

Advancing Your State Career

Professional
Development Resources
for State Employees

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Relationship Building	5
Mentoring	6
Networking	8
Connect to Other Key Leaders	10
Managing Up	11
Career Management Resources for Managers and Supervisors	13
Career Development	13
Managing Your Developmental Experiences as a Supervisor/Manager	15
Simple Questions to Ask Before, During, and After Planned Development Experiences	17
Job Search	18
Cover Letters	18
Informational Interviewing	20
Interviewing Skills	23
Change and Career Resilience	30
Happenstance Exercise	30
Career Planning	31
Developing a Vision & Goals for Your Career Plan	32
Developing a Career Vision Statement	32
Setting Career Development Goals	34
Decision-Making	34
Taking Action	35
Self-Assessment	38
Skill Types Relevant to Career Development	38
Strengths Scan & Talents Inquiry Exercise	39
Education and Training	40
Developmental Experiences	41
Encourage You to Learn From Work Experiences	43
Resources and Tools	45
Trainings and Workshops	45
Books	45
Worksheets	46
Skill Development Resources and Tools	46
Mentoring Log	48
Career Planning Conversation Guide	49
Transferable Skills Checklist	50
Decision-Making Exercise	52
Work Experience Inventory & Worksheet	53



Introduction

The *Advancing Your State Career* handbook is a cross-departmental collaboration of career management tools and resources to help you assess and develop your skills, establish career awareness, and set goals. The tools and resources are built to enhance your professional experience at any stage of your career, whether you are new to state service, or an established manager over a large team.

By utilizing these resources you are taking an active approach in managing your career. The *Advancing Your State Career* handbook provides you with the professional development tools and resources to assist in your journey as a valued state employee. This handbook reflects the philosophy that career management is an intentional and important set of habits that enable you to achieve your career goals and establish career resiliency. The goals of career management include ensuring others recognize your value and see what you bring to the work environment. No matter what career stage you are in, investing in your professional goals is always a worthwhile pursuit!



Relationship Building

One of the most important career management habits for career success and resiliency is regular attention to building relationships. Mentors, role models, feedback providers and coaches can help us connect, gain support, develop and excel in our careers.

Ten Tips for Building Relationships

1. Know yourself and your goals
2. Learn how to articulate this information clearly and with enthusiasm
3. Listen to others and discover what their goals and skills are – send them information that you come across that they may be interested in
4. Seek others' feedback, opinions, consultation, and collaboration. Use the **Connecting to Key Leaders** section to guide you in building relationships with managers, supervisors, or other leaders who can have an impact on your career development.
5. Respond to others when asked for feedback, consultation, or collaboration and be generous with reciprocating your time as much as possible to others
6. Keep track of who you want to develop relationships with, who you already have relationships with, and how to reach them
7. Think about the kind of relationship you want with each person in your network – mentoring, informational interviewing, support/encouragement, feedback, introductions to others, information sharing, etc.
8. Update people in your network periodically on your career development
9. Don't expect any one person to play every possible function in your career development, particularly not your supervisor or spouse/partner - diversify your network
10. Thank people for their time, feedback, and help

There are numerous ways to build relationships. Here are some examples:

- Observe your colleagues and supervisor in meetings or other work interactions – What do they do well? What could you learn by watching them or talking with them about their process?
- Share your career goals with your supervisor and colleagues. Doing so will help your supervisor better understand your desire to work on various projects if you share your reasoning and needs for development.
- Ask colleagues (former and current), supervisors (former and current), professional contacts, career mentors and coaches, and friends for feedback on your strengths and areas for growth. Use the **Talents Inquiry and Strengths Scan exercise** to guide you in soliciting and analyzing this feedback.

Mentoring

Mentoring, one form of relationship-building, is an opportunity for nurturing potential in someone who wants to grow and develop.

This section provides information on the benefits of mentoring and how best to engage in the process. Much of the material in this section is from the University of California San Diego's Mentoring Guidebook: Key Information for Mentors and Mentees.

Roles that Mentors Can Adopt/Roles that Mentees Can Seek In a Mentor

Assessor

- Assess skills, interests, and motivations for advancement
- Provide feedback about observed behaviors and skills
- Identify strengths to be maximized
- Identify areas for improvement

Information Provider

- Inform about options, barriers, politics, and methods
- Give printed information
- Share personal opinions and experiences
- Provide continuing assessment information

Referral Agent

- Refer to others who can assist
- Refer to books, videos, classes, etc.

Guide

- Encourage focus on attainable goals
- Provide reality testing
- Help move around in political structure
- Help with "outer" career (job advancement)

Coach

- Encourage development of specific and appropriate goals
- Encourage action steps
- Assist in how to avoid barriers
- Act as role model about workplace conduct

Developer

- Encourage innovation
- Provide challenging assignments
- Be a public relations person for your mentee

Mentoring can take the traditional form of an ongoing relationship in which a mentor and a mentee meet on a regular basis to help the mentee develop her/his career, or it can be a shorter-term process of helping to nurture a mentee's growth during one or a few teachable moment(s).

Some people have one mentor whom they go to for all of their career development guidance needs, while others have many different mentors whom they seek out for different needs. Others don't develop any deep mentoring relationships at all, but nevertheless have fulfilling career lives.

Qualities of an Effective Mentee

- Asks questions
- Clarifies goals of the mentorship
- Works hard
- Learns (doesn't rush to know everything, allows time to learn)
- Flexible
- Keeps track of learning using a log such as the **Mentoring Log**
- Takes initiative
- Challenges him/herself
- Resourceful
- Creative
- Has a sense of humor
- Communicates with mentor if feeling overwhelmed
- Open to suggestions and change
- Not afraid to ask questions
- Is a good listener
- Patient with self as well as with process
- Comfortable being oneself
- Honest
- Unafraid
- Willing to accept criticism
- Adaptable (to change)

*Creating a **mentor program** will provide employees with the opportunity to gather information, develop peer support, learn more about management, and better understand your organizational culture.*

Topics discussed with mentors can include:

- career advice
- moving around and up in the organization
- feedback on skills/knowledge
- gaining perspective on the organization

Being in a mentoring relationship is a great development opportunity for both mentors and mentees.

Networking

Networking, the art of building alliances, is a critical skill for employees at all levels and in all job roles. It is often said, "It's not what you know, but WHO you know." This maxim is not completely true - skills and knowledge are also critical for job success, but there is a ring of truth to it.

Many people are intimidated by the word "networking" because they feel they don't have the personality type and/or skills to pass out business cards to a roomful of strangers or function like a social butterfly. Understand that there are many ways to network and it is less important how you do it compared with doing it at all. Some people feel more comfortable networking one-on-one rather than in large groups. Rather than worrying about what to say when networking, focus on asking people about themselves and their work. View networking as getting to know others and letting others get to know you.

