or coaching others? As a teacher, coach, or mentor, you become a student of the learning process.

Do you want to regroup and correct your course? Try new tactics? Get another person’s or professional’s fresh perspective?

Have you completed a full cycle? Are you ready to RE-CYCLE and FOCUS on new goals?

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