Contents

01  What is professional development?

02  How can I develop in my career?

03  Planning & goal setting

04  5 signs it’s time to invest in professional development

05  What skills are required in your field?

06  Career chat: advice from the experts
What is professional development?
Professional development can help you advance in your career and may come in the form of formal learning, which includes coursework and internships or apprenticeships, or informal learning, which may include activities such as attending conferences and seminars or networking.

Career counsellor and Assistant Director of the Wackerle Career and Leadership Centre Stephanie Kinkaid believes that everyone can benefit from the development of professional skills.

“Professional development consists of education, observation and mentoring that can help to enhance the employees in a workplace. It might include training sessions or graduate classes, spending time with a mentor to observe how others handle conflict or challenges, or mentoring someone else who might be new to the field,” she says.

Sometimes, says Kinkaid, the learning process also occurs when employees are away from the workplace. For instance, volunteering for a local organisation, serving on a board for a non-profit, or serving on a school’s PTA committee are all ways in which employees develop professionally while not on the job.

Stephanie Kinkaid, Assistant Director, Wackerle Career and Leadership Centre

“Professional development consists of education, observation and mentoring that can help to enhance the employees in a workplace. It might include training sessions or graduate classes, spending time with a mentor to observe how others handle conflict or challenges, or mentoring someone else who might be new to the field,” she says.
Of course, how you choose to tackle your professional development depends on your personal career goals and preferred style of learning. Maybe you want to deepen your knowledge in a specific area to increase your earning potential, or perhaps your industry is quickly evolving and you need to stay up to date with the latest developments, or maybe you’re interested in taking your career in an entirely different direction and will need to learn new skills and gain recognised qualifications.

Your industry, level of experience and position within a company should also factor into your professional development plan, as managers often need to tackle their professional development in a different way than employees would.

**Professional development for employees**

As an employee, much of your professional development will focus on setting personal professional goals and putting the training provided by your company to good use. Learning more about your company’s goals and objectives may also be a part of your professional development, particularly if you intend to remain with the same company and work your way up the ranks.
Like employees, managers must also set personal professional goals and work towards them, but in addition to this, they must also promote the development of employees and look for ways to improve their team’s skills.

“A manager is only as good as those who are employed by him or her,” says Kinkaid. “So offering opportunities for employees to improve is vital to the organisation’s success.”

Another different pursuit of development for managers, says Kinkaid, is the acquisition of skills related to managing, such as improving communication, teamwork and conflict management abilities. It can also be helpful for the entire team to attend personality assessment activities, as this allows both managers and employees to learn about the dynamics of the group.
How can I develop in my career?
Investing time and money in professional development is the best way to ensure that you’ll continue to grow and move forward in your career. But how exactly should you go about it? Here are a few ideas.

1. See if your company is willing to support your professional development

Some companies provide opportunities for professional development as a way of improving employee retention, and taking advantage of these programs can help you continue to grow professionally while saving time and money.

Author and career consultant Rich Grant notes that ideally, human resource departments would serve a function similar to that of college career services offices on campuses by helping employees find the right career fit.

“Human resources professionals should help match employees with mentors, and provide the mentors with the training and resources to make meaningful contributions on behalf of their protégés. Of course, money helps too, and companies should budget money for employees to take courses or specialised training and attend professional events.”

If your company doesn’t fund professional development opportunities and you’d like to broach the subject with your boss, be sure do some research beforehand so you can provide the necessary information about how it will benefit the company, what sort of opportunities are available and how much they might cost.

Rich Grant, Author and Career Consultant

“Whether that means helping employees find an appropriate fit inside the company or outside the company, it’s in the company’s best interests to achieve that proper fit,” says Grant.
2. Find a mentor or shadow a colleague

Not all companies will see the benefit of investing in professional development opportunities for employees, but that doesn’t mean you can’t do it yourself.

“If the company doesn’t support professional development, employees can do it on their own time,” says Grant. “Try to find low-cost or free ways to learn new things, such as taking free online courses or finding a mentor in the company if there’s no formal mentor program.”

Think of a successful individual you know, admire and would like to learn from; it doesn’t have to be someone within your company, but it certainly makes it easier if it is. Find out if he or she would be willing to have you shadow them for a few hours a week in order to learn from their experience.

Keep in mind that you don’t need to follow a formal mentoring program, as simply having an experienced colleague you can go to with your ideas or questions, and who is willing to give you honest feedback, can be hugely beneficial to your career development.

3. Attend conferences and workshops

Attending conferences or hands-on workshops will give you a chance learn about the latest developments in your field and keep your skills and knowledge up to date. It can also be a great way to meet and exchange ideas with other professionals in your industry.