Populating Your Network

The people in your network can:

- Help you solve a difficult problem
- Provide perspective
- Teach you new things
- Support your efforts
- Inform you of new opportunities
- Celebrate your successes
- Give you valuable feedback
- Help you relieve stress

Your network should include people with a variety of connections to you, and who serve you in different ways, such as:

- People with technical knowledge you need
- Social contacts
- Peers
- People with external perspectives
- People with business knowledge
- People with organizational awareness
- People with knowledge of your customers
- People with backgrounds different from yours (cultural, gender, age, educational, occupational, etc.)

Building Your Network can be done in many different ways. These include:

- Attending meetings and events to meet new people
- Attending meetings and events of your professional associations
- Joining an online network, such as LinkedIn
- Getting to know the colleagues in your department/division
- Inviting colleagues to lunch, coffee, etc.
- Working on cross-functional or cross-departmental teams
- Attending training classes and programs
- Volunteering to work on projects where your specific expertise is needed
- Creating or joining communities of practice

Working Your Network

Networking is a two-way street: you want to solicit your network to get the information and assistance you need. You also need to be a source of information back to your network:

- Share what you know
- Share resources you are aware of
- Offer insights, perspective, and feedback
- Offer your skills and expertise
- Look for opportunities to make offers and contributions
- Maintain regular formal or informal contact with key members of your network, including when you don't need anything from them
- Ask associates if they are aware of individuals with similar interests or who have what you are looking for, and ask if they would make an initial contact on your behalf

Social Networking

Online, or social networking, combines the traditional networking you do with the power of the Internet. It allows you to create a community of virtual contacts; people you never would have met any other way.

There are many sites devoted to business networking, and other sites that have a strong networking component, such as professional associations, alumni organizations, message boards, and on-line communities.

Examples of social networking sites include LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and Yahoo Groups.

Advantages

- There are thousands of discussion groups and community forums covering just as many subjects
- Some people feel more comfortable, since the interaction is not face-to-face
- Your contact may expand exponentially through the Internet
- You get immediate responses
- Everyone on the Internet is accessible to you

Pointers

- Initiate widely; continue selectively; cast a wide net for what you are looking for and then follow-up with the best prospects
- Do not use an alias
- Follow standard business etiquette
- Bookmark favorite sites
- Make sure to understand the privacy settings for the tool you are using so that you can protect your privacy and guard against people seeing your postings if you don't want them to

Connect to Other Key Leaders

Tips for Making the Most of Your Relationships with Key Leaders

Use the tips below to see how you can make the most of your relationships with key leaders, especially as you meet them for the first time and begin to forge strong connections.¹

1. Give them a brief explanation of why you seek their advice and guidance (i.e., connect their expertise and experience with one of your projects or development goals).
2. Provide them with a high-level understanding on the 1-2 things you want to learn and the outcomes you will achieve through learning from them.
3. If you are seeking the help of a key leader for a particular project, provide him or her with a quick overview of the project, specifically the results you are trying to achieve, how it links with broader organizational objectives, your project plan and timelines, potential challenges, and available resources.
4. If you are connecting with a key leader to work on a particular developmental goal, give him or her a brief summary of your performance review, specifically your strengths, development areas, development goals, and career aspirations.
5. Be open and honest about how you want learn and develop from the relationship:
6. Do you want them to play “devil’s advocate” and question your ideas and solutions?
7. Do you want them to ask you questions to help you think aloud about your challenges?
8. Do you want them just to share their experiences and understand how they dealt with a similar situation you are facing?
9. Do you want them to help you understand the situation you are currently struggling with?
10. Do you want them to help you brainstorm on potential solutions to your challenges?
11. Ask them to share background information about themselves (e.g. career history, education, hobbies, family, etc.)
12. Focus on part of your initial conversation on logistics – what is the best way to contact them, how often can you meet, what their preference is for meeting with each other, etc.

While your direct manager is best equipped to connect you with other leaders in and beyond the organization, it is your responsibility to build and sustain your networks over time. Be sure to seek your direct manager’s advice on how he or she makes the most of his or her professional relationships.

¹ Source: Ernst & Young; Bombardier Aerospace; Learning & Development Roundtable Research

Managing Up

It's not always clear to some employees why they need to manage relationships upward. This is a valuable skill to know how to consciously work with your supervisor to obtain the best possible results for you, your leadership, and the organization you both work for.

This is important because you and your supervisor are mutually dependent on one another. Your supervisor needs your help and cooperation to do his or her job effectively and you need your supervisors' support and guidance in doing your job effectively.

We often make either the mistake of seeing ourselves as not very dependent on our supervisor or assuming that our supervisor will magically know information or help we need from them without asking for it.

It's important to understand your supervisor - not just initially when you first begin working with one another, but throughout your relationship. On an ongoing basis, it's important to communicate as priorities and concerns change.

It's even more important to know yourself and your strengths, weaknesses, work style preferences, goals, and pressures. Developing self-awareness and then learning to apply your knowledge in order to have more effective relationships is an important ongoing learning process that we all need to and should engage in.

Learning more about your own and others' preferences for how they take in information, make decisions, structure their day, and communicate is something that can serve as a foundation for understanding work styles and strengths.

Find ways to regularly communicate your needs to your supervisor, receive feedback and ask questions about his/her expectations, and speak with him/her about your point of view on important issues. But realize that your supervisor, just like you, is probably limited in his/her time and energy, so make sure that you use his/her time wisely.

The keys to managing our supervisors effectively are:

- Have a good understanding of your supervisor and of yourself – each of your strengths, weaknesses, work styles, goals and pressures.
- Use this information to develop and manage a healthy working relationship – one that is compatible with both people's work styles and strengths, where expectations are mutual and shared, and where each person's most critical needs are met.

Creating Healthy Supervisor-Employee Relationships

Questions to Ask Your Supervisor or Manager

- How would you describe your management and leadership style?
- What are your goals and top priorities for this team?
- What is your definition of a “top performer”?
- What does “success” for this team look like to you? How do you expect this team to help contribute to the goals of our organization?
- What is the path that lead you to this job?
- How do you prefer that I communicate with you – email, in-person?
- How do you like to be approached regarding an issue or challenge?
- How often do you want to meet with us as a team and on a one-to-one basis?

Questions to Ask Your Employee

- What are the biggest challenges you expect to confront in this role?
- What are your biggest strengths?
- What are your biggest opportunities to develop?
- What do you believe your manager/supervisor should expect of you?
- What are you expectations of me?
- What excites you most about your job?
- What motivates you to do a good job?
- How do you like to communicate with your manager/supervisor – phone, email in-person?
- What do you think your objectives should be for the next 30/60/90 days?



Career Management Resources for Managers and Supervisors

As a supervisor or manager at your organization, you play a key role in the success of the organization by helping to develop the workforce of the future. Each individual's career is a personal, lifelong quest for satisfaction and accomplishment, for learning and growth, for the security of an income, and for self-expression.

Your employees look to you for guidance and support in their career development efforts. In helping them develop this important aspect of their lives, you are contributing to their effectiveness, wellbeing, and job satisfaction. You are also contributing to their improved performance on the job because proper attention to an employee's career development is often associated with enhanced productivity and better teamwork.

