

How to Advance as an Entry Level Manager

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Have you ever worked with an amazingly talented, knowledgeable and skilled manager? How did that manager manage and influence, inspire and improve individuals, teams and organizations to optimal levels? You have likely seen different types of managers through the years, some who far exceeded expectations and developed highly successful teams and careers. Some who moved on to become great leaders within or outside their respective organizations. These managers were highly effective. They worked hard, were aligned to organizational strategies and goals, and they achieved excellent results and built lasting relationships within their organizations. They understood the environments they worked in (internal and external), were knowledgeable and assertive, and they knew how to apply what they learned. Their knowledge was rich in the areas of planning, goal setting, coaching, training, organizing, communicating, controlling, and more. They were highly efficient managers. How did these managers develop their knowledge and skills? The answer is simple; they practiced what they learned and they gained valuable experience on-the-job over time. This, plus professional development, helped them to advance and become seasoned in their roles. They gained further knowledge and skills through-the-job and off-the-job. These three areas are where professional development occurs. It is a blend of

formal and informal processes, activities, and experiences a manager goes through in his or her development. It is a continuous process which produces many short-and long-term benefits for the manager, the organization, and its stakeholders. It leads to positive outcomes and can accelerate a manager's learning curve and success.

Professional development helps people reach their full potential

We believe people are the most important asset in an organization. Kevin Cope (2012), in his book, *Seeing the Big Picture, Business Acumen to Build Your Credibility, Career, and Company*, tells us there are five key drivers in business -- cash, profits, growth, asset utilization, and people. Forbes School of Business Professor and Academic Department Chair, Dr. Ray Powers (2015), who founded the first Corporate Project Management Group within the Bell System, reminds us as managers, "Resource allocation is the most important thing that we do, and I define resources as people, time, money, and assets." In both examples, it is obvious that people are a key component for success. People matter and they are an extremely valuable resource to manage and develop. Therefore, we need to provide them with consideration and a path for growth, and develop them to their full potential. One way to provide professional development opportunities is to create and develop a *learning organization* with formal and informal methods for educating, training and developing talent. Weiss (2012) tells us there are three levels of learning organizations: individual, group/team, and the organization itself. "Each of these levels affects the other. The collective knowledge of an organization can serve as a resource for an individual, as well as a group or team. In order to leverage all levels of learning within an organization, the structure needs to be flexible enough to facilitate both collaboration and communication, whether that's through a flat structure or modularity" (Weiss, 2012, p.208). Weiss continues to suggest that learning organizations can take multiple approaches (Weiss, 2012, p. 209) to include:

1. **Adaptive Learning (using past experience to influence the future)**
2. **Anticipatory Learning (anticipating the future)**
3. **Action Learning (reflecting on the present)**

As managers, we need to create an agile organization that is resilient to continuous change and one that has effective managers and leaders in place so that the organization's mission and strategic vision cascade down into all levels of the organization. How can this be accomplished? The answer is simple, set the right learning context and understand your culture. Don't think of professional development as a formal process. Instead, think of it as an ongoing process that includes formal and informal ways for employees to grow.

Is professional development always happening in organizations?

Don't think of professional development as something that occurs only when one is established in an organization. It can and should start early. For entry level managers, a

professional development plan will serve to clarify career goals, identify milestones to attain those goals, and identify effective professional development opportunities early in a manager's career. To create a professional development plan, you need to conduct a self-assessment and scrutinize your interests, motivations, and values. You have to decide where you want to go and develop goals, action plans, methods, and activities to get there. Remember, it is a never-ending process, and, at intervals in your learning and development continuum, you need to check your progress, do some fine tuning, and make adjustments to revise your plan, as needed. According to Chrissy Scivicque (2011), in creating a professional development plan, always remember that: "It's Up to YOU...It's Never "Final"...

[and] It is Never Done". **Professional development leads to**

learning, and learning leads to knowledge! "Learning is an engaging process that leads to knowledge. The concept of knowledge is an ironic one. You can discover knowledge (claim it, possess it) at the end of a learning process, but it is invisible. You know you possess it; you can say, "OK, I've got it!", but that doesn't make it visible. New knowledge becomes visible when you act on it—then it becomes concrete, visible to others, and is fully owned by you. We are all actors on the stage of knowledge every day" (Alexander, Clugston and Tice, 2009, p.3). The rates of information creation and change in the workplace have created an ever-increasing need to learn and develop. Begin to create your professional development plan early, stay proactive, and take responsibility for your personal growth and development inside and outside the organization. New knowledge and skills will give you confidence and motivation. They will help you stay competitive and resilient!

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