If you’re not sure what sort of workshops or conferences would be worth your time and money, talk to your overseers and colleagues or take a look at some of your past performance reviews to see if there are any specific areas you’d like to improve in.

Even if your employers aren’t willing or able to cover the cost of attending such events, you may still be able to convince them that it’s worthwhile for you to attend on company time by showing them how it will help you develop your skills and perform your duties more effectively.
4. Volunteer

Although volunteering outside of work will require a considerable time commitment on your part, it can be an excellent way to master skills you haven’t been able to practice in your current line of work. This can be especially beneficial if you’re thinking of making a career change and want to gain some practical experience in a new area.

Aside from allowing you to develop new skills for free, another big benefit of volunteering is the networking opportunities it will open up to you. Your success is not only dependent on what you know, but also who you know, and volunteering gives you the chance to widen your professional network and gain valuable references that will strengthen your resume.

5. Join an online community

Technology has made networking easier than ever before, and online communities and platforms have become important tools for professional development.

For instance, joining a specific group on LinkedIn or signing up for online forums and discussion boards will allow you to exchange ideas with likeminded individuals and participate in relevant discussions, while Twitter can help you to connect with key people in your industry and track relevant hashtags to see what's trending.
6. Take an online course

Online courses tend to be a great option for those working full-time as they are a lot more flexible, which makes them a convenient option for working professionals.

Look for courses that are relevant to your job and will help you build on your existing skills or perform your job more effectively. Alternatively, you may want to branch out and learn something completely new in order to showcase your versatility as an employee.

Remember that the whole point of professional development is to continue learning and growing, so this should be your primary goal regardless of what you choose to study.
Planning & goal setting
Once you've decided that professional development is right for you, it's time to create a plan and start setting some goals. But mapping out your future isn't necessarily an easy thing to do.

Career coach Hank Boyer notes that there are two kinds of professional growth; intentional growth and unintentional growth.

Hank Boyer, Career coach

“Intentional growth requires a plan while unintentional growth simply happens along life's career pathways,” says Boyer. “Practical career planning should incorporate both.”

Intentional professional growth

Intentional professional growth should be started by clearly identifying your desired career destinations, says Boyer. It’s sort of like planning a trip; you start planning with the end goal in mind.

Identify your career goals

Consider what professional roles and positions, job responsibilities, income levels, and other factors define your desired outcomes. To do this, Boyer suggests speaking with professionals who are currently in the roles and positions you want.

“Grow your LinkedIn network and reach out to people who already occupy your target roles and positions. Once you’re connected, you can request an informational interview to learn about the positives and negatives of the role, and the path that brought them to that role or position.”

You can also explore professional organisations associated with your areas of professional interest, says Boyer. “On LinkedIn you can find several million ‘Groups,’ forums in which members share advice and are willing to speak to someone serious about professional growth. Try reaching out and requesting informational interviews.”
Set a timeline and identify the steps you’ll need to take

After you’ve clarified several career destinations, you’ll want to establish a reasonable timeline for achieving milestones along the way, explains Boyer, and the advice you got from your informational interviews will help you set realistic timelines.

Compare where you are now with where you’d like to end up. To do this, Boyer suggests answering the following questions:

- What specific skills will I need to acquire to reach my goals, and how will I acquire and develop them?
- Which of my natural talents and abilities will I need to further develop and apply?
- Who can help me, as a teacher, mentor or accountability partner? What new relationships will I need to form, and what current relationships do I need to more deeply develop?
- What specific experiences will I need to undergo to develop wisdom and expertise?

Once you’ve followed these steps, you’ll be ready to create a strategic career plan in which you will establish monthly goals and objectives. “It should be a living plan,” says Boyer. “Which means it will be in a state of constant refinement, but it does need to be committed to paper, and then followed.”
Unintentional professional growth

As the name suggests, unintentional professional growth isn't something you map out in advance. “Unintentional professional growth involves being in a constant state of readiness and willingness to incorporate opportunities and experiences as they come along,” says Boyer.

Opportunities may come in the form of education offered by an employer, professional or community organisation, or in the form of participation in volunteer organisations. Both of these are also great ways to expand your professional network.

“When an opportunity comes along, ask yourself how your participation will move you closer to your professional growth objectives. If the answer is not apparent, consider not participating.”

Finally, Boyer notes that it’s important to strike the right balance between intentional and unintentional growth. “If you put too much focus on intentional growth, you may become blind to outside opportunities that could accelerate your professional development,” he says.