In addition, coaching your employees for career and professional development leads to a strong reputation for you as someone who supports development and cares about the people who work for you. You will become a supervisor or manager-of-choice and will attract the best people to work for you. When your employees expand their contribution to your division, organization, group, or work team, they are expanding your ability to get your job done and meet your own goals. Their development is your development.

Career Development

Oftentimes, supervisors and managers initiate conversations with employees only because there is a problem. Far less often, supervisors and managers initiate conversations with employees when there is not a problem. Holding career conversations with employees can help alleviate some of the need to address employee problems and is much more enjoyable.

Career conversations are much less tension-filled and easier because they start from strengths, not deficits. The following are examples of questions you can use in a career conversation with your employee. These questions are organized according to what phase of the career development model is most relevant for your employee.

Studies conducted by the Corporate Executive Board show there is a **25% improvement** in employee performance when their managers and supervisors effectively focus on employee development.

As you become more effective at employee development, your employees are **40% more likely** to stay with the organization compared to employees of less effective managers, are **30% more committed** to the organization, and are **38% more satisfied** in their jobs.

Self-Assessment

- Tell me about the projects you have done that you're proud of.
- What activities do you engage in on your job that get you the most excited or that are the most interesting to you?
- Tell me about when you've felt like you had a "great day at work." What happened that day?
- What are the conditions under which you do your best work?
- What do you think your talents and skills are? Let me tell you what I think differentiates you from others and what value I believe you bring to the organization.
- What are your short-term and long-term career goals?
- What values are important to you? Do your values get to show up at work?

Career Awareness

- Do you know what our division/unit goals are for the year? If not, let me share those with you.
- What projects, committees, or other responsibilities do you think you'd like to be part of in order to develop your career?
- Who are the people I know that could be helpful to you? Let me introduce you to them.

Goal Setting

- What kind of career development action plan do you have? I can show you mine and also forward the template for a plan if you would like to complete one.

Skill Development

- What developmental experiences might help you progress toward career goals?
- What education or training might help you in your employee progress?
- How can I help you get ready to do well in this project/activity we've selected for you?

Career Management

- Let's set up a follow-up meeting schedule so that we are checking in on your career development progress regularly.

The **Career Planning Conversation Guide** provides questions you can ask your employees to ensure you have a firm understanding of their career aspirations.

The **Career Conversation Topics for Managers** is a model to guide your own career conversations with your manager.

Career Mentoring Tips

Share what you can about your career path and what you've learned along the way. Be open to questions the employee may have about your experiences. Meet regularly to help them develop, refine, and periodically re-evaluate their career development action plan. Continually use coaching skills: ask questions, listen, and summarize what you hear to help the employee reach appropriate conclusions for next actions.

Keep the focus of these conversations on the employee. This is his/her career and his/her life. Collaborate on finding solutions, sharing resources, and suggesting development experiences, but let the employee take the lead on creating and following through with their plan. See your role as one of affirming your belief that developing his/her career is important to him/her, to you, and to the organization by holding regular check-in conversations on this topic. When you check-in regularly with your supervisee, it's not for giving "approval" of the plan you and she/he have put together. Rather, the plan can be used to generate conversation and coaching opportunities.

Managing Your Developmental Experiences as a Supervisor/Manager

As a supervisor or manager, there are most likely specific areas for learning and development that you will want to address in your own career development. Taking inventory of the areas that you have and haven't yet been exposed to for development is an important first step toward creating a plan with your manager for your development needs. Use the **Work Experience Inventory** to help you take stock of areas for your development.

It is also useful to develop habits of regularly planning, acting, reflecting, and reviewing your own development progress. Building these habits in your own career management repertoire will be good modeling for your employees to do the same for their career management needs. Use the **Learn From Work Experiences** handout to help guide you in your development planning.

Coaching Your Employees Through their Development Experiences

To maximize employee learning through developmental experiences, supervisors should set up regular meetings with employees to check in on progress.

The following are the things that supervisors/managers should take responsibility for during these meetings:

Tips for Supervisors to Assess Development Progress

- Schedule time to specifically discuss development progress
- Review the development plan before meeting with your employee
- Ensure the development areas are still areas of useful focus
- Evaluate your own coaching efforts
- Adjust milestones, goals, and timelines as needed
- Provide feedback after a project's completion to discuss the positive, negative, and key lessons learned.

Use the **Questions to Ask Before, During, and After Planned Development Experiences** handout to help guide you and your employees through their development experiences.

As a supervisor or manager, you have a unique opportunity to positively influence the career development of your employees while also helping your organization build its talent pipeline for the future.

The following list of high-impact development activities are suggestions for ways you can help employees develop:

1. Stretching and challenging employees through work experiences
 - Where operationally feasible, sequence work and assignments such that they build on one another
 - Direct employees to career-advancing job assignments similar to ones that contributed to your success
 - Place employees in challenging situations that push them beyond their comfort zone with the goal of building their self-confidence and skills
2. Connect employees to important relationships with others
 - Guide employees to the most influential leaders
 - Help employees build relationships with other key staff and leadership
 - Enable employees to learn from leaders – suggest they use the following 3-step process to solicit useful feedback:
 - Step 1: Analyze the situation upon which you want your direct manager's advice
 - Step 2: Determine your desired outcomes from your direct manager's advice
 - Step 3: Communicate how you prefer your advice to be delivered.
3. Offer your advice and guidance for the areas you have identified as your employee's most pressing areas for development
 - Provide feedback on the greatest strengths you observe
 - Serve as their sounding board for difficult challenges
 - Help them understand unintended consequences of their action
4. Encourage employees to learn from work experiences
 - Help employees balance learning goals with work requirements
 - Provide employees with opportunities to practice new skills
 - Enable employees to reflect on learning assignments
5. Pave your employee's path to career advancement
 - Prepare them for successful career moves
 - Ensure they are aware of their successes and long-term potential by highlighting specific information about their achievements, the contexts in which they delivered those achievements, and how they achieved them

Simple Questions to Ask Before, During, and After Planned Development Experiences

The questions below can be used at various project stages. These are merely suggestions, and managers are free to use their own questions to ensure that critical lessons are identified and learned and that employees are planning to apply these lessons in the future.²

Pre-Activity

- What do you hope to learn from this project?
- What will you be able to do differently?
- What do you need or expect of me?

During Activity

- Where do you feel that you are improving your skills?
- Where do you feel that you are struggling?
- Where do you need me to support you through coaching?

Post-Activity

(To be answered by employee before meeting with manager)

- What did I learn?
- Did I reach the goals I laid out before the project started?
- Did I improve my skills?
- Where can I use this skill in my daily work?

Post-Activity

(For discussion with employee)

- Where do you feel you succeeded?
- Where did you struggle?
- If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?
- What is the most important lesson you learned?
- Where can you apply this lesson in the future?

² Source: The Corporate Executive Board; Learning & Development Roundtable Research



Job Search

If you are ready to begin a job search, you will need to build up your ability to write attention-getting state applications, résumés (if applicable) and cover letters, and to successfully interview for positions. Investigate this job search section for tips, and information on all these areas and more. Good luck!

