

How to write an Individual Development Plan

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An individual development plan (IDP) is a document that outlines the projected growth for an employee. It is an agreement between an employee and employer that certain skills should be improved or learned or that overall performance should meet a certain standard by a specified time.

What is the purpose of an IDP?

An IDP is a tool to help employees in career and personal development. Its primary purpose is to help employees reach short and long-term career goals, as well as improve current job performance. An IDP is not a performance evaluation tool or a one-time activity. It should be looked at like a partnership between the employee and the supervisor. It involves preparation and continuous feedback. Many agencies require IDPs for new and current employees. It is encouraged throughout many organizations.

Individual development planning benefits the organisation by aligning employee training and development efforts with its mission, goals, and objectives. When using an IDP, supervisors develop a better understanding of their employees' professional goals, strengths, and development needs resulting in more realistic staff and development plans. Employees take personal responsibility and accountability for their career development, acquiring or enhancing the skills they need to stay current in required skills. Some of the benefits of an IDP are:

- Provide an administrative mechanism for identifying and tracking development needs and plans
- Assist in planning for the company's training and development requirements
- Align employee training and development efforts with its mission, goals, and objectives

It is considered good management practice and many companies have developed their IDP planning process and forms. While there is no one "correct" form for recording an employee's development plan, an effective plan should include at minimum the following key elements:

- **Employee profile** - name, position title, office, grade/pay band
- **Career goals** - short-term and long-term goals with estimated and actual completion dates
- **Development objectives** - linked to organisational and cluster mission/goals/objectives and employee's development needs and objectives
- **Training and development opportunities** - activities in which the employee will pursue with estimated and actual completion dates. These activities may include formal classroom training, web-based training, rotational assignments, shadowing assignments, on-the-job training, self-study programs, and professional conferences/seminars
- **Signatures** - supervisor and employee signature and date

How do you go about developing an IDP?

The IDP process requires communication and interaction between the supervisor and employee. It involves five phases:

1. **Pre-Planning** - supervisor and employee prepare independently for meeting
2. **Employee/Supervisor Meeting** - discuss employee strengths, areas for improvement, interests, goals, and organizational requirements
3. **Prepare IDP** - employee, in consultation with the supervisor, completes plan for individual development
4. **Implement Plan** - employee pursues training and development identified in the plan
5. **Evaluate Outcomes** - supervisor/employee evaluate the usefulness of training and development experiences

A personal development plan is something that is written as an account of self-reflection and improvement. This will also be a detailed action plan that will help you with your personal, academic and career goals. This will usually be created within the workplace or when you are attending a place of learning. This plan allows you to look at your strengths and weaknesses and find a way of improving yourself.

Creating an IDP takes time and planning. However, writing and implementing an IDP can help you to identify and develop the professional skills needed to reach your goals, and can keep you on the track to success. It is an important process that helps you achieve your potential, reach your goals and take charge of your professional development.

It is Important to Take Your Career into Your Own Hands

Your professional development is your responsibility. While your employer might require or encourage you to create an IDP as part of your performance review process, the chances are this will involve you steering clear of any goals that see you leaving your current company.

Writing your own, private IDP can help you plan to meet your long-term career goals, and will assist in identifying the skills and actions you need to reach them.

Your dreams will only ever be dreams if you do nothing about them. Writing an IDP is taking the first step to making those dreams come true.

Here are 9 steps to completing an IDP:

1. Assess where you are now.

How is your career currently progressing? Assessing your current career situation is a good place to start. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What have you been doing over the past year, 3 years or 5 years to help your professional development?

- Are you where you thought you'd be at this stage in your career?

If the answers are 'nothing' and 'no', an IDP is a great place to start to begin turning that around. Even if those were not your answers, this step will give you the chance to assess the effectiveness of the strategies and actions you have been taking in the past.

Take this opportunity to reflect on your actions and be honest with yourself. Identify, and write down, any actions that have specifically helped, or hindered, your professional development.

2. Identify your specific career goals.

Where do you want to be? Answering this question can take a **lot** of time. It is a good idea to carve out a block of about thirty minutes; sit calmly and do not rush yourself.

