**Tool 2.4: Career Development Action Plan Instructions**

This tool will be especially helpful for those of you who work at organizations that don’t have their own career development process.

The goal of this activity is to develop your vision for your career over the next few years. Where do you want to be five years from now?

You can use this information in your career planning discussions with your manager.

**Step 1: Your Target Vision -** List your career goals.

**Vision** – How do you envision your career path over the next one, three, five, and ten years? Do not limit yourself to your current career. There may be other leadership or career goals you want to achieve, such as starting your own company, helping to create a new non-profit organization, or getting into politics. This vision will help you to decide where you want to invest your time and energy so that you will achieve the results you want.

Imagine it is five years into the future and you are thinking back on your career accomplishments over the last five years. What are these accomplishments? If you do not set your target, you will not know where you are going, or when and if you get there!

Write down your career vision:

**Step 2: Required Competency List -** List the required competencies for each goal. See table 1 (page 3) column B for an example.

In order to accomplish your five-year vision, what are the skills, abilities, and knowledge a person in this position would need? This list makes up the required set of competencies a successful person in this career would possess. You may need to do some research to find out what the necessary skills and competencies are for each goal.

**Step 3: Analysis of Current Competencies -** Assess your current abilities. See table 1, column C for an example.

Take a look at the list of competencies and assess your current ability on each competency: is it fully developed or does it need further development? You may be surprised to find you have some fully developed competencies already – great! This plan is to assist you in your own development, so make sure you are honest and realistic both in terms of your evaluation of your current skills and in terms of how much you will be able to accomplish each year. Remember, you have a personal life, too! Keeping these things in mind will result in an inventory of the competencies in which you are already proficient as well as a list of those competencies which need further development i.e. your strengths and opportunities for growth.

The result is your gap analysis. The gap is the difference between your future vision or your target and where you are now.

**Step 4: Create an Action Plan**

From this gap analysis, you can create your action plan to ensure you will reach your target in the time frame you have set. For this action plan, write your short term one- to two-year and longer term three- to five-year goals. In describing how these goals will be achieved, create an action plan. Create a reasonable timeline for accomplishing the goals in your action plan. Determine the action steps in your plan, how you will achieve them, and by when. Address the following questions:

* How are you going to close the gap to ensure you acquire the necessary skills, abilities and knowledge?
* What specific actions will you have to take to make it happen?
* What kinds of training, education, and other experiences are necessary?
* What will you have to do to acquire the under-developed skills and abilities which are needed to achieve your goals?

Consider opportunities available at work. Here are a few ideas; keep in mind, not all of them will be applicable or possible for you:

* Ask your manager for coaching regarding a specific area.
* Ask your manager for specific assignments in the areas of interest (including stretch assignments). How can you add value to the organization?
* What job-crafting opportunities are available?
* Ask for a transfer to a different department.
* Volunteer for special assignments, taskforces, or committees.
* Utilize the training opportunities which are offered at work.
* Find a mentor.
* Become a mentor.
* Network with others in your organization.

Consider opportunities available outside of work:

* Training courses/seminars.
* Adult education classes.
* Other kinds of experiences which might assist you through management or committee experience such as joining your Home Owners’ Association, the Parent Teachers Association, or a non-profit organization.
* Volunteer to coach a team.
* Join a professional organization.
* Make a presentation at a conference, or at a professional organization meeting.
* Write articles about your areas of interest.
* Network with others in your field/in the area in which you want to progress.
  + How about going on some informational interviews in companies you like and with people who would be able to give you information about the kind of work in which you are interested?
    - At the end of the interview, don't forget to ask for the names of a couple of other people who would also be willing to talk to you.

Here are a couple of additional things to consider:

* Remember that your goals should be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timed or timely.
* Be realistic in terms of what you can achieve and by when. If you’re studying, too, there is often not much time for anything else besides family.
* How will you know you are reaching your target?
* What is your timeline, and how will you monitor, measure, and evaluate your progress?

You ought to review your plan frequently, maybe once per month or, at least, once a quarter. You can also revise it when necessary to check off the items you have completed and to amend the action plan items as you re-prioritize your goals and amend your target.

As you develop your plan, it might be a good idea to put yourself in the place of a manager or mentor. If you were the mentor or supervisor of this person, what might be some recommendations you would suggest?

Table 1: Gap Analysis

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **A** | **B** | **C** |
| **Goals** | **Required Competencies/**  **Experience** | **Fully Developed?**  **(Y/N)\*** |
| Project management experience | Ability to lead meetings with all stake-holders | Y |
| “ | Effective communication skills | N |
| “ | Budgeting | Y |
| “ | Time management | N |
| Facilitation skills | PowerPoint | N |

\* If not fully developed, see action plan.

From the information on this table, create your action plan—identify concrete action steps and a timeline; then state how you will measure/evaluate your progress.

Gap Analysis

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **A** | **B** | **C** |
| **Goals** | **Required Competencies/**  **Experience** | **Fully Developed?**  **(Y/N) \*** |
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\* If not fully developed, see action plan.