- **Informational Interviewing**
- **Cover Letters**
- **Interviewing Skills Guide**

Cover Letters

A well written cover letter may accompany your state application. Its purpose is to introduce yourself, highlight your experience in your state application as it relates to the job description, and explain why you are interested in that position/division/organization.

Research the organization/division to see how your experience, skills, and abilities meet its needs. In your cover letter, show why you are a good fit. Send the letter to the identified person listed on the vacancy announcement whenever possible; otherwise, use "Dear Members of the Selection Committee," or "Dear Hiring Team."

Carefully review the position responsibilities and qualifications and design your cover letter to match these as much as possible. Sometimes position listings may be vague. In these cases, draw from your experience of similar positions to infer which skills and abilities might be required or research similar positions online.

A good cover letter should:

- Open with a compelling paragraph that tells a story and catches the reader's attention.
- Connect your experiences and qualifications with the desired qualifications of the employer.
- Include specific information about why you want to work for the employer.
- Exemplify clear and concise writing skills with NO grammar/spelling errors.
- Demonstrate your knowledge of the position AND the organization. Cover Letters for Job Listings
- Know the employer
- Analyze the job description
- Analyze your background

Think about your background in relation to the position responsibilities and qualifications. Ask yourself, "What have I done that is similar to what this position entails?" Consider courses taken, classroom projects, work experience, summer jobs, internships, volunteer experience, extracurricular involvement, and travel. Be sure to indicate in the first paragraph what position you're seeking.

Cover Letter Checklist

Stop! Don't submit your cover letter until you have completed the following:

- Write an original targeted cover letter for each position
- State in the first sentence why you are writing and why you are interested.
- Show that your career goals are aligned with both the position and the organization.
- Make your points succinctly; every point should support your readiness to contribute.
- Proofread for typos and accuracy of contact information. Have another set of eyes review it, too.
- Run spell check before sending your final copy, but remember that it does not catch everything.

Be Careful Not To...

- Make your introduction long-winded or forget to include your job objective to cause confusion about what you're applying for.
- Forget to proofread your letter or use spell check.
- Write a great deal about your experiences without explaining why they are relevant. Do provide details that will let the employer know that you understand what their organization does or what the job entails.
- Write more than one page.
- Explain what the organization can do for you instead of what you can do for them.
- Send the same generic cover letters to all organizations.

Informational Interviewing

Informational interviews are conversations that you arrange with persons who have knowledge and experience in professions or jobs you wish to investigate. This strategy is useful throughout one's career. It is used by experienced professionals to research advancement opportunities or changes in their careers, as well as by people seeking first careers or career changes.

Where do I find people to interview?

- Ask friends, family, neighbors, work colleagues, old friends from college, or anyone else you know; they might know somebody who would be interested in helping you out
- Look for people at work who have jobs you might be interested in – many people are willing to help

Remember, people are generally interested in talking about what they do and how they do it. In fact, you may have ideas that will be interesting to them. But don't waste their time or your time — *be prepared!*

Being prepared means knowing exactly what kind of information you want. Generally, don't ask something routine that is readily available elsewhere. First find out something about the organization and the person. Know your own interests, skills, and values, and how they relate to the person you are interviewing.

How do I arrange an interview?

- Personal referral is the most effective. Have a mutual acquaintance be the bridge for your contact.
- Telephoning is the next best route if you don't have a personal referral.
- Letters or emails can work if they include a personal referral and are followed up by a telephone call.
- If the person agrees to an interview, arrange a time and place that is convenient for both of you.
- Make sure you arrive promptly and don't stay longer than the prearranged time unless the person suggests it.
- If the answer is no, accept it.

There are many reasons to do informational interviewing:

- To gain insights and information from personal accounts of the work setting, knowledge and skill requirements, and current trends in the field
- To develop your networking skills and "introduce" yourself to people in the profession
- To help you identify how to prepare yourself and work toward a particular career goal
- To increase motivation in working toward goals
- To build confidence and experience in interacting with professionals

What should I ask?

The idea is to ask about those things that are important to you, and to let the conversation flow naturally while making sure you get the information you need.

Sample Questions

• **Introduction**

- “Hello. May I speak with (name of person you want to interview)? Hi, this is (your name). I was referred to you by (name of person who referred you). I told him/her that I was interested in exploring (the career/job you are interested in). He/she said you would be a good source of information. I wonder if you have 10-12 minutes to talk right now? I wish to explore career options that might be a good fit for me.”

• **What is your job like?**

- A typical day?
- What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
- What kinds of problems do you deal with?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
- How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?

• **How did this type of work interest you and how did you get started?**

- How did you get your job?
- What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?

• **What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation?**

• **Why did you decide to work for this organization?**

- What do you like most about this organization?
- Do you find your job exciting or boring? Why?

• **What are the major qualifications for success in this occupation?**

• **What were the keys to your career advancement?**

- How did you get where you are and what are your long-range goals?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job?
- How did you learn these skills?
- Did you enter this position through a formal training program?

- **How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?**
- **What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold?**
 - Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
 - Is there flexibility related to work hours, vacation schedule, etc.?
- **What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, variety, and independence)?**
 - If your job progresses, as you like, what would be the next step in your career?
- **How has your job affected your lifestyle/work?**
 - From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field?
 - What are the major frustrations of this job?
 - What aspects of the job do you like least or create the most stress?
 - If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- **How did you prepare for this work?**
 - If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?
 - What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?
- **Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs?**
 - Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field/job?
 - Are there any written materials you suggest I read?

What should I do when I'm done?

It is a good idea to follow up your interview with a thank-you note. In it, you might want to mention the information you found particularly interesting or helpful. Let them know that you appreciate them letting you ask them questions and that the information they gave will be valuable to you.

Debriefing Questions

Immediately after an informational interview "debrief" yourself by writing down your thoughts and reactions about the interview. Next, evaluate the match between the elements of your "dream job" and what you heard during this informational interview.

- Does this person I just spoke with use the skills I want to use?
- What additional skills or experience (if any) would I need to be qualified for this job?
- Would I enjoy this kind of work?
- Did I get any additional ideas for other jobs to explore?

If you can answer most of these questions, you have gathered useful information to guide you on your career path.

Interviewing Skills

Interviewing

Once you get to the interview stage of the application process, you have succeeded in convincing an employer to invest time in meeting you. When you developed your State Application, you already:

- Analyzed the job description;
- Identified and conveyed your skills and accomplishments most relevant to the position; and
- Researched the employer and understand what attracted you to the organization.

But there is more to do before the interview so you are prepared to answer questions on the spot and articulate what makes you a truly compelling candidate.

Preparing for an Interview

Don't let your first interview be your first time actually answering interview questions! Consider the following strategies when preparing:

- Write out answers to questions you think the employer will ask. See samples in this chapter.
- Practice saying your responses out loud. Answering potential questions in front of a mirror can make you more aware of your facial expressions and gestures.
- Practice with friends or family.
- Ask for feedback on the content and organization of your answers (completeness, level of detail, how easy to follow) and your presentation style (pace, voice quality/tone, energy, posture, eye contact, hand gestures).
- Film or record your responses and review your performance. Ask yourself, "Did I look/sound confident, relaxed, and enthusiastic?" "What does my body language say?" "How were my pace and volume?"

