



Get Where You Need to Go

A guide to professional development

"Where do you see yourself in five years?"

It's likely you've faced this classic job interview question at some point. But even if you're not preparing for an interview, it's worthwhile asking yourself this every so often to make sure you're on track in your career. If you're lucky, you might be happy with where you are, or reached your career goals. If so, this guide might not be for you, but if you're one of the large percentage of us who haven't yet reached our career goals, and still have big dreams and aspirations, then keep reading.

But how do you reach your career goals? Simply put, professional development.

Professional development is the expansion of your skills and knowledge and will take you a long way in furthering your career. But to even get to that point, you first need to identify the relevant areas for development. Easier said than done, right? What if you don't know where to start?

This guide is filled with tips and hints to help you discover your starting point – the skills that will get you where you want to go. And they don't have to be skills which require degrees or diplomas, you may find a small practical skill you want to develop, which will only require a couple of 'how to' videos, or maybe you realise you need to refresh some skills you already have. Or maybe it's soft skills, or learning a theory or context you're after. The options are endless!

But whatever it is that you need, this guide will help you on your way to broadening your horizons and skill set.

To help, we've broken the guide into four sections:

- Gathering information
- Assessing your skills and finding suitable training
- Planning for success
- Putting your skills into practice



Getting You Where You Want to Go: tips and advice

This guide is not a prescription of what you need to do – you can pick and choose – but it is roughly laid out in a sensible order, and it'll be well worth trying to follow it.

The first section is designed to help you gather information about what skills you might want to develop, and we highly recommend you follow at least one of these before moving on to the other sections. Trust us, they'll be a lot easier if you've gone to proper lengths to gather the information you need first.

"Change is the end result
of all true learning."

– Leo Buscaglia



Gathering information

Talk to your manager

The first port of call should be your manager. If you're not sure where you can go in your role, they'll likely have an idea. In the very least, raising the question will prompt them to think about it and look into what your options might be. So, have an open discussion with them and see what they have to say.

Seek out (constructive) feedback

Feedback is a key part of professional development and it roughly falls into two buckets - positive and constructive.

Positive feedback can boost your motivation, creativity, morale and job satisfaction. Constructive feedback, on the other hand, focuses specifically on areas that you can develop or improve. Areas which might not be your strongest. And as uncomfortable as it can make you feel (and the person giving the feedback), it is just as important as positive feedback.

Seek it out. It'll give you invaluable insights into which skills you should be working on.

Talk to others in similar roles

Who do you admire? Who is doing the job you want to do but is two to three steps ahead of where you are? Talk to these people. Find out what skills they have, how they got them, and the sort of projects they have worked on which really improved their work or stretched them. And then use their advice to find out what skills you should be working on.

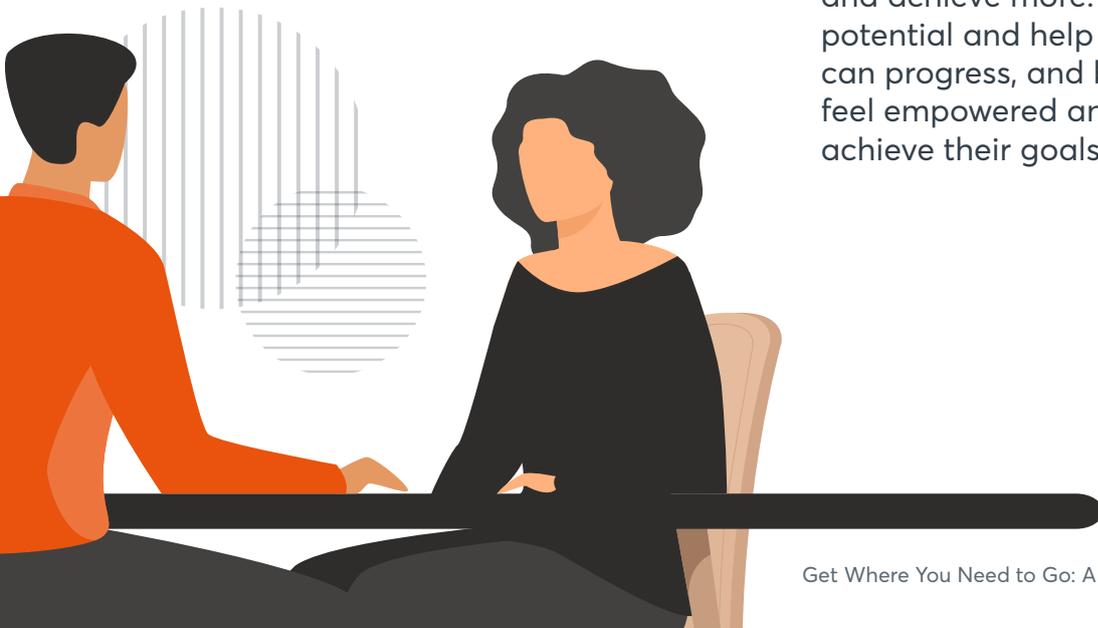
"Study hard at what interests you the most in the most undisciplined, irreverent and original manner possible."

– Richard Feynman

Find a coach

If you're at a loss as to where you want to go, a coach might be useful.

Coaching doesn't include teaching of specific skills, but focuses more on what skills, tools and resources a person already has and builds on these to help them progress further and achieve more. The aim is to uncover their potential and help them realise how they can progress, and by the end they should feel empowered and equipped to set out and achieve their goals.



Assessing your skills and finding the right resources

Make a skills matrix

Usually, a skills matrix is done by a manager to assess the skills in their team, but there is no reason why you can't do one yourself. Using the information you've gathered, write out what skills are required for your job and assess what you have, what competency you are and so forth. This will help clarify where you are with the skills, what gaps you have, and what you need to do to improve.

