

Planning for 2022 – Development Plans for Your Teams



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— **LISA CAVANAUGH**
VICE PRESIDENT
OF LEADERSHIP
DEVELOPMENT
EXPERIENCES, FCCS

American businesses have seen a massive exodus of employees, either leaving the workforce altogether or moving to new opportunities. Retaining skilled staff is a growing problem, and one way to alleviate the outflow of talent is to encourage career growth and employee engagement through support for personal development plans.

Whether a personal learning strategy for an individual contributor or a leadership development journey for a senior manager, development plans guide an individual's growth toward an identified goal, either established by the company or, increasingly, by the employee as they take control over their own career development.

“Formalized development plans and learning strategies are vehicles of self-development that enable people to exceed their current boundaries and achieve professional and personal goals,” says Michele Padilla, Director and Senior Consultant, FCCS Learning and Consulting.

The first step in creating a development plan is to identify a goal, which could be anything from obtaining a specific job to improving a leadership or communications skill. Employees should also consider how their roles might evolve over time and what that might require in terms of skills and attributes. At times, the goal is clear, but in other situations, assessments are used to identify skill gaps to address. Self assessment is valuable in identifying goals but asking for others' input via 360-degree assessments can deliver even more powerful insights.

“Identifying areas for improvement in order to achieve your goal should embrace multiple avenues of input,” says Jeannie Clinkenbeard, Director and Senior Consultant, FCCS Learning and Consulting. “Self and 360 assessments are invaluable for objective, data-based insights, but also think about what your passions are, what gets you up in the morning and what your natural strengths and tendencies are.”

Once the goal is established, specific, actionable steps are plotted within a reasonable time frame. These could be courses or conferences, building a mentor relationship or engaging a coach, or consistently practicing desired behaviors. For example, a leader may have as a goal that whenever a team member raises a problem, the leader first asks for suggestions or solutions rather than diving in to fix it themselves. One of the most valuable methods to build skills and abilities toward a defined goal is to undertake challenging projects or professional “heat” experiences that push beyond comfort levels – sometimes projects as simple as making a presentation or running a meeting. In fact, FCCS recommends that 70% of learning comes from experience, 20% from networks and relationships, and 10% from classroom training, a best-practice approach based on research by the Center for Creative Leadership.

Manager support is essential for the success of any professional development plan. Ideally, they're involved from the outset, helping their team member set goals and plan activities. In fact, they're optimally placed to support this step through ongoing feedback and the formal performance evaluation process, which plays a key role in identifying potential areas for improvement and can be used to measure progress. Managers are also in a position to open opportunities for growth experiences within the work setting, as well as securing any budget needed, and of course to help assess results. And, they're in the optimal position to encourage implementation of new skills.

One highly recommended tool to help identify goals and assess progress is a commitment to self-reflection, honestly considering strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, and potentially reexamining aspects of the plan once it's underway. Journaling is a powerful, though sometimes difficult, practice to support honest reflection.

While the primary focus of a personal development plan is, of course, the individual, the company also benefits from decreased turnover in a tight labor market, and increased productivity resulting from improved skills. It behooves leaders to examine their teams and consider broadly the upskilling that will be needed to meet tomorrow's challenges.

"The world is changing faster than ever, and technology is evolving at a rate that's hard to keep up with without active upskilling," says Lisa Cavanaugh, FCCS Vice President of Leadership Development Experiences. "Individuals should be in tune with what they want to do next, and companies need to consider the bigger picture and actively support development."

Every company, says Lisa, has three options to access the talent they need to keep the company running: buying, borrowing or building. Hiring new, more experienced staff or contracting outside vendors are both expensive propositions, but developing current employees is both less expensive and more efficient.

"Company leadership should take the time to identify what skills are represented today compared to what skills will be needed in one, three or five years, identify the skill gaps and establish a reskilling program to stay ahead of the learning curve," says Lisa.

To learn more about personal learning strategies, register for [Leading Self](#) or contact [Michele Padilla](#) at 720.939.7182. To learn more about leadership development plans, register for [Leading Others](#) or contact [Jeannie Clinkenbeard](#) at 303.721.3289.

5 Key Steps to a Comprehensive Development Plan



Establish the desired goal or skill to be developed, based on self- and external assessment.



Identify specific steps or activities to achieve the goal, targeting the recommended 10/20/70 breakdown of training, relationships and experience.



Set a reasonable time frame within which activities can be completed and the plan sustained – it's hard to maintain momentum over multiple years, for example.



Identify and obtain resources, including manager buy-in and budget, as well as booking classes or buying educational materials.



Measure results with both qualitative tools, including personal reflection and others' input, and quantitative tools, such as re-administering the same initial assessments and comparing results.