Types of Interviews

- Panel: You are interviewed by more than one person at the same time
- Second Round: After you have made it through a screening interview, this is a more extended interview at the employer site that may include a series of different types of interviews and a site tour.

General Tips

- Schedule the interview for when you can give 100 percent of your attention.
- Be prepared with lists of points you want to make, your skills and accomplishments with specific examples, and questions to ask.
- Keep a copy of your State Application and the Job Description nearby.

Feeling Nervous?

It is normal to feel nervous about interviews. In fact, being a little nervous can motivate you to prepare and do your best. But worrying about being nervous usually just makes you more nervous! Try focusing instead on being self-confident. To harness your nervous energy, think about five things (qualities, skills or experiences) you would like the employer to know about you and practice presenting these points.

- Listen actively and avoid interrupting the interviewer; ask for clarification if you need it, and think out your responses before answering.
- Speak clearly and slowly enough so that the interviewers can understand you without difficulty.
- Project enthusiasm in your voice to show you are excited about the possibility of getting the position and appreciate being considered.
- Avoid saying “uh,” “um,” “er,” or “you know.”
- Dress in business attire

Preparing for a Second Round Interview

Getting a second round interview means you are being considered seriously for a position. The employer will have a chance to gain a more complete picture of what you offer. They will also see how well you fit in with the company culture and with other team members.

Begin preparing by reviewing how you did in your first interview. Which aspects did you handle well, and which did you struggle with? Use this information to plan what you will continue to do and what you will try to improve in the second one.

Also, gather new information you can bring into the second interview by continuing to research the department.

Before the Interview

- Confirm the date, time, location, and name of the person you should ask for when you arrive.
- Allow plenty of time to get to the interview site and arrive at least 10 minutes early.
- Have an extra copy of your references and all employer forms that you have been asked to complete.
- Come up with at least five questions to ask the employer
- Alert references that they may be contacted.

At the Interview

- Turn off your cell phone, and do not chew gum.
- Be respectful to everyone.
- Build rapport in the first 5 seconds. When your interviewer comes into the waiting room and calls your name, walk toward that person with confidence, make eye contact, extend your hand for a handshake, and say “Hello, I’m (insert your name here).” This should help set the tone for a successful interview.
- Do not put your belongings on the interview desk.
- If a panel interview is part of the second-round interview, be sure to maintain eye contact with everyone on the panel as you answer questions.
- Be prepared to answer the same question several times since you will probably meet with several people over the course of the day. Stay

What to Wear to Interviews

How you should dress will vary somewhat depending on the area of practice, but it’s better to dress up than to be too casual.

- Dress conservatively. Men should wear a dark suit and conservative tie. Woman should wear a dark suit. Avoid miniskirts, trendy outfits, or loud colors.
- Make sure your clothes are cleaned and pressed.
- Style your hair neatly and keep it off your face.

enthusiastic and consistent in your responses.

- Keep in mind that the interview is a two-way street. Be observant. What is the atmosphere like? Are employees friendly?
- Be sure to ask when you can expect to hear from the employer again.

Types of Interview Questions

Depending on the position you apply for, you may be asked questions from any of the three different categories:

- Traditional Questions
- Behavioral Questions
- Technical or Case Questions

Since most interviews consist of a mix of different question types, practice responding to questions from both the traditional and behavioral categories, and add in some technical or case questions if you are entering a field that is known to use them.

Traditional Questions

Straightforward questions about your experience, background, and personal qualities. For example:

- Tell me about yourself.
- How would a former supervisor describe you?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Tell me about an accomplishment that you are proud of.
- What have you learned from your failures?
- What motivates you to do good work?

Behavioral Questions

Frequently used questions based on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. For example, if you have shown initiative in an assignment or project, you are likely to show initiative in future assignments or projects. For example:

Interpersonal Skills

- When working on a team project, have you ever dealt with a strong disagreement among team members or a team member who didn't do their part? What did you do?
- Tell me about the most difficult individual that you've ever had to work with and how you approached the situation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to be assertive.

Leadership

- Tell me about a time when you influenced the outcome of a project by taking a leadership role.
- Describe your leadership style and provide an example of a situation where you successfully led a group.
- Provide an example that demonstrates your ability to motivate others.

Communication Skills

- Tell me about a time when you had to present complex information. How did you get your point across?
- Describe a time when you used persuasion to convince someone to see things your way.
- Tell me about a time when you used written communication skills to convey an important point.

Initiative

- Provide an example of when you had to go above and beyond to get a job done.
- Tell me about a project you initiated.

Planning & Organization

- Tell me about an important goal of yours. How did you reach it?
- Describe a situation when you had many assignments or projects due at the same time. What steps did you take to finish them?
- Provide an example of what you've done when your time schedule or plan was upset by unforeseen circumstances.

Creativity/Innovation

- Describe a time when you provided a creative solution to a problem.
- What is the most creative thing you have done?

Flexibility

- Describe a situation in which you overcame a "personality conflict" in order to get results.
- Describe a time where you were faced with issues that tested your coping skills
- Describe a time when you received constructive criticism.

Decision-making

- Provide an example of when you had to make a difficult decision. How did you approach it? What kinds of criteria did you use?
- Describe a time when you had to defend your decision?
- Summarize a situation where you had to locate relevant information, define key issues, and determine the steps to get a desired result.

Behavioral Questions: Planning Your Responses

Respond to these questions with a specific example where you have demonstrated the skill the interviewer is seeking. It's helpful to remember "CAR" to compose a thoughtful response. Here's how it works:

Context

What was the problem, need, or concern? Include obstacles you had to overcome.

Actions

Describe steps you took, incorporating skills you employed. Focus on what you did as an individual rather than the group as a whole. Own your accomplishments.

Results

Quantify the results you achieved if possible and relate them, your skills, and actions to the organization's needs.

Show up to interviews ready with several stories that demonstrate your relevant skills and accomplishments. Develop them by anticipating the skills that are important for the position and reviewing your past experiences.

Behavioral Questions: How to Say It

Question

Describe a time when you worked in a team. What role did you play?

Context

Earlier this year, I was part of a team of five people for a marketing campaign. We were given the task of developing a marketing strategy for an upcoming special enrollment period. As part of the project, we were to create a detailed marketing plan for submittal to the Director.

Action

I was the team leader, in charge of coordinating all of our team meetings and delegating tasks. I took the initiative to create a meeting schedule so that our group met every Tuesday afternoon, emailed the agenda to each group member prior to our meetings, and kept an excel spreadsheet of all of the tasks. I also worked on making the team cohesive and supportive of each other by promoting open communication. To do so, I facilitated discussions, listened to each team member, and helped clarify any areas of opportunity.

Results

As a result of my efforts, we submitted a detailed marketing plan one week ahead of schedule and were identified as the team with the most innovative marketing plan. Also, because of the open communication skills I utilized, any potential misunderstands between the team members were significantly reduced allowing us to efficiently work together and develop a successful marketing plan.