“On the other hand, if there is too much unintentional growth focus you may find yourself expending time and energy in enjoyable activities, but ones that may not yield enough progress toward your goals to justify your investment. The key is to remain flexible but fixed on the objective.”
Creating your professional development plan

Now that you have your career goals in mind along with the steps you’ll need to take to make them a reality, it’s time to incorporate it all into a written professional development plan.

“Many people won’t commit a full plan to writing; instead, they may jot down specific outcomes or end-goals, but not the steps and timelines to get there,” says Boyer. “But without an actionable plan to get you there, a goal is just a dream.”

He notes that performance evaluations can be a great source for feedback and advice when creating a professional development plan, as your supervisor or HR manager will have evaluated your performance and behaviour over a long period of time and can help you identify both your strengths and weaknesses.

“Ask your supervisor to have follow-up discussions with you, which can help you replace ineffective behaviours with more effective ones,” he says.

“Pay attention to skills, talents, experiences, and areas of expertise that appear on both your evaluation and your strategic career plan, as mastering these areas will provide value to your employer and move you closer to your professional development goals.”

Another thing he emphasises is the importance of scheduling time every month to review your progress, identify any areas of the plan that may need to be adjusted, and update the plan with any new opportunities that may have arisen.

When it comes to the format of your plan, Boyer outlines a “more, less, start, stop” approach that can also be a part of a monthly review.

“I’ve had tremendous success in helping my clients master skills, behaviours, and talents in a compressed period of time this way,” he says.
To do this, set up a four quadrant page and select the area which you want to master.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>list the specific actions you need to do more of.</th>
<th>list the specific actions you need to do less of.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>list the specific actions you need to start doing.</td>
<td>list the specific actions you need to stop doing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you’re ready to get started, here are a few other important things to keep in mind when researching, creating and following your professional development plan.

**Just get started**

Planning and goal setting are certainly necessary if you want your professional development to pay off, but getting started is the most important and difficult step. There are always going to be reasons not to start, from not having enough time to feeling disorganised, but even if your plan isn’t perfect, there will always be at least one thing you can do right now, whether it’s joining an online forum or identifying relevant online courses.

**Focus on your weaker areas, but also on your strengths**

A lot of your professional development will probably focus on strengthening your weaker areas, whether you need to become more organised or learn to communicate more effectively with certain members on your team. But while this is certainly a sound strategy; developing skills or talents you already have and would like to learn more about or specialise in can make the process more enjoyable.
Keep track of your progress

Carefully tracking your progress will help you to determine whether the short and long-term goals you have set for yourself are realistic or whether you need to make adjustments. Aside from this, having a clear overview of everything you’ve accomplished and what areas you have already improved in can be very motivating.

Don’t be afraid to revise

Don’t worry if on reviewing your progress you find that things are moving slower than you expected or certain parts of your plan haven’t come together as planned. Your professional development plan will never be final or complete, and that’s okay. Follow the plan as closely as possible, but don’t be afraid to revise or update it as you go – it’s all part of the learning process.
5 signs it’s time to invest in professional development
Professional development is to your career what maintenance is to your vehicle. Even when there’s nothing ‘wrong’ with your car, you still need to take it for regular checkups, change the oil and rotate your tires if you want it to continue running smoothly and avoid any major issues down the line.

Unlike with your vehicle, however, it’s easy to overlook the need for professional development when you’re feeling comfortable with your current job and career trajectory. So here are a few important signs that it might be time to invest in your career.

1. Your industry is changing

Industries and business practices are changing quicker than ever before, and this means some of the things you may have learned in school five or ten years ago may no longer be relevant or applicable.

Even if it’s not a company requirement, it’s a good idea to keep up with what’s happening in your field by reading professional journals and research papers, attending industry events, conferences and workshops or participating in online forums and discussions on Twitter. This type of self-directed learning will help you keep your knowledge current, and can even boost your confidence at work.
2. You’re stuck in a rut

It’s easy to get stuck in a rut when you’ve been with the same company for many years, but even if you’re happy in your current job, there’s no need to stand still in your career.

Look around you. Are your colleagues being promoted and moving up through the ranks while you continue to perform the same tasks you were originally hired to do? If this is the case, there’s a good chance you’ve become too comfortable with your routine and need to shake things up a bit.

Taking professional development courses and networking with other professionals will not only inspire you about new possibilities and give you something to work toward, but will also show your boss or HR managers that you’re willing to take initiative.

If you’re not sure why you’re being overlooked for a promotion when some of your colleagues have already advanced, consider scheduling a meeting with your direct overseer to discuss your performance, and in particular, any areas you could improve in.

3. Your resume hasn’t been updated in years

It’s easy to neglect your resume when you’re not actively looking for a job, but the longer you’ve been with a company the more difficult it will be to remember key information about the different roles you had over the years.

