



Partnering in Employee Development

Hi, I'm Steve Slater. Today I'd like to share with you a practice that can help you to better leverage the strengths of your team: employee development planning. Employee development refers to the steps taken by a leader to encourage an employee's professional growth. As you'll see, supporting employee development can be a formal process—or simply a part of your everyday management philosophy.

So, why prioritize the professional development of your team? Well, by taking an active interest in the growth of your employees, you can increase their motivation, engagement, capability, and productivity. Increased employee retention is another potential benefit of supporting the growth of your team. Finally, cultivating the skills and interests of your employees can, in some cases, create opportunities for promotion, which demonstrates your confidence and trust in their abilities.

Job Enrichment

Frederick Herzberg was an American psychologist who became known for some of the most influential ideas related to employee motivation and engagement in the 20th century. One of Herzberg's most celebrated contributions to the field of business management was his concept of Job Enrichment. "All jobs should be a learning experience...a growth experience," he explained.

Herzberg believed the most powerful motivational factors for employees were the "intrinsic motivators"—specifically, having clear-cut goals that create a sense of achievement, getting recognition for their accomplishments, understanding that the work itself is important, having increased responsibility, and opportunities for growth and advancement.

Professional development connects directly with these motivational factors. Many people will thrive when given new, challenging assignments or more responsibility. They care about the work they do, and a good manager will recognize their work and let them know it is valued. Opportunities to learn new skills and get better can be very rewarding!

Finding the Opportunities

How can you, as a leader, practice job enrichment? Start by having simple conversations with your staff. Consider using your weekly check-in meetings to engage your employees about the jobs they do and how they see their career taking shape in the years ahead. Then, look for ways to create professional development opportunities for them. Perhaps a first step would be to set a goal of finding one such opportunity for each member of your team, whether it's attending a professional conference or training class, job-shadowing within the team, or other cross-training.

Why it matters?

All employees have the ability to improve and get better at what they do! From the highest performing member of your team to the employee who might be struggling, supporting performance is a process and you, as a leader, have a role to play. By partnering with your staff to develop their abilities and improve their performance, you can increase motivation and engagement.

Planning for Success

If you're interested in taking a more structured approach to professional development, consider creating a professional development plan, or PDP, for your employee. A professional development plan is a formalized road map for growth and improvement with specific activities and expected outcomes.

Implementing a PDP is typically done in four steps:

1. Preparation and assessment
2. Identifying development opportunities
3. Monitoring progress
4. Providing feedback

Let's look at each step more closely. During the first step, **preparation and assessment**, the manager and employee should hold one or more meetings to take time and reflect on the person's areas of strength as well as areas for improvement. The manager should ask questions such as:

- “What knowledge or skills do you need to be more successful in your work?”
- “What activities can you take on to improve?”
- “What are your professional development goals?”
- “How can I help you achieve them?”
- “Where do you see yourself in five years?”

It's important to consider the length of the employee's tenure within your organization. A professional development plan for a new employee will look very different from one created for a more experienced member of your team. It's also necessary to consider the employee's current level of performance. Providing regular, specific feedback is especially important to the process of employee development. The preparation and assessment phase requires the manager and employee to have a realistic and shared understanding of the employee's strengths and weaknesses.

From these conversations, you will draft a personalized development plan for the employee. This can be a basic document that outlines short and long-term development goals for the employee, the specific competencies or skills targeted for improvement, and activities identified to support the employee's growth. If you're interested in seeing a sample, a professional development plan template is included with this podcast on our toolkit.

The next step is to begin **identifying development opportunities** that will help the individual improve his or her performance and advance towards the goals identified. As you look around, you'll find there are many such opportunities outside your organization and within as well. Some of the external activities you might want to consider include training classes, seminars, formal certification or degree programs, conferences and other professional events, externships, assigned readings, or online courses.

Internal professional development opportunities are many and require some commitment of time or resources within the day-to-day or week-to-week operations. Consider leveraging the expertise of your team. Have the employee “job-shadow” other senior members of the team to attain a more holistic understanding of your operation. Cross-train the employee with staff members who perform other roles in order to develop his or her capabilities. Maybe identify someone who can serve as a mentor to the employee, providing more frequent training or coaching.

As the employee moves forward with developing the knowledge and skills defined in the PDP, it's important for the manager to devote some time and energy to **monitoring progress**. Create milestones or check-in points to assess the employee's performance and accomplishments along the way. Perhaps keep a checklist of the anticipated activities or achievements expected. If other members of your staff are actively involved in the employee's development, be sure there is a way for them to provide progress updates—whether by adding a section to their weekly report or conferring during regular, check-in meetings.

The last step to implementing a professional development plan is **providing feedback**. This should not be limited to a formal, once or twice a year process, such as with performance appraisals. Feedback needs to be direct, candid, and a part of the daily or weekly routine.

It's important to note the responsibilities of monitoring progress and providing feedback do not rest solely with the manager. According to Frederick Herzberg, "*How am I doing* should be built into the system automatically. *How am I doing* should not be a formalized, outside my job system, that is, a supervisor telling me. *How am I doing* should not be dependent on an appraisal system. *How am I doing* should not be dependent on somebody else telling me." The employee must be responsible for self-checking, regularly sharing progress and working with you to maintain a shared understanding of how the plan is progressing and which areas of improvement are shoring up. Monitoring progress and providing feedback should remain a regular rhythm of your interaction and work with the employee. In this fashion, performance appraisals should be a time to summarize and look back on the employee's growth and honor the achievements attained.

Ultimately, motivation and engagement must come from within the individual. We, as leaders, need to make sure we are doing everything possible to create an environment that fosters motivation and the development of the people with whom we work. In doing so, you will increase the capabilities of your team and demonstrate that work can be a learning, growth experience.