Accomplishments can be found in all parts of your life:

- Academics, such as projects (How did you work with others? Lead others?)
- Sports (What did you learn about being a team player?)
- Activities (Have you published a story, given a speech, were you a leader?)
- Volunteer, work, or internship experiences (When did your performance exceed expectations? Achieve something new? Make things easier? Save or streamlined processes/procedures?)

Technical and Case Questions

Technical and case questions are common in fields such as finance, accounting and computer science fields. Technical questions ask about discipline-specific knowledge; they may be related to concepts that you learned from your industry knowledge, coursework, or specific skills.

A general principle that applies to case questions, however, is this: often, you won't know the answer, but you need to make an attempt. The interviewer is evaluating how you approach a problem just as much as your answer. Logical and reasonable thinking is preferred over a one-line response. Keep in mind that there is often no right or wrong answer; each candidate has their opinion and perspective on a question.

Difficult Questions

When encountering a difficult question, pause for a moment and ask yourself, "What is the interviewer really hoping to learn about me?"

Examples of questions that some often find tricky:

- **Tell me about yourself.**
 - This commonly asked question seems so broad. Keep in mind your audience and purpose. Keep your comments focused on information that will help the employer determine your qualifications and/or interest in the position. This can include what you have gained from your experience, education, future career aspirations, and your enthusiasm for a job in your field of interest.
- **What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?**
 - View this as an opportunity to point out strengths that relate to being successful in the position for what you are interviewing. Back up your statements with examples of experiences in which you have demonstrated your strengths. Strategies for addressing a weakness include choosing one you have overcome, or selecting an area/skill that you have not had much time to develop or an area that is not that important to the demands of the work. Be genuine with your answers and avoid cliché answers such as "I work too hard" or "I'm a perfectionist." Employers are impressed by people who can be honest, recognize areas of improvement, and overcome personal challenges.

Difficult Question: How to Say It!

Question

What is your greatest weakness?

Sample Answer

One area that I have been working on is feeling more comfortable with public speaking. While I have given presentations on several occasions, I noticed that I do get more nervous that I would like when speaking in front of large groups of people. For this reason, I took the initiative to join a local Toast Masters to get more experience with public speaking. I have since provided several presentations during meetings. Because of this

Because both technical and case questions can vary so widely from one setting to the next, the best approach to effectively prepare for them is not to "learn" a particular set of interview questions and then hope that your interviewers ask them. Instead, aim to get really good at answering strategy-based questions you've never seen before. This can be attained through lots of practice.

additional experience, I have felt less nervous and more confident about speaking in public and feel that this position would be a good fit for me because I would continue to develop my communication skills.

Questions to Ask Employers

Bring several questions to all interviews to ask employers. Asking thoughtful questions shows your interest in the position and demonstrates you have researched the employer. Avoid questions that you can find the answers to on the employer's website; focus instead on questions that show you have gone above and beyond to learn about the employer through news articles, reports, etc.

It is usually appropriate to ask questions at an interview, and typically the interviewer will invite questions at the end of the interview. Here are some questions to consider as you develop your list:

- What kind of training do you offer new employees?
- What are some typical first-year assignments?
- What are the best/most difficult aspects of working in this group/department?
- How does this position fit into the overall organizational structure?
- What's the biggest challenge facing this group/department right now?
- Always ask: May I have your business card(s)? This will give you proper contact information for thank-you letters and follow-up communications.
- How would you describe the culture of this organization?
- Always ask: What are the next steps in the hiring process?
- What do you see as unique about your unit/department compared to other departments?
- How would you describe this department's management style?

For all answers, make sure to use your own attributes and your own words!



An open-minded person is in the middle of what was and what will be; being undecided means that all the data are not in yet.³

Change and Career Resilience

Changes in an organization lead to a psychological process of transitions for the employees of that organization. The phases of transition are:

1. Letting go of the old identity; dealing with the loss(es)
2. Going through a period of time when the old is gone but the new isn't yet fully integrated into our identities
3. Making a new beginning

Transitions can be emotional experiences. It's natural to feel a whole host of emotions, from positive to negative, during a transition. Some of the most difficult negative emotions include: Anger, Discouragement, Guilt, Hopelessness, Inadequacy, Irresponsibility, Lethargy, Overwhelm, Rejection, Self-Doubt, and simply Stuck.

Curiosity is a great antidote to help cope with the negative emotions that can accompany change. Curiosity can help you begin exploring ideas for what you can do about a situation that makes you angry. It can remedy discouragement through helping you focus on what an attainable next step could be.

Happenstance Theory focuses on the importance of creating and transforming unplanned events into opportunities for learning. This is not the same as leaving everything to chance. Rather, this theory advocates an active searching process while also remaining open to new and unexpected opportunities that were not planned.

Developing the following five skills will help one recognize, create, and use chance to create career opportunities:

- Curiosity: exploring new learning opportunities
- Persistence: exerting effort despite setbacks
- Flexibility: adapting to changing attitudes and circumstances
- Optimism: viewing new opportunities as possible and attainable
- Risk Taking: taking action in the face of uncertain outcomes

Happenstance Exercise

Answer the following questions:

- How have unplanned events influenced your career?
- How did you enable each event to influence you?
- How do you feel about unplanned events in your future?
- How is your curiosity excited? How could you explore the career implications of your curiosity?
- What is one chance event that you wish would happen to you? How can you act now to increase the likelihood of that desirable event?
- Not all chance events are positive. How have you tended to react to negative chance events? If you've tended to react with discouragement and inaction, how could you instead react by feeling challenged to exert even greater effort?
- How have you been blocked from doing what you want to do?
- How have others overcome blocks like that?
- How would you begin overcoming that block?

3 Mitchell, K.E., Levin, A.S., & Krumboltz, J.D. (1999). "Planned happenstance: Constructing unexpected career opportunities." *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 77, pp. 115-124

Career Planning

After you have made a career decision, it is time to plan how you will carry out that decision. A **career development action plan** provides vision, structure, direction, and motivation for your career development process.

When we think of career development planning, we think of the goals or action items that we feel we need to do to move our careers forward. We often carry these thoughts around in our heads for months, years, or decades without ever writing them down. If we do write down our goals, they often take the form of a list and many times we lose momentum after writing our goals down, misplace the list, and accomplish only some of our goals. This is not a very motivating or positively reinforcing process!

It is far more effective and productive to think of career planning as a process that allows us to visualize our future careers and then provides us a roadmap to follow in realizing our dreams.

Career planning is not something that happens once or twice in one's career; rather, it is a continual process of assessing one's career identity, setting new learning goals, creating new career visions, and celebrating accomplishments as one develops and becomes more skilled.

Development planning is a process designed to help you:

- Think through your job/ career goals
- Focus on developing knowledge and skills for your current position and for future job opportunities
- Think about how to better utilize your strengths, talents, experience, and passion in your work
- Write up your own career development action plan
- Share your development goals with your manager



Developing a Vision & Goals for Your Career Plan

Developing a Career Vision Statement

Having a clear vision of the end state we are trying to achieve before we take action to reach our goals is the key factor in accomplishing any goals that we set. Do you have a clear mental image of who you will be in the future? Your vision is a “picture” of what you aspire to – and what inspires you – in your work life. Articulating your vision statement for your career is the first step in helping you eventually reach your career goals.