To help you get started with identifying your career goals, ask yourself the following questions:

- **What does success mean to you?** Is it financial success, a promotion to a managerial position or starting your own business? The definition of 'success' varies from person to person. There is no 'one-size-fits-all', so you need to understand what *your* motivations are to answer this question.
- **What activities do you love the most?** Are these activities a part of your current job? If not, can you change this?
- **Are you experiencing a version of this success in your current job?**
- **Where would you like to be in 5 years?** This is a good time to identify your long-term goals.

Defining your long and short-term goals can be scary. It can take a long time and a lot of thought, and you might start to get overwhelmed by the enormity of all the decisions, but that's alright. Remember it is okay to think big (like 'dream job' big) because with a proper IDP anything should be possible.

Just make sure that your goals are '**SMART**':

- Specific.
- Measurable.
- Achievable.
- Realistic.
- Timely.

3. Gather information

What professional skills are needed to get where you want to go? After you have identified your long and short-term goals, researching what you need to achieve them is the next step. Which skills under your belt will impress at interviews and make you an ideal candidate?

Take this time to break your long-term goals down into more manageable steps. For example, if your

long-term goal is to become an Area Manager, identify what the individual steps required to reach that position might be. These could be progressing to a supervisor position, being promoted to Team Manager and then Area Manager. Each one of these positions will have different job and skill requirements, and breaking them down into individual steps will allow you to create a better plan for the future.

Meeting with your line manager is a good place to start, as they might help you identify other areas you need to work on and offer suggestions about upcoming training opportunities provided by the company. Researching the criteria for the job you envision yourself having, and looking into new workshops that target the key skills needed in your profession, can also be helpful.

This step is important because it helps you identify the professional skills and abilities you need to help you reach your goals, enabling you to plan new learning and development opportunities that are relevant to your professional development.

4. Evaluate your professional skills.

Now that you have identified what professional skills are desirable for your ideal career path, take a moment to tick off ones you are already proficient in.

Knowing your current strengths is important, so you can clearly distinguish what you are lacking that might be holding you back.

5. Decide on a strategy.

After you have identified the areas you need to work on, you need to decide how you will remedy this. To be effective, your professional development should be;

- Job embedded.
- Strategic.
- Continuous and ongoing.

Perhaps you could sign up to skills workshops and seminars that your company is offering, get involved in formal Continuing, Professional Development (CPD) training or keep up to date with new technology relating to your field.

There are many strategic ways to develop the skills you need to accomplish your goals; take it in small chunks, relate all learning experiences to the skills identified by your IDP and remember this is a process of continual development – not a one-time thing.

6. Develop a timeline.

It is important to decide when you want to achieve your goals and laying out a time-frame is an important factor in making sure that you stick to your IDP. Knowing you have given yourself a deadline

means you are more likely to achieve your plans.

Plan your targets every year, make sure to give each target more time than you envision it taking because things rarely go to plan, and schedule your targets around opportunities you'd like to achieve.

By planning and scheduling your professional development, you will be the ideal candidate by the time that promotion you want rolls around.

7. Write it all down.

Keep detailed notes of your Professional Development Plan that you can update and alter as you go along. Writing it all down will help you remember your overall goal and all the steps you have laid out for yourself.

An IDP is not something to be written and forgotten. It is a career-long tool that you should refer to regularly.

Writing it down will also be handy for when you are ready to apply for that new position or promotion. You will have a detailed list of all the professional skills you have been working on, and examples of just how you have gone about facilitating your professional development.

8. Evaluate your plan

Before you commit to your IDP, look over it. Check again that all the goals and steps are:

- Specific.
- Measurable.
- Achievable.
- Realistic.
- Timely.

Even though you should dream big, setting unreasonable goals and targets will make the experience of following an IDP stressful and disheartening. It is important to evaluate your plan to make sure you can meet your targets – be it task or time-frame – and that your goals are realistic and achievable.

9. Measure your progress

Are you meeting your targets? Assessing your progress regularly is important. Even though you know your professional development is important professional education can quickly fall in priority.

Measuring your progress will help you know if you are hitting your 'checklists', meeting your targets and are on track for reaching your goals. You may need to set more manageable steps, or make new targets, or even set new goals.

Remember that plans change and, as you go through your career, your goals will progress with you. Learning is a lifelong process, and it's important to continue your professional development to ensure career success.

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