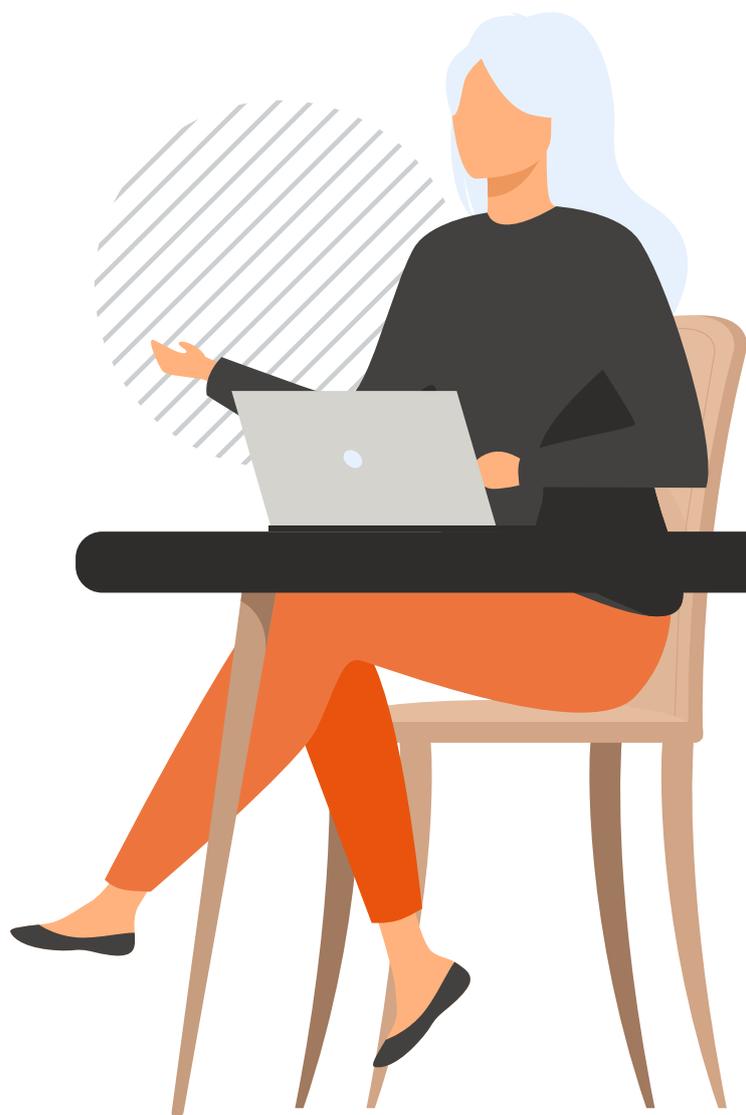
Need help setting one out? Read [this article](#).

"There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning."

– Jiddu Krishnamurti

Hunt for suitable training or resources

It's unlikely that'll you find areas to develop that don't require some resources or training to aid you. It may not be a full-blown training course you need, but some how-to videos, guides or downloadable resources instead, or a bite-size online course you can dip in and out of. It may even be a book. Whatever it is, find out what you need to do in order to effectively develop these skills you're after.



Ask for a mentor

Mentoring is an example of peer-to-peer support, and focuses on teaching a specific skill or skills. As you can imagine, it can be a fantastic way to learn first-hand about skills. For it to be successful, the mentee needs to be paired up with a more experienced peer – not necessarily a more senior colleague, just someone who has the desired skill – and the relationship between the two needs to be based on trust.

Lots of organisations have a mentoring programme set up to aid development within the company, recognising that it is a useful way of driving long-term growth and career development. So, why don't you see if your company offers the option?

Want to discover more about mentoring? Read [our article](#). It also covers coaching, explaining the differences, similarities and the appropriate time in which to call on them.

Planning for success

Create a professional development plan

"But how am I going to achieve these goals? How am I going to make the time for the training? When am I going to make the time?"

When you're faced with these daunting questions, a professional development plan (also known as a personal development plan) is what you need. A plan which details exactly how you are going to achieve your goals.

Commonly used in workplaces as a way of helping employees advance and progress, a professional development plan will help you organise and track future actions you need to take to achieve your goals. Using the information you have gathered, it will give you a structure to help you know how and when you'll make the time to develop the skills. By outlining, setting and refining your goals and putting a plan in place, it is just the tool you need to help you focus and work with the intention required to develop those skills.

When creating one, make sure it's realistic and give yourself milestones or reasons to keep invested in the plan. Set up regular meetings with your manager to discuss progress or areas in which you may need further support. Don't just say 'develop skill', but break it down further into specific tasks, and then set up daily, weekly and quarterly plans to help you know exactly when you're going to work on them and by what point you will have achieved your goal.

To read a detailed guide on how to create a professional development plan, have a look at [our article](#).

"The future belongs to those who learn new skills and combine them in creative ways."

– Robert Greene



Putting your skills into practice

Use the knowledge and skills in your role

As with any training programme, it isn't just about undertaking the training. That isn't going to get you the skills you need. It may give you the knowledge but to make sure you retain this, you need to use it. So, make sure to incorporate your newly acquired skills or insights into your job – it's the only way to properly acquire them.

Top tip: Have a growth mindset

Learning and development goes hand in hand with failing, with making mistakes. This isn't always an easy pill to swallow, but adopting a growth mindset will help. This means getting comfortable with

the discomfort that comes with learning something new. It's hard work and not always easy, but it'll be worth it in the end and giving yourself permission to fail and make mistakes – a key part of growth mindset – will take you a long way.

When it comes to your professional development, our training courses may be just what you're looking for. To browse our extensive library, go to: www.virtual-college.co.uk/courses

