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FIRM MANAGEMENT

How to Seek and Find Professional Development

It's all too easy to feel stagnant in your career, no matter how much success you've achieved. You could be a partner at a major firm and still suffer from a sense of wanting more. You know the story. You have a great job, opportunities to move up ...

Amy Vetter, CPA • Oct. 01, 2019



“A passive approach to professional development will leave you by the wayside.”

~ Tom Peters, Author of “In Pursuit of Excellence”

It's all too easy to feel stagnant in your career, no matter how much success you've achieved. You could be a partner at a major firm and still suffer from a sense of wanting more. You know the story. You have a great job, opportunities to move up, your work is valued, but something just doesn't feel right. You begin to wonder if your sense of listlessness is the result of falling out of love with your profession. I've gotten everything I've wanted, but I'm still feeling unsatisfied. What's wrong with me?

The truth of the matter is that these feelings are perfectly normal and are not at all related to your position or the value you provide to your team. When it comes to our careers, **advancement and development** are not the same thing. It's entirely possible to advance without learning new things, adding new skills to your repertoire, or growing in your ability to do what you do well. Oftentimes, the moments when we lose focus on our development in order are precisely the moments when we feel directionless and without professional validation. In other words, it's essential to making our jobs feel meaningful and rewarding.

When I talk about professional development, I'm not talking about the required continuing education credits many of us have to complete.. Instead, I mean learning opportunities that help us with our growth, outside of compliance, that makes you a more capable team member and a more agile contributor to your organization. Learning begins with having a **mindset** that you're still a beginner and have a thirst for knowledge. It may also involve ditching bad habits that keep you from pursuing new opportunities. Always, though, it begins with an honest impetus from within you. Unlike a promotion, nobody can tap you on the shoulder and give you development. It's important to identify what we need and find it, so we can feel fulfilled.

When to be comfortable in the uncomfortable

People are leaving their jobs at **higher rates** than any time in recent history, many of them seeking out better compensation doing a similar job at a similar company. The story of the one-company worker is becoming more and more of a rarity, and with good reason. Studies indicate the workers who change companies can earn as much as 15 percent more when they switch. Some experts even recommend **switching jobs regularly** in order to have the most fulfilling career.

It's important to note that chances for development may be no better just by virtue of switching jobs. Sure, you'll have the first six months when everything feels new and fresh, when you're learning the systems and every day is a new challenge, but what happens after that? We can't run away from who we are, the skills we have, and the gaps we need to conquer. It's up to us to step back in any situation that we are in and be more of an observer and study it. If you believe with the right support and educational opportunities you can reach your desired milestones, than jumping ship doesn't necessarily solve it. Being able to approach a manager or leader and discuss your aspirations is key in ensuring you are in the right place and the company wants the best for you as well.

The avenues for development

Here's the good news when it comes to development: Once you decide to seek it out, there are countless places you can find it. Mentorship is one of the surest sources of development. Seek out people who are leaders in your field, both inside and outside of your workplace, and ask them for guidance. That may sound like an intimidating prospect, but mentors want to help people who are passionate and willing to learn. [Demonstrating your interest](#) in receiving guidance from somebody can lead to massive growth.

Additionally, books, podcasts, and other passive resources can be hugely beneficial for development. Try subscribing to a few podcasts that focus on topics you'd like to improve, whether their technical skills, technological awareness, or interpersonal relationships. Of course, real development is only going to come once you've taken the time to [define what success](#) looks like to you. If development is going to be real and lasting, it can't be cookie-cutter or done in an attempt to appease somebody else.

The beauty of our information-saturated age is the breadth and depth of resources available to you. Most of the time, simply motivating yourself to take the first step is the hardest part. Once you can do that, you can unlock a world where work is never boring and the only question you start ask is, "How can I get better today?"

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