Follow these steps, adapted from Randall S. Hansen of Quintessential Careers, and you’ll be on your way to creating a career vision statement that inspires and energizes you.

- 1. Carve out a chunk of time.** Career visioning cannot -- and should not -- be rushed. It’s also something that may take several efforts and false starts before things begin to clear and you start getting a grasp of your ideal future.
- 2. Review your career goals and core work values.** For help identifying your work values, understand your work related values and learn about setting career goals in **Taking Action**.
- 3. Suspend logic and pragmatic thinking.** Remember that with a career vision anything should be possible to accomplish, so find a way to turn off any negative thinking that will block you from thinking big. Don’t assume the future is limited to what is happening today.

4. Try one or more of these visioning exercises to help get your creative juices flowing. Think deeply about the questions and answer each as authentically as you can:

- How do you define career success? Are you achieving some level of success in your current job? What job will help you achieve complete success?
- What would you want to do today if all your bills were paid and you had relatively unlimited cash reserves?
- What would your career be like if you had the power to make it any way you wanted?
- What would you like said at your retirement about your career accomplishments and the types of impacts you left with the people you worked with?
- If absolutely no obstacles stood in the way of your achieving it, what would you most like to attain in your career?
- Who are the people you most admire? What is it about them or their careers that attract you to them? Is there something about what they have or do that you want for your career vision?
- Imagine yourself in the future at a point in which you have achieved great career success. What is it that you have accomplished? What does your life look like?
- Do you feel as though you have a gift or calling? How can you share this gift or best answer the call in a way that will fulfill you?
- What's the one activity you most love? Is it part of your career? If not, how can you make it part of your career?
- Where would you like to be in your career in 5 years? In 10 years?

5. Put it all together. Using one sentence or a concise paragraph, write your career vision. Consider writing a short vision statement along with a short description of how you currently see yourself accomplishing it - reaching your vision. Write everything in the present tense, as if you already have accomplished it. This creates the right frame of mind – confidence about your future – rather than keeping your vision in the distant future.

6. Keep your vision visible. Once you've created your career vision statement, plaster it in various places and read it and say it aloud often. Imagine yourself achieving your career vision. Constantly reinforcing the image of you in your career vision will help you both consciously and subconsciously develop goals and action steps that will lead you to success.

7. Review your career vision statement regularly. Your vision can - and most likely will - change as you move closer to it. As part of an annual career planning process, you should review your career vision statement and make any adjustments that you feel are necessary.

Setting Career Development Goals

Goal-setting techniques are used by successful people in all fields. By setting sharp, clearly defined goals, you can measure your progress and continuously motivate yourself to progress toward the vision you have for your ideal work life. You will be able to see forward movement in what might otherwise feel like a long, pointless grind. By setting and taking action toward your goals, you will raise your self-confidence.

The following are some tips for setting effective goals:

- Express your goals positively, rather than framing them in terms of what you don't want.
- Be precise in setting dates, times, and amounts so that you know when you have achieved your goals.
- Set priorities so that you know which of your goals to focus your attention toward and helps you avoid feeling overwhelmed by having too many goals.
- Write your goals down so that you can visually be reminded of them and so that you can craft them to be precise and clear.
- Break down your goals into small, achievable tasks so that you get frequent opportunities to accomplish them and feel motivated to take on other goals.
- Set realistic goals that you can achieve and that are in your own control.

Decision-Making

At some point in the career development process, you will be faced with decisions. Some of the most common career decisions include:

- Whether to change occupations
- Whether to pursue an entrepreneurial opportunity
- Accepting or declining a job offer or promotion
- Deciding to stay in your current career path
- Pursuing additional education or training
- Scaling back your work life
- Choosing among several different job offers

It is important to get to know your decision-making style and to examine how your career decisions from the past have served you. If you chronically have difficulty making career decisions, it could be useful to sort out whether you are in a state of indecision, which could be addressed by gathering additional information on whether you are feeling indecisive, which may be more of an indication of anxiety that could be addressed emotionally.

The **Decision-Making Exercise** at the end of this booklet can be used to assist you in your decision making style.

Taking Action

This step of the career planning process is when you proactively put all the pieces of information about yourself and your carefully collected career information together to produce a set of career-related goals and options. The work you have done in the self-assessment and career awareness phases should have helped you identify some possible career directions.

Most likely, you will have some decision-making to do as you consider and eliminate possible career directions and options. It is important to study your own decision-making history to learn your tendencies and style. Learning about and utilizing various other decision-making strategies can also be useful. Trust not only the facts of your gathered information but also your intuition. Believe in yourself and the time and energy you have invested in your own career development. You are ready to start making career-related decisions happen, such as:

- Changing jobs
- Choosing a different career path
- Taking classes to begin a career change

Developing a career development action plan is the main focus of this phase of career development planning. Be as specific as you can in outlining the steps in achieving your short- term and long-term career-related goals. Include in your plan how you will go about building and maintaining your professional network and community of support.

Taking action is often easier said than done. Obstacles to taking action do appear and life is often unpredictable. Even though you might have come up with a detailed and thoughtfully constructed career plan, your career goals can change for many reasons - circumstances change or unexpected opportunities arise seemingly out of nowhere. Still, having a career plan can provide a road map that guides your actions and keeps you moving forward, while you keep your eyes and ears open to opportunities for planned happenstance.

Obstacles to Taking Action

Obstacles to taking career actions could include both external obstacles, as well as internal obstacles. The following list shows some examples of each kind of obstacle. Write down any that may apply to you – things that have derailed you in the past or currently from making the changes you want to make in your career life. Read on for tips on tackling these obstacles.

External Obstacles

- Clutter and Chaos
- Family Expectations and Needs
- Peer Pressures/Societal Expectations
- Childcare Arrangements and Cost
- Stressful Work Life
- Difficult Working Relationships
- Organizational Changes
- Changes in Field of Work
- Financial Difficulties

Internal Obstacles

- Procrastination
- Fear of Failure
- Fear of Success
- Perfectionism
- Lack of Motivation/Apathy
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Lack of Assertiveness
- Low Self-Esteem
- Career Indecisiveness
- Lack of Stress Management Skills
- Need for More Information
- Difficulty with Negotiations
- Difficulty Asking for Support
- Poor Time Management Skills

Psychologist Nancy Betz has written about career self-efficacy, which refers to the beliefs you have about your ability to successfully perform a career-related behavior, such as trying until you obtain the job you want. These beliefs will influence whether you take action steps in your career development process, how much effort you will put into these actions, and how long you will persist at taking action in the face of obstacles. It may help to think of career self-efficacy as the opposite of self-doubt about your career prospects or about your ability to create the career you want.

Note that the list of Internal Obstacles is longer than the list of External Obstacles. This is usually the case – we tend to put up more internal barriers to our career success than there are external barriers. The good news is that we have more control over the internal barriers.

