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# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## What is your professional development plan?

Professional development is essential. Call it onboarding, training, or required professional learning, it not only helps employers get the best contributions from staff members, but it can build confidence in employees who expand their skills. Ideally, it is ongoing.

The work environment is constantly changing, especially in the uncertain times of the COVID era. Learning new skills and learning how to learn is a benefit for workers and managers alike. In schools, it allows staff to model learning for a lifetime to their students.

### Professional learning is self-care

The pandemic has created feelings of anxiety and insecurity in many people. Many educators, in particular, have reported feeling this stress at high levels. Self-care is the recommended antidote to pandemic-related mental health concerns. But what does that mean?

Self-care can mean learning to say no and preserving personal time and boundaries. It can be focusing on physical health by eating well, exercising more and sleeping better. It could include a massage or dedicated social time with family and friends.

It could also mean reducing or eliminating worries about job skills and work stability by increasing tangible, high-demand skills to ensure that you are indispensable in your current job or sought after for your next prospects.

### The best training for you

To maintain certification, licensed staff must earn professional development units (PDUs). Staff may have prescribed training activities or choose to pursue specialized training to enhance or expand their skillset. The first step is to understand the goal of the training you seek. Do you need specific training, or do you want to explore a learning area? District managers, HR or school principals may have recommendations. Local or state professional networks may also offer opportunities to build skills while expanding professional networks.

### Professional learning as self-care

The Professional Learning Association suggests that professional learning is self-care. In the midst of the stress and uncertainty of the current era, finding meaning and satisfaction in our work is a means of self-care, and one way to do this is to focus on professional learning to master an area of interest.

To do this, three conditions must be met. According to learning coach and Superintendent Stacy Winslow, they are:

- **Mastery** – You must have the desire to master the activity. We all want to be the very

(Over)

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best educators we can possibly be, so working towards mastery is a condition that is easily met as we learn, practice, and aim to master new content or strategies.

- **Mindfulness** – You need to be mindful of your time, giving yourself space and opportunity to engage in the activity. When you really engage in professional learning, you have to set aside time to truly engage – you have to turn off email, limit distractions, and turn yourself over to the learning experience.
- **Mattering**— The activity you are engaging in needs to truly matter to you and to others. There is no question that this work matters. In fact, it matters now more than ever before because the students need us, and we need each other so much.

<https://learningforward.org/2021/11/23/professional-learning-is-self-care/>

### **Upskilling for mid-career workers**

Workers and employers benefit from low staff turnover. The upfront investment of hiring someone is substantial. After the initial onboarding, it makes financial sense to protect your investment in staff by helping them maintain or improve their skills. Also, high turnover among staff can damage employee morale and raise concerns about workplace culture.

Workers should be able to access high-quality training to keep updated on current changes to the workplace, their industry and COVID-related shifts in workplace philosophy and practices.

AARP makes a case for leveraging the vast experience and soft skills of mid-career workers: “The business case for upskilling and reskilling your existing workforce across the age spectrum has never been stronger. The ripple effect in closing your organization’s skills gap empowers your workforce, ensures business continuity, saves your organization on capital costs and meets the evolving needs of your customers. Communicating reskilling and upskilling opportunities to your existing employees with respect, collaboration and transparency will help pave the way for success.”

The emphasis is on sensitivity to ensure that workers feel respected. It is not a matter of age but on a recognition of the experience in the field or position and the need to consider new focus areas or gaps that could help them grow in their job or mentor new hires.

<https://bit.ly/31sSQOb>

### **Creating a learning plan**

After you define your professional development goals, you must spend some time developing a plan for success. As the saying goes, goals without plans are just wishes.

Employers may also require a written plan or reflection as a pre-evaluation tool, especially if the goals are attached to funding requests for conferences, materials or training.

Duke University has a performance management section on their website that is for managers. These resources may be helpful self-reflection tools: “A professional development plan documents the goals, required skill and competency development, and objectives a staff member will need to accomplish in order to support continuous improvement and career development. A professional development plan is created by the manager working closely with the staff member to identify the necessary skills and resources to support the staff member’s career goals and the organization’s business needs.” <https://hr.duke.edu/managers/performance-management/professional-development-plan>

As long as the plan and the process are not overly intimidating, the process may be a helpful

way for employer and employee to understand and clarify the needs and understanding of the work. Excellent communication skills could help avoid any misunderstanding.

#### Suggested professional development activities

When we think of professional development, we may imagine reading books, completing online modules or attending workshops or conferences. Opportunities for career development and continuous improvement are much more expansive than that. In addition to learning hard skills and current trends, employees can gain leadership experience through in-house job transfer or shadowing stints.

The following suggested activities are part of the Duke planning process:

- Expand accountabilities through meaningful leadership and risk-taking opportunities.
- Attend department meetings, agree to assignments as needed.
- Seek job coaching and mentorship from a supervisor, including availability for questions and thought-partnering to solve problems.
- Agree to formal presentation opportunities.
- Participate in job shadowing by a supervisor to prepare to assume leadership responsibilities.
- Take a lateral transfer to broaden knowledge.
- Consider enrolling in a college course for specific skills.
- Become involved in community or civic organizations.

*<https://hr.duke.edu/managers/performance-management/professional-development-plan/development-suggestions>*

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*Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant*