

What is Professional Development?

Professional development is gaining new skills through continuing education and career training after entering the workforce. It can include taking classes or workshops, attending professional or industry conferences, or earning a certificate to expand your knowledge in your chosen field.

Some companies offer in-house opportunities for professional development, such as training sessions or mentoring programs, but many professional development programs are done independently.

There are many types of programs that help to improve and learn multiple skills, such as a range of project management certifications.

Why is Professional Development Important?

Professional development is important because it has the potential to open opportunities for career advancement, such as promotions. It can assist you in honing existing skills and in learning new ones.

It can also help you stand out in a pool of applicants; showing that you have completed professional development programs or additional industry certifications on your resume can go a long way in showing your expertise in your field.

Employees who show initiative in independent learning can signal to employers that you are open to new experiences and are enthusiastic about continuing to grow.

Benefits of Professional Development for Employers

Professional development can be instrumental in growing a stronger team.

Employers who encourage their employees to seek out professional development opportunities are in turn encouraging higher productivity and job satisfaction.

- **Higher Retention Rates**

According to a Business News Daily article, businesses should offer professional development opportunities to their employees to improve potential turnover.

Professional development can help to bolster employees' confidence in their work. Greater confidence can, in turn, translate into higher overall job satisfaction, employee performance, productivity, and overall morale.

Investing in professional development training programs also shows employees that their company is invested in their success and interested in cultivating their advancement.

- **Attract Better Talent**

It can be challenging to find—and retain—talented employees. Offering professional development opportunities can help employers fill open positions by attracting and retaining skilled employees.

According to talent management platform Clear Company, 74 percent of employees say that a lack of professional development opportunities are preventing them from reaching their full potential. Additionally, 94 percent of employees would stay longer at a company if it invested in staff development.

Employers offering these benefits are more likely to attract potential employees who are interested in striving for excellence and pursuing advancement.

Investing in professional development for employees can grow an existing team's skills and entice new talent to join with the incentive of a clear learning and development plan.

- **Help Employees Stay Up to Date With Industry Trends to Keep Skills Sharp**

Industry trends move rapidly, and it's important for companies to keep pace with the times. Ongoing professional development can prevent potential stagnation by maintaining—and improving—employee skills. Look for programs that will help you stay up to date, such as those for agile leadership for hybrid work, or for innovation strategy.

Employees engaged in professional development are also more likely to stay engaged in their work and to be enthusiastic about pursuing their goals.

Benefits of Professional Development for Employees

From gaining confidence in your abilities to building potential for advancement, professional development offers employees many benefits for not only your career, but your personal goals as well.

- **Learn new skills**

Through professional development, you may hone both hard and soft skills in your work. Hard skills pertain to job-specific knowledge you can obtain through formal training or education. Soft skills are personal competencies, such as effective communication or the skills that contribute to emotional intelligence.

Developing both types of skills is important to reaching your professional goals—and even some of your personal ones.

- **Boost Confidence and Credibility**

Adding additional skills or certification from a professional development program to your resume is one way to boost your confidence in your skills and show your credibility to employers.

Professional development opportunities can expose both new and experienced professionals to new ideas and expertise. Seeking out these opportunities shows ambition and the space to practice those new competencies.

- **Develop Leadership Skills**

A confident employee is also likely an enthusiastic employee. If you take the step to grow and develop your skills, the incentive to seek out additional opportunities can continue to expand along with it.

If you are an employee who wants to advance your career but isn't sure how to do so, professional development can encourage you to put your hand up for leadership opportunities you may not have sought out otherwise.

- **Build Your Network**

Professional development can provide many opportunities for networking. Workshops, conferences, classes, and webinars are all spaces in which professionals can meet new people within their industry and make new connections.

These connections can lead to new opportunities, mentorship, and support which may provide the next stepping stone in your career.

- **Advance in your career**

A well-qualified employee attracts employer attention. Employees who are invested in professional development display commitment to their work and an interest in continuing to improve.

Professional development can also boost your earning potential by increasing your value through obtaining credentials, certifications, and designations.

10 professional development tips

In order to write your plan for professional growth, you need to get objective. Analyze yourself, where you stand currently in your career, and where you want to go. Then, you need to create a comprehensive plan with accomplishable steps that will help you achieve your career development goals. This may require stepping out of your comfort zone to seek available resources and new **professional development opportunities**. Here's how.

1. Assess your skills

To create your **development plan**, you'll need to assess where you are in your career and your current skill set. This isn't a time to be considering how great you are or how far you've come in your career. Rather, it's a time to be objective about your knowledge, your skills, and where you need improvement or additional training. To begin this task, you may want to make a list of everything you know as of today. Include hard skills like educational degrees, computer coding, or data analysis, and soft skills like strong relationship or communication skills. After you list each skill, rate your competency. Then list the specific areas where you do well and where you do poorly.

