

# Professional Development in Operations

This is a roadmap on how to skill-up in an operations role. See [this article](#) for an introduction to the field. [Get in touch](#) if you're looking to transition into such a role or are seeking mentoring.

Please leave comments so I can improve this document.

## Goals

- Increase work performance in relevant fields.
- Retain and motivate current operations employees and attract new talent.
- Have a simple system that holds people accountable.

## Process<sup>1</sup>

1. Define your goal. Determine your "From/To" in two brief statements; one describing where you are today and one describing your next big (not your ultimate) destination.
  - a. Prompts:
    - i. See the lists of competencies ([flexible](#) and [role-specific](#)) below. Where do you stand right now? Consider scoring yourself on each competency on a 1-5 scale. If this competency were improved, what would that look like? Where do you expect additional learning efforts to have large effects?
    - ii. What "To" is far enough away so that it will be a meaningful challenge to achieve?
    - iii. What would your ideal career look like?
    - iv. Where do you want to be in five years?
    - v. Who are some of your role models? What about them do you want for your career?
    - vi. Where does the organization need you in the future?
  - b. Examples:
    - i. *From* an individual contributor who adds value through technical expertise and closely follows others' directions, *to* a people leader who creates a clear strategy and delivers results through a small team.
    - ii. *From* a finance contributor who operates our current systems *to* a finance manager who improves current and develops new systems.

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<sup>1</sup> This section is mostly based on the books "[8 Steps to High Performance](#)" (Marc Effron) and "[The Effective Manager](#)" (Mark Horstman).

2. Create your personal experience map that shows which experiences you need to acquire in the next 1-2 years to achieve your goal.<sup>2</sup> The map should be focused and realistic – a reference sheet that you'll use regularly to plan your growth and assess your progress.
  - a. Prompts:
    - i. What next experiences will most quickly move your career in the desired direction?
    - ii. Who are the experts in your field? What experiences allowed them to become experts?
  - b. Examples:
    - i. Develop a multi-year strategic plan.
    - ii. Build a team from scratch.
    - iii. Give an introductory EA talk at a local group event.
    - iv. Set the annual budget for the entire organization.
    - v. Run a major fundraising campaign.
3. Write down likely barriers to your plan and how you will overcome them.
4. Brainstorm resources that will help you along the way, including books, online lectures, and workshops.
  - a. Examples: See the list of competencies ([flexible](#) and [role-specific](#)) below.
5. Set short-term goals with deadlines for a sense of urgency.
  - a. Examples:
    - i. Complete a leadership training course before the end of the quarter.
    - ii. Attend a training session on how to give and receive effective feedback to team members by the end of the month.
6. Act on the plan. Report to your manager during weekly meetings and get feedback.
7. Teach what you've learned to your colleagues.
  - a. Examples:
    - i. Give a short talk to colleagues.
    - ii. Host a workshop for people in your functional team.
    - iii. Create a short write-up and share it with your colleagues.
8. Re-evaluate: Update your personal experience map every 3-6 months.

## Flexible competencies

This document distinguishes between flexible and role-specific competencies. Flexible competencies (this section) allow you to do great work across a broad variety of roles, whereas role-specific competencies (next section) are more narrowly applicable. The boundaries are fuzzy, of course.

For each competency, I provide a few learning resources that I found useful myself or saw believable people recommend. I'm less confident that resources in brackets will be useful. Please leave comments to up- or downvote existing resources or suggest additional ones.

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<sup>2</sup> Development occurs through experiences: [Research suggests](#) that roughly 70% of your professional growth will come from the work experiences you have, 20% will come from your interactions with others, and 10% will come from formal education.

- Critical thinking and problem-solving
  - [Rationality: From AI to Zombies](#) – Eliezer Yudkowsky
  - [Superforecasting](#) – Philip Tetlock
  - [Algorithms to Live By](#) – Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths
  - [How to Measure Anything](#) – Douglas W. Hubbard
  - ([Guesstimation 2.0](#) – Lawrence Weinstein)
  - ([ClearerThinking.org](#))
- Decision-making
  - [Decisive](#) – Chip & Dan Heath
  - ([Smart Choices](#) – John S. Hammond et al)
- Emotional stability and resilience
  - [Feeling Good](#) – David Burns
  - [The Obstacle is the Way](#) – Ryan Holiday
  - [A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy](#) – William Irvine
  - Mindfulness practice: [Calm](#), [Headspace](#), [Waking Up](#)
- Fit with EA
  - [The Effective Altruism Handbook](#) – CEA
  - [EA Forum](#)
  - [Public EAF reading list](#)
- Focus and prioritization
  - [Deep Work](#) – Cal Newport ([summary](#))
  - [Essentialism](#) – Greg McKeown
  - [The 80/20 Principle](#) – Richard Koch
- Learning how to learn
  - [Anki](#) ([Alex Vermeer guidance](#))
  - [Learning How to Learn](#) – Barbara Oakley ([book](#))
  - ([Peak](#) – K. Anders Ericsson)
- Optimization mindset and ownership
  - [The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement](#) – Eliyahu Goldratt
  - [How to Think Bigger](#) – Martin Meadows ([summary](#))
  - ([Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#) – Carol Dweck)
- Organization and reliability
  - [Simplified Getting Things Done](#) – Daniel
  - ([Getting Things Done](#) – David Allen)
  - ([The Checklist Manifesto](#) – Atul Gawande)
- Productivity and effectiveness
  - [Personal Productivity](#) – EAF
  - [Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#) – Stephen Covey
  - ([Procrastination Equation](#) – Piers Steel ([summary](#)))
  - ([The Four-Hour Work Week](#) – Tim Ferriss)
- Self-reflection and open-mindedness
  - [How to Actually Change Your Mind](#) – Eliezer Yudkowsky
  - [Principles](#) – Ray Dalio
- Social skills and communications
  - [The Charisma Myth](#) – Olivia Fox Cabane
  - [Double Crux: A Strategy for Resolving Disagreement](#) – CFAR

- ([Never Eat Alone](#) – Keith Ferrazzi)
- ([Presentation Zen](#) – Garr Reynolds)
- Systems thinking
  - [Thinking in Systems](#) – Donella Meadows and Diana Wright ([related essay](#))
  - ([The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization](#) – Peter Senge)
  - ([Work the System](#) – Sam Carpenter)
  - ([The Six Sigma Way](#) – Peter Pande, Robert Neuman and Roland Cavanagh)
- Taking joy in solving business problems
  - [The Best Place to Work](#) – Ron Friedman ([summary](#))
  - [The Personal MBA](#) – Josh Kaufman (related: [business reading list](#))
  - [Work Rules](#) – Laszlo Bock

## Role-specific competencies

I've removed the resources in this section because they were selected based on little thought and research. My basic message here is that operations work involves many domains and disciplines, and it's potentially worth doing some dedicated learning to familiarize yourself with the domains you interact with frequently.

## Further reading

- [Operations management – 80,000 Hours](#)
- [How to be successful in any job – 80,000 Hours](#)
- [Skills that make you most employable – 80,000 Hours](#)
- [Education matters for altruism – Brian Tomasik](#)
- [Learning and development – Google re:Work](#)
- [A Simple Way to Map Out Your Career Ambitions – Harvard Business Review](#)