Keeping your resume updated as your career progresses will help you track your professional accomplishments and ensure that you’re ready for any opportunity that may present itself.

Take out your resume and read it as critically as possible. Does it still accurately represent your current skill set and expertise? Would it convince a new employer that you possess the know-how to excel in your job? If you haven’t added to or updated your resume for more than a year, it’s probably time to invest in your professional development.
4. You’re lacking a specific skill or qualification

Does every job you want to apply for seem to list a specific skill or qualification that you don’t currently have? Rather than throwing in the towel and looking a different type of job, you should consider how you can work towards meeting those requirements.

While you may not have the time to complete a course or degree before applying for the job of your choice, enrolling in a relevant learning program or attending workshops and seminars that focus on areas where you lack expertise will send employers the message that you’re willing to learn the necessary skills and are serious about pursuing this opportunity.

5. You have no idea what your career might look like in five years

The best thing about focusing on your professional development is that it gives you a chance to think about your career goals. If you have no idea what you’ll be doing in five to ten years from now, taking professional development courses, volunteering or finding a mentor can help you understand your career goals and form a plan of action.

Your first step will be to identify specific skills or experience that you don’t have, but would be relevant to your line of work and give you an edge over other applicants. Once you know what you’re aiming for, you can work out what the next steps should be.
What skills are required in your field?
When deciding what skills to focus on in your professional development, it’s important to think about your future plans and goals. If you’re happy in your current career and have no plans to make a change, you may want to focus primarily on developing industry-specific skills.

On the other hand, if you’re fairly certain that you don’t want to remain in your current career, but don’t have any specific career in mind yet; it can be useful to focus on transferable skills that will make it easier for you to transition into a wide range of jobs.

Transferable skills

Aside from the technical skills required in each industry, it’s also important to develop somewhat less tangible attributes like interpersonal skills, flexibility or problem solving.

Mastering these skills can put you one step ahead, because while most of your colleagues or fellow applicants will have the same qualifications as you do, fewer of them will have taken the time to develop skills that aren’t an absolute requirement.

“What we hear most often from employers is that they’re looking for what are usually called ‘soft skills,’ says career advisor Beth Campbell Duke. “Employers are great at screening for the technical skills required, but they still tend to struggle with identifying soft skills like resilience, tenacity or effective communication skills.”

In order to identify and further develop these all-important soft skills, she suggests focusing on the skills you already have. “Think about how you do things,” she says.

“Do you show up on time? Do you stick to a task? Do you see the bigger picture so you can predict what tasks you could be doing next? Do you understand yourself well enough to be realistic about your strengths and weaknesses? Do you ask for help and input from others? The list is endless.”

A Career Builder survey of over 2000 hiring managers found that 77 percent believe soft skills are just as important as the hard skills necessary to perform specific job functions, and 16 percent even said they considered such qualities more important than hard skills.
Some of the most important soft skills they said they look for when hiring included:

- A strong work ethic
- Dependability
- A positive attitude
- The ability to work well as a team
- Organisation skills
- The ability to work well under pressure
- Communication skills
- Flexibility
- Confidence

Of course, it’s not enough to simply list these skills on your resume or tell your boss that you’re a team player and good organiser; you need to be able to give specific examples of when and how you demonstrated these skills in your work. In order to do this, you will need to put yourself in situations where you’ll have a chance to practice these skills.

Start by working out if there are any important soft skills you don’t have a chance to practice much in your current line of work, such as working on a team or performing under pressure, or whether there any areas you need to improve in, such as having a more positive attitude or showing confidence.

Once you know where you need improvement, you can look for opportunities to strengthen these areas, whether that means volunteering in a different type of role or taking on more responsibility at work.
Industry-specific skills

In order to advance in your career you may need to develop, sharpen or update some of your industry-specific skills.

Beth Campbell Duke, Career Coach

“The idea of life-long learning is really being taken onboard by traditional educational institutions, the growing number of online institutions and even people like me who are now able to offer courses and coaching online,” says Beth Campbell Duke.

“Depending on the industry you’re in, it’s usually relatively easy to find ongoing education – whether it’s through your industry association or a local or online learning institution,” she says.

“In some cases it may be possible to take some university and earn a certificate, then turn it into a diploma or Associate’s Degree, and then earn a degree. Many places also offer post-graduate certificates to help you quickly add new skills. If anything we now have too many options. There’s no end to ways to continually learn and upgrade.”

To give you an idea of the sort of industry-specific skills you may want to focus on, here’s a look at some of the top job sectors and a few of the skills and abilities that are important in each one, according to Job Outlook.
Education & Child Care

- Oral Expression – The ability to communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.

