

MAKING THE
MOST OF
YOURSELF
AND ACHIEVING
YOUR ASPIRATIONS



What is a Personal Development Plan?

Personal Development Plans (PDP) are a structured and supported process undertaken by individuals to reflect on their own learning, performance and/or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development. It also means taking stock of your own abilities, experiences, qualities and skills to create a plan in order to succeed and develop professionally and to make effective life decisions.

A PDP is a useful framework as it can help you think through how best to meet your development needs and capitalise on your findings when you consider your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in the short, medium and long term. It will take you through four basic stages:

1. Where am I?
2. Where do I want to be?
3. How will I get there?
4. How well did I do?

The resemblance to a planning cycle will be apparent immediately: development needs are assessed; the means of achieving them are planned; and then put into practice. The success of PDPs will ultimately depend on the crucial stage of evaluation to ascertain if objectives have been met.



Benefits of PDP

We all work in demanding jobs and you might be asking yourself why you should take time out from your busy schedule to prepare a PDP. Once you've gone through the whole process you'll find that the PDP benefits you in many ways, in both your professional and personal life.

For your professional life

- Clearer ideas about the kind of life and work you want.
- Greater confidence in the choices you make.
- Greater confidence in the skills, qualities and attributes you bring to your position.
- Be in a better position to compete for jobs.
- Be better able to discuss your skills, personal qualities and competence with line managers.
- Develop the positive attitudes and approaches associated with successful professional life.



Many employers now expect their employees to understand and manage their own performance and to know how to adapt to meet times of increased workload, stressful situations or conditions of change. Time devoted to understanding what influences your own performance is therefore, very well spent.

For your personal life

- A better understanding of yourself and how you 'tick'.
- Be in a better position to make appropriate choices and to achieve your aspirations.
- Greater awareness of your needs and how to meet them.
- Greater awareness of the unique contribution you can make.

Personal development planning is becoming an increasingly important aspect of our lives as is often the key mechanism by which lifelong learning is planned.

A PDP needs to be at the forefront of your personal development, building on the findings of your analysis and identifying your goals and aspirations as well as highlighting the paths to achieving your ambitions – in both your work and personal life.





1. Where am I now?

In order to make plans for your personal and professional development you need to start by assessing where you are now and to decide what your current situation is. You may find it helpful to consider the following questions:

What am I good at?

- Do I have strengths which I would like to use in my job now or the future?
- What do others I work with consider my strengths to be?

What do I need to work on?

- Are there any weaknesses I need to work on to help develop my long term career?
- What do others I work with consider my weaknesses to be?
- What guidance might I need to help me tackle my weak areas?



What could help me along?

- What are the opportunities I can see ahead in the next year for developing my capabilities at work?
- What are the longer-term opportunities that will help me to develop my career?
- How do I make the most of the opportunities available?

What might stop me?

- What threats are there to my development over the next year?
- What are the threats in the long term that may prevent me from pursuing my career goals?
- What suggestions might I offer to deal with any threats?

To help clarify your longer-term development needs, it may be helpful to consider your:

- Strengths e.g. good interpersonal and organisational skills.
- Weaknesses e.g. don't like giving presentations
- Opportunities e.g. source assertiveness courses
- Threats e.g. lack of resources – time/money



2. Where do I want to be?

The next stage of the plan is to consider your aspirations and goals. To achieve your own personal goals, it's important to have a vision of where you are going; an idea of the kind of life you want to lead in the future and the levels of personal investment you are prepared to make.

Personal management helps you plan ahead towards your dream and to have those dreams in the first place. This section considers the importance of setting and realising personal goals and objectives to give you a sense of purpose and ensure you can achieve those that will bring you the greatest satisfaction.



Why Set Goals?

Setting stretching goals forces you to look for, understand and leverage upon opportunities. Opportunities can be found everywhere; at your company, in your industry, as well as in your personal and social life.

Setting stretching goals encourage you to aspire. You do not need to settle for what you have now; instead you can aim high.

Successful people set goals - They concentrate on their main goals and objectives, don't get sidetracked and don't procrastinate. Their clear focus ensures they achieve their personal dreams and aspirations.

Take personal responsibility - No-one else will do it for you and only you alone can ensure your dreams are realised.

How else will you know when you have succeeded? Defining goals means you'll know when you have succeeded in achieving them, when you can celebrate success and put yourself in the mindset for success.

Success breeds success - With the right mindset you will eventually develop the attitude of over achievement, where you start to stretch yourself and will be surprised that the limits you once accepted about your ability no longer exist.



The process of defining and achieving your goals

Setting goals for yourself means that you are making choices as to the direction you wish to take. We are all offered choices in our life and it is the ones that we choose that define the paths to take. To maximise your chances of success make sure that you:

Know what drives the development of your goals - When you define your goals the thought process will involve identifying some stimulant to that goal, what it is that gives you the emotional feeling of achievement, whether that feeling is power, exhilaration, achievement or status.

Are honest with yourself and your capabilities - Be honest with yourself, including when you look to overcome your weaknesses. It would be no use setting yourself a target of running a marathon in less than 3.5 hours within the next 12 months, if you currently struggle to walk to the end of the road.

Define milestones along the way - When you have defined the overall objective you should then set yourself a series of manageable interim milestones, justifiable steps that help you on your path to the overall goal. By setting manageable steps, which in themselves are goals, you are able to maintain your motivation and achieve the overall objective.