Next, list all the relevant skills that you lack. These could be skills that you know you'll need in order to **advance to the next position** in your company. Or they might be skills that you've been told you need through performance reports or one-on-one conversations with supervisors.

2. Create a plan

Next, think about where you want to be in a year, in 5 years, and in 10 years. Most businesses create current, intermediate, and future goals, which translate into 1-year, 5-year, and 10-year **business plans**. You can do the same with your career development. It's also important to remember that plans can be flexible. You can adjust them as you meet goals, as the business environment changes, or as your own goals change.

3. Expand your skill set through free training and online courses

Next, take another look at your skills list. Compare it to your 1-year goals. What do you need to learn right now? Does your company offer a specific learning program that can help you meet that goal? Some companies invest regularly in their **employees' training and development**. So the first place to look in order to advance

and to learn a new skill is your own company. If it offers a class you need, enroll in it. If your employer recommends an institution where you can learn that skill, take the course at that institution. If your company doesn't offer any type of training or recommendations, search for **online classes** of interest. Remember to check your local university or community college.

4. Develop a professional network

Build a rich professional life by cultivating professional contacts and surrounding yourself with people from your industry. Share with people in your department. Make yourself available to your team members, and let them know that you are available for them. You must be willing to give and get, and you must stay in touch with these people. You can't call them for a favor if you haven't talked to them in 5 years. Likewise, they shouldn't do that to you.

As your business network grows, you'll likely expand to having contacts in other departments, and even outside your company if you **attend seminars and conferences**. These are the people in your circle of business associates and friends who may also share development tips and opportunities more quickly than you'd be able to find them on your own.

5. Find a mentor for advice, ideas, and tips

Many companies offer mentoring and coaching programs, so the best place to start looking for a mentor is within your company's **mentoring and coaching network**. If your company doesn't offer a mentoring program and you belong to a professional group or organization, look for a mentor at your group meetings. A mentor or a coach is someone who can give you unbiased advice — someone who can help you sort through your thoughts about your professional and personal development. Once you get far enough into your career, you can become a mentor or a coach to someone else in your industry.

6. Build your brand through social media to share — not brag about — successes

Don't forget to build your personal brand through social media. This means that you will share your accomplishments, along with pertinent business articles and information, so that others can learn and share in your excitement, advancements, and progress. The trick here is to share your knowledge and accomplishments without seeming like a braggart.

If you just got promoted at work, make sure to give step-by-step updates. After all, no one wants to hear about your \$100,000-a-year overnight promotion. People will think that you just got lucky and that you're bragging or being egotistical. Instead, share how you learned your new skills. Share the way in which you found and applied for the job. Share how you got yourself ready for that promotion, and only then tell people that you got the promotion. Not only will you be sharing your accomplishments, you'll be **helping others in your network** advance their own careers.

7. Read industry-related books, trade publications, and blogs

Keep yourself up-to-date by reading books about your industry, as well as by keeping up with trade publications and blog posts written by other professionals. This can give you **innovative ideas** that you may be able to use in your current job. You may also discover new learning opportunities or new software that could help you do your job more smoothly.

8. Don't procrastinate when it comes to your career development

Take time regularly to **work on your professional development**. Don't make it just one of your New Year's resolutions! While you don't have to do something every day, you might set aside time each week to work on your skills, to network, and to stay up-to-date on industry news and advancements.

It helps if you create reminders for yourself. Perhaps every Wednesday at lunch, you'll read a few trade articles. On Saturday, you may decide to work on your skills via a free online course. On Sunday, you might check in with your industry contacts or mentor.

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9. Analyze your successes and your failures

Just as if you were a business, you'll want to track your metrics. This means that you will objectively analyze the places where you succeeded and **how you succeeded**. You'll also look hard at your failures to determine where you went wrong and what you need to work on in the future to prevent the same type of failure.

10. Continue to learn

Remember: Always be learning something new. In business, they say that if you're merely maintaining, you're falling behind. For example, if a company made VCRs in the '80s and determined that people would always buy VCRs to view movies because distributors were selling billions of VCR tapes, they'd be out of business today. This is because VCRs were quickly replaced by DVD players, which offered better video and sound quality.

Today, many people view all of their movies over the Internet. You need to think of yourself as an advancing business. If you started your career using a typewriter, you probably use a computer today, and you needed new skills to be able to operate that computer. So take advantage of **continuing education opportunities**, and you'll be ready for the next technological advancement in your industry.