- Learning strategies – The ability to select instructional methods that are appropriate for the situation when teaching new things.

- Public safety and security – Knowledge of relevant equipment, policies, procedures, and strategies.

- Psychology – Knowledge of human behavior and performance; individual differences in ability, personality, and interests; learning and motivation; psychological research methods; and the assessment and treatment of behavioral and affective disorders.

- Social perceptiveness – An awareness of others actions and understanding why they react in a certain way.

- Problem sensitivity – The ability to tell when something is wrong or likely to go wrong.

- Negotiation – Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences.
Business

- Critical thinking – The ability to use logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions to problems.

- Administration and management – Knowledge of business and management principles involved in strategic planning, resource allocation, leadership techniques, production methods and coordination of people and resources.

- Complex problem solving – The ability to identify complex problems and review related information to develop options and implement solutions.

- Management of personnel resources – The ability to motivate, develop and direct people as they work, and identify the best people for the job.

- Systems analysis – The ability to determine how a system should work and how changes in conditions and operations will affect outcomes.
Tourism and Hospitality

- Active listening – The ability to give full attention to what others are saying, understand the points being made and asking questions when appropriate.

- Customer service – Knowledge of principles and processes for providing customer and personal services.

- Speaking – The ability to talk to others and convey information effectively.

- Persuasion – The ability to persuade others to change their minds or behaviour.

- Judgment and decision making – The ability to consider the costs and benefits of potential actions and choose the most appropriate one.

- Foreign language – Knowledge of the structure and content of a foreign (non-English) language.

- Sales and marketing – Knowledge of principles and methods for showing, promoting, and selling products or services.
Health Care

- Social perceptiveness – An awareness of others actions and understanding why they react in a certain way.

- Active listening – The ability to give full attention to what others are saying, understand the points being made and asking questions when appropriate.

- Coordination – The ability to adjust actions in relation to others’ actions.

- Critical thinking – The ability to use logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions to problems.

- Psychology – Knowledge of human behaviour and performance; individual differences in ability, personality, and interests; learning and motivation; psychological research methods; and the assessment and treatment of behavioural and affective disorders.

- Problem sensitivity – The ability to tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong.

- Speaking – The ability to talk to others and convey information effectively.

Creative Arts and Design

- Originality – The ability to come up with unusual or clever ideas about a given topic or situation.

- Visualisation – The ability to imagine how something will look after it is moved around or its parts have been rearranged.

- Design – Knowledge of design techniques, tools, and principles involved in production of precision technical plans, blueprints, drawings, and models.

- Fluency of ideas – The ability to come up with a number of different ideas about a topic.

- Active learning – The ability to understand implications of new information for current and future problem-solving and decision-making.
Accounting and Finance

• Active listening – The ability to give full attention to what others are saying, understand the points being made and asking questions when appropriate.

• Mathematics – The ability to solve problems using mathematics.

• Reading comprehension – The ability to understand written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.

• Writing – The ability to communicate effectively in writing as appropriate for the needs of the audience.

• Economics and accounting – Knowledge of economic and accounting principles and practices, the financial markets, banking and the analysis and reporting of financial data.

• Critical thinking – The ability to use logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions to problems.

• Systems analysis – The ability to determine how a system should work and how changes in conditions and operations will affect outcomes.
Writing and Communication

- Written expression – The ability to communicate information and ideas so others will understand.

- Active listening – The ability to give full attention to what others are saying, understand the points being made and ask questions when appropriate.

- English language – Knowledge of the structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.

- Reading comprehension – The ability to understand written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.

- Communications and media – Knowledge of media production, communication, and dissemination techniques and methods, including alternative ways to inform and entertain via written, oral, and visual media.

- Time management – The ability to manage your time and the time of others.
Conclusion

Professional development is an investment in your future; it takes time and the results won't be seen overnight, but the long-term pay off will be well worth the effort.

It ensures you'll never get stuck in a rut and enables you to strengthen your weaker areas while also developing your strengths. Most importantly, though, professional development puts you in the driver's seat and allows you to take charge of your career with the confidence that comes from knowing where you want to go and how to get there.

Remember that you don't need to have a perfect plan to get started; the most important thing is to take those first steps. As you go along, you'll be able to build on and revise your plan, and things will slowly become clearer.

As Plato said “The beginning is the most important part of the work,” so take those all-important first steps today, whether that means visualising where you want to be in one year from now or creating a list of skills you’d like to strengthen.
Career chat: advice from the experts
Cecile Riddle  
Business Coach

Bio: Cecile Riddle is a coach, mentor and learning facilitator who specialises in developing emotionally intelligent leaders. She is an International Master Trainer of Personality Dimensions® and has designed an innovative professional development program – video of interactive workshop supplemented by skype coaching – for understanding self and others.

