Professional Development Plan Guidelines

Effective professional development requires discussion and alignment on the following key questions:

1) What is the focus for development (i.e. getting better at current job, preparing for another job, exploring new interests)?
2) What does the employee need to do to move toward their goals?
3) What will help the employee stay motivated and energized while pursuing development goals?

Think about the question above and follow steps below to create an effective Professional Development Plan.

Prepare for development planning discussion

- **Employee and Supervisor** consider questions above, schedule time to meet, and prepare for development discussion.
- **Employee** enters career goals on development plan and asks supervisor to review prior to development discussion.
- **Employee and Supervisor** independently identify employee strengths and development needs related to career goals.

Discuss goals and create action plan

1) **Discuss Focus Area and Career Goals** - Employee discusses development focus area and career goals with Supervisor. Supervisor provides perspective and guidance on career goals and development focus area.
2) **Start with Strengths** - Employee and Supervisor discuss strengths that are closely related to career goals.
   - Supervisors should provide candid feedback, especially if something is not seen as a strength.
   - Employee and Supervisor agree on strengths that are most aligned with achieving career goals.
   - Select 1 or 2 strengths that will be used to help achieve goals.
3) **Identify Development Needs** - Employee and Supervisor discuss development needs that are related to career goals.
   - Identify specific behaviors to focus on and talk about the causes of these behaviors.
   - Identify skill gaps and misalignments that could be having a negative impact on performance or development.
   - Prioritize one or two development needs that will be improved as a result of the development plan.
4) **Identify Development Goals** - Employee and Supervisor discuss desired outcomes of the development plan. Employee writes no more than three clear, specific and attainable development goals that are aligned with desired outcomes.
5) **Create an Action Plan** – Identify specific actions that will help the employee achieve each development goal. Think about how new knowledge/skills will be acquired and how strengths will be leveraged to address development needs. After identifying what needs to be done, specify who will do what by when.

Tips for building better development plans

- **When identifying Strengths** - Focus on those that can be used to help drive improvement in development needs.
- **When identifying Development Needs** – Discuss blind spots and potential derailers.
- **When identifying Development Goals** – Clarify desired results and select no more than three goals.
- **When deciding on Development Actions** – The most effective development comes from on-the-job activities:
  - Center for Creative Leadership indicates 70% of the most effective development comes from on-the-job experiences
  - 20% comes from learning through others (coaching, mentoring, observing others, etc.)
  - 10% comes from training and educational experiences (classes, seminars, workshops, books, etc.)
- **When writing Development Actions** – Be realistic and focus on short-term actions that are most likely to get done.
- **Have a good follow-up plan:**
  - **Employee**: “Work the plan”, get input from others, pay attention to outcomes, take charge of your own development.
  - **Supervisor**: Provide guidance, be aware of personal motivators, provide coaching and “on-the-job” development.
  - **Employee and Supervisor**: Schedule follow-up discussions, integrate development into daily activities.
# Examples of Development Activities

## On-the-Job Experiences
- Focus on “out of the comfort zone” activities that are relevant, visible, and challenging
- Look for things that can be done within the current work environment
- Define learning objectives, support, and follow-up requirements

## Job Assignments and Projects
- Commit to a stretch assignment – one that uses skills typically demonstrated in higher level positions or another functional area.
- Enrich the current job - add new responsibilities that may otherwise be out-of-scope.
- Use change management techniques to implement new standards or processes.
- Provide guidance and share knowledge with a new employee or someone who is struggling with something.
- Use project management skills to create a project team and lead a project from beginning to end.
- Participate in a challenging, rapidly changing situation or a project with tight deadlines. Review and evaluate outcomes.

## Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Activities
- Use structured problem-solving tools and techniques to solve a persistent problem.
- Make a difficult decision that is “outside the comfort zone” and may have a ripple effect on other parts of the operation.
- Handle a work-related crisis, or fix something that has gone terribly wrong.

## On-the-Job Learning and Teaching Experiences
- Work with people who are recognized as experts (internal or external) to master a skill or technique.
- Organize a teaching experience that requires educating and/or persuading others.
- Research, document, share, and apply “best practices.”

## Cross-Functional Work
- Work on a cross-functional team to deliver new methods, systems, products, services, or tools that are not related to current role.
- Provide technical or functional expertise to a work group that has conflicting or competing interests.

## Learning through Others
- Focus on learning from others’ experiences
- Get candid feedback and support
- Make it a priority to build and leverage effective relationships over time

## Coaching and Mentoring
- Invite trusted co-workers to provide feedback when observing presence or absence of target behaviors.
- Frequently seek feedback from supervisors. When supervising others, provide frequent, constructive feedback.
- Use coaching techniques to build self-awareness and leverage strengths.
- Ask questions that cause others to reflect on situations, outcomes, and assumptions.
- Establish mentoring relationships that build trust and create opportunities for low-risk learning, candid insight, and guidance.

## Networking and Support
- Pursue active membership in a professional association, industry organization, or trade group. Share ideas and experiences.
- Create and sustain a network of peers, functional experts, customers, and vendors who are willing to provide helpful insight and feedback.

## Targeted Training and Self-Study
- Focus on independent study, courses, or programs to build specific skills or credentials
- Align resources, then use planning and personal initiative to complete training and apply knowledge

### Formal Education
- Identify educational requirements for current or future roles. Enroll in an accredited program to close gaps.

### Classes, Workshops and Seminars
- Attend classes, workshops, or seminars to build targeted skills. Create a plan to apply new skills.

### E-Learning and Books
- Use online courses or books as a cost effective, flexible substitute for classroom training.