Have long-term vision – Identify the kind of life you want to lead in the future, what you want to achieve in your life and the levels of personal investment you are prepared to make in different types of activity. It is this vision that will keep you motivated when the inevitable setbacks occur and give you a sense of purpose and identify where you have to concentrate your efforts.

Set short, medium and long term objectives - Setting objectives allow you to focus on your aspirations in terms of your career, professional ambitions and your personal goals in the foreseeable future. Splitting these ‘mini-objectives’ may seem artificial but many of these will of course be interrelated, so after concentrating on one, step back and consider the bigger picture, namely your long-term vision which will in turn spur you onto greater triumphs.



3. How will I get there?

Setting goals is not enough; you need to ensure that you achieve them by focusing on your different objectives, celebrating successes and reviewing your learning and progress.

Maintain a proper mindset – By having the right mindset and a ‘can do’ approach it makes life’s challenges much easier. It’s amazing how things work out just right for people who are optimistic, people who set their mind to do something and just do it.

Challenge yourself - Every time you take on something over and above the normal tasks and responsibilities relating to your job, challenge yourself by asking what those actions are doing in relation to your long term aspirations. If your activity cannot be justified as contributing to the achievement of your goals you should question the validity of spending time on it.

Visualise success and create a desire to achieve - Visualisation is a very powerful technique to give us the energy, drive and ambition to achieve our dreams. Close your eyes and actually picture what it will look like when you have achieved your dream, do this regularly throughout the day. By keeping your long term vision firmly in your mind it will keep you hungry and motivated for success.



Carefully plan - It is necessary to carefully plan how you are going to achieve each individual step you take along your route achieving your goals. When you do develop your plan don't look at it as just a task list, each item should be viewed as a mini success in your pursuit of your dream. When you do complete a stage or element of your plan reflect on your success and on how it has contributed to the delivery of the overall plan. Each of these incremental successes will reinforce your drive and motivation to succeed in the overall plan.

Review your progress - It is crucial to review your progress against your milestones. In doing so you will learn and embed those behaviours and skills you have embraced and identify what you are doing right to be able to replicate it. If you recognise your mistakes you can take steps to change them.



Developing Skills

You will now need to think about some of the ways you might meet the objectives you have identified. This will involve thinking about the kind of skills, qualifications, knowledge and experience that might be appropriate for you. This is generally through either:

Formal learning activities e.g. workshops/courses, lectures or conferences, studying for a qualification or structured reading.

Informal activities e.g. reviewing your current capabilities, covering someone's work whilst they're away, coaching others or mentoring.



Planning for Achievement

Taking into account your own strengths and weaknesses together with your ambitions at work, you need to set yourself a plan for development. This involves:

- setting goals to be achieved
- listing the actions needed to achieve these goals
- establishing success criteria (which will tell you if you achieved your goal)
- e.g. achieving a certain grade for a particular qualification
- deciding on any necessary resources required e.g time, finances

The next stage is to consider the detailed actions and timescales needed to achieve these objectives and the criteria to evaluate your achievement against. These will all be part of your own personal development plan (PDP) which will be your tool to support your personal and professional development.



Personal Development Plan

Spend some time thinking about your own goals and aspirations, then complete the table

Goal 1:			
Action:	Date for completion	Success criteria	Resources needed
Goal 2:			
Action:	Date for completion	Success criteria	Resources needed
Goal 3:			
Action:	Date for completion	Success criteria	Resources needed

4. How well did I do?

Personal management is an on-going and changing activity. You need to keep the process going by reviewing and updating your goals, vision and values on a regular basis by reflecting on what you have done, achieved and thought about.

What is reflection?

Reflection is associated with the deep thought aimed at gaining a better understanding and involves reviewing what is said and done, weighing up the consequences and considering what the alternatives might have been. Reflection includes a mix of different elements including:

Making sense of experiences e.g. hindsight, understanding unexpected consequences, learning from your mistakes.

Standing back to allow yourself gain a different perspective of an experience or action.

Repetition or going over something in order to look at it from differing views and to check nothing is missing.

Making judgements on your behaviour and assessing what you did well and not so well.



There are several ways to effectively reflect on the success of your goals, the most suitable depends on the type of goal and who it involves.

Question based e.g. Why did I .., could I have .., what was the best.., which was...?

Reflective journal – This help you to monitor changes in both yourself and your progress. In your reflective journal you can keep note of anything you feel might be significant or useful.

Brainstorming - Identify the event you wish to evaluate and write down everything that happened and how you felt about each aspect, from this you can list your strengths and weaknesses.

Discussion – This can often give rise to challenging questions that you may as an individual wish to avoid. It can be helpful to discuss your progress or activities with a range of different types of people such as immediate colleagues, line-manager, a mentor or even your family.

Learning moments - These are a means of focusing your thoughts on the activity and assessing the impact any training or educational activity has had on your job role.

Upon reflection, often the reality turns out to be different from your initial expectations. Post-activity reflection helps you to decide whether the activities have met your expectations and requirements as well as ensuring you consolidate your learning.



This document was created by Professional Academy as part of our ongoing commitment to professional development.

We hope you found this advice download useful and would encourage you to share this with your peers and colleagues.

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Thank you for reading,
The Professional Academy Team

Professional Academy, Chartwell House, 620 Newmarket Road, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, CB8 5LP
Tel: +44 (0) 1223 365 505 Email: info@professionalacademy.com www.professionalacademy.com