Cecile is a Fellow of the Career Development Association of Australia and describes her life’s work as helping people find work they are passionate about and to coach leaders to create organisational cultures that engage their people and maintain that passion.

Craig Donaldson  
Editor of Inside HR Magazine

Bio: Craig has been a journalist and editor for 15 years and is currently the editor of Inside HR magazine, which focuses on the link between business and people strategy for HR leaders. He has written for a range of HR and business publications locally and internationally, with a focus on driving effective organisational results through people.

Emma McDonald  
Editor of Third Sector Magazine

Bio: Emma McDonald is Editor of Third Sector, a professional development hub for leaders of the Australian NFP sector across both print and digital platforms. Third Sector publishes a quarterly print magazine, free weekly e-newsletter and online content.

Emma is passionate about creativity and community, storytelling and social welfare. She splits her time between Melbourne and Kathmandu where she works with a grassroots NGO and teaches at a free school for children of the Basundhara slums.

Sonia McDonald  
CEO of Leadership HQ

Bio: Thought leader, coach, consultant, facilitator, speaker and trainer, Sonia has over twenty years’ experience in human resources, management and organisational development. Sonia is an expert in building leadership and strategy confidence and capability, and is renowned for her innovative approach to leadership, organisational development and neuroscience as it applies to leadership.
**Bio:** Currently National Manager of the Career Development Association of Australia, Greg's career has been diverse across the not-for-profit sector and within the banking and finance industry. From traditional retail banking leadership in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland, through leading product management teams in India, and Wealth Management teams in New Zealand. Outside of banking, but in a related field, Greg state managed one of the largest and most respected franchise based mortgage broking businesses in Australia.

Greg has sat on a number of committees at various stages of his career, including representative functions on an employee superannuation fund, and a charitable organisation.

cdaa.org.au
facebook.com/Career-Development-Association-of-Australia-225964534082041
twitter.com/CDAA_inc
linkedin.com/company/the-career-development-association-of-australia

---

**Greg Parker**
*National Manager of the Career Development Association of Australia*

---

**Joan Flatt**
*Principal of Amazing Coaching & Learning Solutions*

au.linkedin.com/in/ joanflatt
maxcoaching.com.au

**Bio:** Joan is a highly experienced coach who specialises in career, outplacement and leadership coaching. Her passion is working with individuals to enhance their ability to effectively manage and exceed their career expectations.

Joan's philosophy as a coach is to ensure that you receive the highest quality of career and leadership advice and support as you move forward in your career. Her human resources experience combined with her psychology background ensures that all her clients receive targeted, practical and relevant learning.

---

**Sam Haider**
*Global Head of Talent Development at Atlassian Software*

atlassian.com

**Bio:** Over his 20 year career, Sam has worked as Division Head of Learning after moving into progressively higher roles in Abbott Laboratories. He was recruited by Bayer AG to head the Global Organisational Development function in their Biological Products Business.

He has successfully progressed into higher levels of responsibility and leadership within HR and business functions, building a track record of success and business impact. He has worked, travelled and/or lived in over 10 countries across the Americas, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.
Kate Southam  
Career Mentor

Bio: Blogger and coach Kate Southam has specialised in employment and careers for more than a decade. A regular contributor to media, Kate has appeared on a range of television shows from TODAY and Sunrise to Sky Business as well as radio programs, websites and magazines. Her former weekly advice column Ask Kate was published by more than 100 newspapers and she wrote a workplace blog for news.com.au called Cube Farmer.

Kate started her career as a journalist and has worked for the Sydney Morning Herald, ABC Radio, the South China Morning Post in Hong Kong and as a freelancer in London.

sydneycareercoaching.com.au
facebook.com/Sydneycareercoaching
linkedin.com/in/tinamonk

Tina Monk  
Principal Consultant

Bio: Tina is a career and executive coach and facilitator who, for the past 26 years has consulted to the corporate sector and private clients to assist individuals, teams and organisations to achieve outstanding results.

Tina holds lifetime accreditation in the Human Synergistics' development tools, the Life Styles Inventory, Leadership Impact and the AMA DISC Model. She is an accredited practitioner in the Leadership Circle and her coaching training was with Results Coaching Systems.

smgrp.com.au
linkedin.com/company/stephenson-mansell-group

Virginia Mansell  
Executive Chairman, Stephenson Mansell Group

Bio: Virginia Mansell is an expert and thought leader in executive coaching, mentoring and leadership. She is the author of The Focused Executive, an important resource for CEOs and senior executives determined to perform at their very best. The 2nd Edition is now available with a new chapter on high performing teams. In 1998, Virginia established The Mansell Group to provide coaching and leadership development services.

