

How to Draft Your Personal Development Plan

BY ROBERT MCHENRY, CPCU

Like most career-oriented individuals, I reached a point in which my career was at a standstill. In my own mind, it was time to either move up or move on. Being a long-time Westfield employee, my preference was to seek an internal opportunity that would be more challenging and gratifying. So I searched Westfield's on-line job postings, applied for several positions and participated in many interviews. Going into the interviews I felt very positive about

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myself and about my successful career as a claims professional. Unfortunately, I was rejected for those positions even though I met the qualifications.

In the midst of my frustration, my colleagues suggested that I draft a personal development plan. This is a career-planning tool that forces you to look both inward and outward at yourself. It requires you to create a written, formalized

action plan in which you identify your strengths and weaknesses, career objectives, find a mentor, take education

classes, read self-help books and help others with their plans. It was also emphasized, during the interview process, the importance of relaxing, being yourself, and showing your sense of humor.

Upon completion of my plan's first draft, I accepted my supervisor's offer to help me with mock interviews in preparation for the next position. It's very insightful to see yourself as others see you. So when the next interview came along, I was better prepared and it went much smoother. Although the position was offered to someone else, I sat down with my supervisor and the hiring manager of that position to solicit constructive criticism. I took their feedback, revised my personal development plan and interviewed for the claims manager position in Jacksonville, Florida. The end result: I got the job!

It's hard to believe that the move to Florida was just over a year ago. The streak was over. Could it be that easy? No, it wasn't easy and it took a lot of work and self-reflection. Here are the details of my plan that might just help you land that dream job.

- The six self-help books read are *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, *The Discipline of Execution*, *Feedback Is a Gift*, *The Stress of Organizational Change and How to Handle It*, and *Inspirational Quotes for Managers and Designated for Success*.
- Get a mentor. My mentor was not only a good friend, but he was my sales training course instructor. He was patient with me and objective in the advice that he provided — including a brick-to-head wake up call.
- A leader is always learning. I graduated from the National Leadership Institute in Las Vegas

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and have taken at least one course yearly in Tampa and Phoenix. Other courses included the *Dale Carnegie On-Line Manager's Course* and internal training.

- My employer offered psychological profiles. The tests included *Big Five*, *Myers-Briggs* and *Lominger 360*. What my manager recommended (and I took it to heart) was to review these documents often and share them with my peers and direct reports. Revealing my inner make-up was scary at first, but soon I realized that sharing this personal information fosters understanding.

Take the two biggest strengths from these profiles and build on them. Target your two prominent weaknesses and work on them, too. Yes, it is okay to have weaknesses and to be working on improvement.

- Take the two biggest strengths from these profiles and build on them. Target your two prominent weaknesses and work on them, too. Yes, it is okay to have weaknesses and to be working on improvement.
- Talk to your peers and ask their help while you are working on a weakness. Let them know what you are doing and tell them it is okay to bluntly say, "You're doing it again." Hey, I'm revealing my inner self by writing this article and working on two weaknesses at once.
- I put my plan in writing. You are looking at the "30,000 foot view." Update yours and review it often.
- Help others with their plans and share your experience.

Write your plan and put it into action. Please let me know how it is working and if there is anything I can do to help you achieve your career objectives.

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