

## Using Professional Competency to Advance your Career

Written by: Tracey Renzi, CM, M.Ed, MBA | July 15, 2015



*Professional competency* means an individual has the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform his or her job at a high level of quality and expertise. Professional competency is not something that can be developed overnight; it takes time, patience, and the drive to learn and achieve success. This is true at all levels of employment, and especially for professionals desiring to advance their careers.

There are a number of ways to develop professional competency, and using a combination of them over time will help to ensure your development is well-rounded. A good starting place is to acquire an understanding of your company's mission and vision. Knowing the purpose of your company and why it exists will not only help you to comprehend its strategy and goals, it will also clarify how the department you work in contributes toward achieving and sustaining the company's mission. Other ways to develop professional competency include:

## Understanding Department-wide Tasks

Get familiar with the job tasks your staff performs and be willing to assist when needed, especially in emergencies. Leadership and management are not just about guiding staff; they are also about knowing what to do and when to do it. If you fully understand the role of your team within the department and can assist with just about any task, people will take notice. In doing this, you cannot be afraid to ask questions of your staff. There is much to learn from those you supervise. This may take you outside of your comfort zone, but in the end will add to your ability to perform, increase your confidence, and grow your competency.

## Finding a Mentor

Find someone in a position you aspire to, who has longevity and organizational knowledge, to serve as a mentor. This does not have to be a formal mentor/protégé relationship; it can be as informal as chats over coffee, as formal as regularly scheduled meetings, or something in between. Use your mentor's experiences, knowledge, and advice to help you develop the insight and confidence you will need to advance in your career. This relationship will provide even stronger lessons if the person is someone after whom you model yourself; someone who leads, manages, and interacts similarly to you.

## Reading Professional Publications

Books, articles, and professional organizations offer an abundance of information to develop professional competency. These resources should not be limited to the position you hold now, but grow your knowledge for positions you hope to have. One of the best books recommended to me when I first got into management was “Good To Great” by Jim Collins. Don’t let the topic of becoming a great company fool you, as much of this book applies on an individual level. Other books that have helped me include: “The First 90 Days” by Michael Watkins, “50 Management Ideas You Really Need To Know” by Edward Russell-Walling, and “First, Break All The Rules” by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. Professional organizations offer many resources that will help as you work your way up to the next level. Don’t limit yourself just to those organizations associated with your current position or company either. Look for organizations that offer local, regional, and national affiliates, topics that interest you, training, and best practices. All of these will help you build competencies and, along the way, advance personal and professional growth.

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As much as you manage downward, you must focus on managing upward as well. This includes demonstrating the ability to communicate on all levels; developing and maintaining relationships; aligning values with the organization and the staff you manage; decision making, especially in a crisis situation, and effectively leading your team. The best way to do this is to seek out and achieve professional competency, regardless of the source. There is no one perfect solution to gaining the professional competency needed to advance your career.

There are numerous options to select from that will allow you to gain the experience needed to advance. As you work on building competency, believe in yourself and your abilities. This will lead to the confidence and competency needed to achieve your ultimate goal.

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## About the Author



### **Tracey Renzi, CM, M.Ed, MBA**

With over 15-years in Information Technology, Tracey has developed a myriad of expertise across multiple business and operations platforms. Tracey holds an M.Ed. and MBA, along with multiple professional certifications in customer service and management. She is dedicated to giving back to the community through the funding of animal rescue efforts and support of businesses with environmentally and socially oriented agendas.

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