In 2005, she merged this business with The Stephenson Partnership to create Stephenson Mansell Group, arguably Australia’s longest-established executive development firm.
Here, our experts answers some questions you might have about developing in your career.

What are the different ways people are looking to develop professionally in 2016?

Emma: A recent study undertaken by the University of Western Australia’s Dr Ramon Wenzel for the Centre for Social Impact looked at this topic of professional development through the lens of the Australian NFP sector. The resultant report, Learning for Purpose, found that NFP organisations who invest in professional development for their people do better.

For leaders of the NFP sector, professional development can take many forms, from attending conference sessions, undertaking systematic training and completing structured coursework to reading publications, mentoring and contributing to sector discussion.

Joan: Many individuals are very committed to their career development, but are time-poor due to working long hours and having busy lifestyles. In my experience, people are searching for just-in-time learning opportunities to update their skills; they are doing this through short accredited courses, webinars and professional development associations.

Tina: The main skills I see that we need to develop for this are: thinking skills, communication, personal management, ethics and professionalism, teamwork, lifelong learning and self-direction, technology use and dealing with complexity and ambiguity.

Craig: Companies are increasingly looking to provide talented employees with cross-functional experience, through the likes of secondments, job rotations or placement in other functions, to round out their business experience. Self-directed learning through internal learning systems are also important, as people are able to share their knowledge internally (such as recording videos, or responding on internal forums) with other employees, and this content is accessed and rated by other employees who can benefit from the experiences of others.
How often should you review your professional development plan?

**Greg:** The frequency of review depends on a number of factors. If professional development is a requirement of evidence of ongoing development, it’s usually associated with a defined volume of hours over a given period (say, one year). People in such roles are encouraged to review their plan at least quarterly.

For the person reviewing their own career plan (of which professional development such as academic qualifications is a part) that review should be at least annually.

**Tina:** A professional development plan should be a living document that is referred to on a regular basis. With rapid change occurring in organisations, especially around technology, nobody can afford to fall behind. Professional development in terms of on the job, lifelong learning needs to be ongoing and formally reviewed on a three month basis. However, the manager or staff member needs to be able to change or update it at any time according to need.

**Sonia:** You should review your professional development plan every quarter. It is best to keep momentum and make sure you are sticking with your goals. It’s especially important in our field which is leadership and neuroscience where new discoveries and theories happen every day. But we each grow and evolve gradually, usually without realising it. By reviewing your plan you not only prepare for future growth; you measure and appreciate the growth you’ve had.
Why is professional development important?

**Greg:** For many maintaining currency is a baseline requirement for licensing or registration, and is often a pre-requisite hurdle to be considered for certain roles. But more importantly, professional development requirements are in place to ensure consumers are delivered capabilities consistent with what should be expected by the consumer and society generally.

**Sonia:** It doesn’t matter what field you work in. The world changes and that means we need to change the way we work, too. The Oxford Dictionary defines a professional as someone who is “competent, skilful, or assured.” If your knowledge or skills are outdated, you’re not competent. Ongoing professional development is the only way to ensure that you are competent and skilful in your role.

What are the latest trends in professional development?

**Joan:** Short courses such as webinars, short accredited external training programs, and there is an increasing trend to free web-based university courses. I have also seen an increase in individuals wanting to improve their soft skills in leadership, team development and conflict resolution. These individuals are often working with a mentor or a career coach to develop or refine these skills.

**Tina:** More people are being seen as ‘leaders’ in their organisations because of their impact, not on their authority or position. People need to recognise this and have access to internal leadership development programs or look externally to develop these skills.

Demand for ‘big data’ skills is growing sharply and many employees lack the analytical skills to deal with so much complex data and training is required.

With the movement of employees around organisations and their desire for variety, more resources need to be provided for career development skills. Many people lack the basics of writing a good resume and smart interview skills, which they will need throughout their careers.

There is a renewed focus on communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity, all of which aim to improve long term employee productivity.
How can we ensure more women are offered professional development opportunities to suit their needs?

**Craig:** Gender equality really begins at the top. Unless the board, CEO and executive team genuinely believe in and drive gender equality in all its forms, usually companies will struggle to realise true equality. This also applies to professional development opportunities for women, who often need a sponsor in the executive ranks to help mentor them and pull them up through the organisation to help provide them with/recommend them to the right opportunities to advance their careers. Women also need more experience outside typically “softer” functions such as HR and marketing, and move more into harder business roles such as finance and operations to help them round out their business experience and advance into more senior roles.

