

WELL BALANCED

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Professional Development



Many of us are seeking something *more* in our work but are unsure how to fill the gap. The answer just may be in the realm of professional development—but what does that mean, exactly? Simply put, *professional development* is the process of gaining new skills after entering the workforce. Many choose to pursue professional development because it can create opportunities for career advancement, build a more developed or diverse skill set, signal to employers you are open to new experiences, and make you stand out in a pool of applicants. While beneficial for our careers, it also positively impacts personal well-being.

The pursuit of professional development opportunities leads individuals toward healthy self-reflection, builds confidence, and encourages us to learn new skills (such as effective communication and emotional intelligence). Professional development also leaves individuals open to new ideas, nurtures leadership skills, prompts meaningful engagement with peers, and, ultimately, presents new opportunities that can lead to a more fulfilling work-life blend. If you are considering starting your professional development journey, read on for tips to help you get started.



Communication Is Key

Good communication is fundamental to professional growth. In times of high stress, it is important to use effective communication skills to promote wellness in your interactions with colleagues. Practice empathy, open-mindedness, and active listening skills to show others you value collaboration and are serious about the discussion at hand.

» Embrace a Growth Mindset

One thing you can do to aid yourself in pursuing professional development opportunities is to embrace a growth mindset. A *growth mindset* is the belief that one's abilities can develop through dedication, hard work, and perseverance. Those with this mindset see challenges as opportunities to learn rather than something to avoid at all costs. Cultivating this mindset helps individuals build resilience and mental toughness, as well as nurture a more positive self-image. In professional settings, those with growth mindsets are more likely to develop new skills, generate creative solutions, and contribute to problem-solving. These individuals also encourage a wider culture of continuous improvement, allowing them to be adaptable as work evolves and changes.

» Conduct a Self-Assessment

Those with the most success in their pursuit of professional development have a strong motivator for the work they do. When considering the variety of opportunities out there, it can be difficult to find the path that feels right for you. The key to both personal and professional wellness is the process of self-reflection. Taking time to take stock and get clarity on the value you bring, what you enjoy doing, and the conditions that allow you to be your best self can help you understand where your passions, strengths, and areas of potential growth lie. Conducting a self-assessment can also help you thrive in your current role. Start by asking yourself key questions found in the basic career review from Workplace Strategies for Mental Health.

» Set Personal and Professional Goals

Once you have conducted a self-assessment, it is time to set goals. This is essential to create a “road map” for your future and to measure your progress as you move forward. Goals can be small, such as developing a new skill, or large, such as becoming a specialist in your field. Choose goals that are meaningful to you and design them to be achievable. Think: What do I want, and what benchmarks do I need to reach to get it? This will give you the foundation of your professional development plan. Consider sharing the plan with your manager; they can help you access resources such as tuition reimbursement programs, certification opportunities, mentoring options, and more. We all get by with a little help from our friends—Having the support of others as you pursue your goals can be instrumental in achieving them.

» Stay Informed

One of the easiest ways to get started with your professional development journey is to stay informed on the latest news and industry trends. Subscribe to regular email newsletters and do additional research on important topics affecting your work. Not only does this practice keep you up to date, but it can spark ideas as to additional opportunities you would like to pursue. These bits of added knowledge can, over time, help your career development and build self-confidence.



Want more professional development resources?

Talk to your employer to find out what is available to you through your workplace.

» Be a Lifelong Learner

Perhaps the most common and well-known kind of professional development is continuing education. Individuals can go back to school and earn an advanced degree, take courses to earn and maintain a professional certification, or enroll in local training programs. Online learning options have made continuing education more accessible than ever, allowing students to work at their own pace and from the comfort of home. Aside from aiding career confidence, the practice of lifelong learning has many mental health benefits. Adults who continuously learn new skills have displayed enhanced brain function and improved general cognition, are more stimulated in their work, and can more readily think of novel solutions to problems.

» Expand Your Network

Many people are introduced to professional development opportunities via their professional network. In-person or virtual conferences are a wonderful way to blend continued learning and networking. Professional associations and membership organizations combine professional development opportunities, educational offerings, and pathways for networking within your specific industry. Members of these organizations can sometimes join specialized committees, giving you additional ways to develop your skills and enmesh yourself with industry leadership. Engaging in discussions about your professional passions can improve well-being by creating meaningful connections, as well as aid professional development by opening your eyes to previously unseen avenues for career growth and skill-building.

Additional Resources:

- » **The Power of a Growth Mindset for Personal and Professional Success (iawomen.com)**
- » **7 Ways You Can Achieve Your Professional Development Goals (hbs.edu)**
- » **Career Development 101: A Complete Guide to Professional Growth (nsls.org)**

Sources:

1. <https://www.aicpa-cima.com/news/article/5-benefits-to-being-a-lifelong-learner>
2. <https://www.mghf.ca/your-impact/mental-health-moment-communicate-wellness>
3. <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/why-is-professional-development-important/>