**Virginia:** Webinars, online information, podcasts, blogs, half-day conferences instead of two days.

**Cecile:** My area of expertise is in developing emotionally intelligent leaders. There has definitely been an increased awareness of the importance of understanding yourself and others as well as being able to influence and inspire others (people management). This includes an awareness of the different personality temperaments – their needs, values, behaviours and communication style.

As well as understanding disparate temperaments, the skills necessary for improving interpersonal communication and relationship-building are considered essential for leadership and professional development. These include assertive communication and conflict management. Then there are the time management skills such as prioritising, organisation and work-life balance.

**Sonia:** The most exciting trends in professional development are:

- The focus on adaptive learning, where the learning needs of the individual – the way he or she prefers to learn – are of prime importance in the way learning material is presented.

- Blended learning which uses a mix of structured on and offline learning along with coaching and mentoring. It’s the most complete form of training that we have yet come up with.
How should you approach your boss about professional development opportunities?

**Greg:** As an employee, you should expect reviews at least annually, and this review should include development objectives. The ability of any employer to support development activities might rely on a number of factors - budget to support financially; whether the preferred development is consistent with the needs (now or in the future) of the employer; and sometimes whether the employer sees a future in an advanced career for that individual. Any employee has the right to ask – and should prepare for that discussion, including making your boss aware that you seek inclusion of development opportunities in any review discussion.

**Joan:** The best way is to discuss ongoing professional opportunities is in your performance review. Always focus on the bottom-line impact this learning will have on the organisation. E.g. a focus on improvement in your existing skills could result in you becoming faster or more accurate in your tasks. If you are taking a longer-term view and wish to pursue a tertiary qualification, you could see whether the organisation is prepared to support you financially or by giving you flexible work hours to attend lectures and study.

**Tina:** If you are not receiving the professional development that you want and need, schedule a meeting with your manager to discuss your career development needs. If your boss is reluctant to do so, you could be stuck in a dead end career and it is wise to find out sooner rather than later. If the manager agrees, go into the meeting in learning mode, saying something like “I want to find opportunities to grow within the organisation and would like to discuss with you how to make that happen.” Assure your manager that this isn’t necessarily about immediate promotion but that you are interested in your future growth and the skills you will need when there is an opening.

If you already know the growth path you want, tell the manager and talk about ways to get there. If not, ask the manager what career paths you can take from where you are. Remember this is about your overall development and may or may not be about promotion in the short term; you may just want to be more effective in your current role.

You can ask your manager for feedback on what you are doing well and what you could improve upon and how although many managers find this a challenging task. They usually wait for the annual performance review and tick a few boxes, thinking this is adequate feedback. In my view, it often
Isn’t. Feedback often needs to be on the spot or as close to an event as possible and an ongoing part of a manager’s role. Either side can initiate the discussion. People like to know how they are going as it is one of the number one motivators at work.

**What questions should staff be asking themselves and their managers to work on a development plan?**

**Greg:** What are my interests? Do I like and enjoy the work I’m doing now? Does my work bring me job satisfaction? Am I likely to enjoy the future with my employer? What are the skills that are necessary for career advancement? Do I have them? Am I prepared to commit (both time and finances) to developing skills?

**Joan:** In order to move forward in your career you need to have a dual focus on the immediate role and identify areas for improvement and also have some idea about where you want to move to next. When working with your manager on your development plan you might have a focus on what opportunities might be coming up, and how you can identify gaps to position yourself as the ideal candidate. You might want to check with your manager about the strategic direction of the organisation and see if there are any different areas you might be interested in pursuing.

**What are the steps involved in creating a professional development plan for your staff?**

**Sam:** It starts with on boarding. Each Atlassian receives a customized 90 day plan and a “buddy” who can serve as their go-to person. Due to Atlassian’s growth, we have naturally occurring opportunities to grow in the job, take on challenging assignments or work on cool new projects. Professional development conversations are continuous because of this.
Anything else you would like to add?

**Greg:** Professional development should be a part of a broader career plan.

**Emma:** In the NFP sector it is about far more than a slick business card. Instead, it’s about hard work, resilience, a passion for change and the strength of your convictions. In my opinion, relationship-building is more important than business networking.

**Sam:** Millennials make up nearly 70% of our employee population, and learning and development is one of the key reasons that they stay with a company.

**Kate:** What gets measured gets done - we all know that. Organisations have to put metrics around their goals for gender diversity and hold service providers and their own managers to account for delivering to those goals.