Career Self-Efficacy

If you have found yourself stuck in taking action steps, it may be helpful to focus on increasing your sense of career self-efficacy. To increase your career self-efficacy, focus on four areas: accomplishments, modeling, encouragement, and anxiety-reduction.

Past Accomplishments

Think back on the 5 main accomplishments you are most proud of in your life. List them with detailed descriptions of what you did. Analyze the list to identify your **Transferable Skills** that are part of each accomplishment.

Modeling

Think back on what kinds of skills you have had a chance to observe others doing well. Select experiences where you got a prolonged exposure, such as in internships, jobs, volunteer work, your family interactions, or other opportunities for vicarious learning. These skills are also skills that you most likely have just from having experienced them in person.

Encouragement

Think back on the positive feedback and encouragement you have received. Focus on the people who have really taken the time to get to know you and who have been your biggest supporters. Write down the feedback you received and notice how your sense of belief in yourself increases as you read it and remember receiving this feedback. Think now about what kind of encouragement you want to make the career changes you are considering.

Anxiety-Reduction

Change is anxiety-provoking for most people and career development is full of change or potential change. Reducing your anxiety will help you feel more of a sense of control and will increase your confidence in yourself and your abilities. Consider what has helped you feel more in control and less anxious in the past and apply those ways of thinking or behaving now. Seek support if needed.



Self-Assessment

Skill Types Relevant to Career Development

Skills are learned behaviors and abilities. There are many different types of skills that are relevant to career development.

Work Content/Technical Skills include things like our knowledge of a specific subject, procedures, equipment, or vocabulary necessary to perform a particular job. These are often expressed using nouns. For example, personnel administration, financial planning, market research, etc. We tend to spend most of our time developing technical skills that we need for the actual role we are in now. That's important, but it shouldn't be our only focus.

- What technical skills can you develop that would enhance your current position and/or help you expand your repertoire of necessary skills in your future career development?
 - **Competencies/Transferable Skills** are also important to emphasize. These are general skills that are applicable in many different jobs and fields and are often expressed using verbs. For example, organize, promote, plan, coordinate, instruct, negotiate, teach, write, present, etc. There are statewide core and leadership competencies that have been identified for all leaders. They can be found on the Department of Human Resources (CalHR) [Competencies web page](#).
- What competencies or transferable skills can you develop that would enhance your current position and/or help you expand your repertoire of necessary skills in your future career development?
 - Self-Management/Personal Growth Skills are traits or personal characteristics that contribute to our performance of work and are often expressed using adjectives. For example, efficient, flexible, resourceful, diplomatic, results-oriented, etc. Developing these qualities may require learning skills in time management, assertiveness, or stress management. Or it may require overcoming self-defeating behaviors like procrastination.

- What areas of self-management or personal growth would enhance your abilities to develop your career?
 - Leadership Skills are important regardless of whether you are in a supervisory/managerial role or not. We all benefit from feeling more confident in our abilities to take charge of tasks, responsibilities, projects, team processes, office work flow, goal setting, decision-making, and our personal and career development.
- What leadership skills do you need to develop?
 - CalHR's Statewide Training Center as well as a number of external training providers offer numerous classes to help employees in skill development. Information about skill development can be found on the [Developing Your Career web page](#). Also, please refer to our [Skill Development Resources and Tools](#) to learn more.

Strengths Scan & Talents Inquiry Exercise

It's crucial that you know your strengths – the key skills, abilities, and behaviors that you use well in your work. Ask others for feedback to help you identify your strengths.

Strengths Scan

- Ask 5 friends, family members, supervisors (former or current), career mentors, and/or co-workers (former or current) to tell you what they think are your strengths and talents, your most positive or special qualities, and your best personal characteristics.
- If possible, try to include people who know you from different times and contexts of your life and include people in at least the following categories: family member(s), friend(s), co-worker(s).
- It is best to ask them to provide this to you in written form so that you can compare the responses and see patterns.
- Once you have their responses, summarize the themes you see among them.
- Some possible questions to ask:
 - What are my standout strengths? (Very few others are as good as I am.)
 - What are my moderate strengths? (I'm good – so are many others.)
 - How would people describe me?
 - What are my overdone strengths? (Things I'm good at, but not interested in using – I'm going to burnout if I keep focusing on these.)
 - What are two skills I should strengthen? How would it help me, given what I want to do?

Talents Inquiry

- Make a list of everything that comes naturally to you – things for which you seem to have a “knack”.
 - Include work-related and non-work-related things in your list. Sometimes talents are those things that we consider fun and not “work”, even if we do them in a work-related context.
 - Don’t include those things where you think you have developed a skill, but have no real natural talent.
 - Think about times when you are in flow – when you lose track of time because you are enjoying what you are doing. These might be times that hold clues as to your talents.
- Make another list of everything you are not naturally good at.
 - Doing this will help you clarify what your talents are by knowing what they are not.

Putting It All Together

- Write a “Talents and Strengths” profile of yourself based on the information you gathered from the Strengths Scan and your Talents Inquiry process.
- As you write, describe your strengths and talents in action. Use examples from your work and life history.
- Share this with others as a way to refine your understanding of the information. For example, you may share it with your supervisor in a discussion about your work goals and the kinds of experiences and responsibilities you’d like to take on. Or you may share it with your support group as a way of getting clarity about the kind of work that you are best suited for and as a way to prepare for job interviews.

Education and Training

Education and training can enhance your professional life in a number of significant ways.

- Completing increasingly advanced levels of education shows your employer that you have a drive and commitment to learn and apply information, ideas, theories, and formulas to achieve a variety of tasks and goals.
- If you need to acquire subject matter knowledge, education and training is often the most direct way to obtain it in a short amount of time.
- Obtaining a particular degree or certification may be a requirement for applying for some jobs. Educational requirements are a quick and easy way to narrow down a field of applicants, so if you find yourself competing against others with more education than you, it could be in your interest to obtain the degree, certification, or training to be a competitive candidate.

Education and training can consist of any of the following:

- Advanced Degrees
- Professional Certifications
- Computer Skills Training
- e-Learning
- Independent Reading
- Seminars and webinars through CalHR and/or Professional Associations

See **Skill Development Resources and Tools** for more information on training opportunities, worksheets, and online tools.

Developmental Experiences

While education and training are important to skill development, it is sometimes viewed that only 10 percent of adult learning happens in the classroom, from books, tapes, or online learning activities. This is often because learning in these formats is more passive. Most adult learning, a full 70 percent happens by doing. Learning by doing can take place through on-the-job and leadership experiences.

Following are examples of on-the-job and leadership experiences that can help you develop a range of skills and competencies.

On-the-job Experience Examples

- Take on challenging 'stretch' assignments. Some examples:
 - Fill in for your supervisor or manager when they are on vacation;
 - Manage a project from start to finish;
 - Take a formal Training & Development Assignment;
 - Help launch a new initiative or program;
 - Help turn around a struggling project;
 - Teach a process or course to your team or others;
 - Run a team meeting or briefing session.
- Represent your group at a cross-functional meeting or serve as a liaison between groups.
- Serve as a back-up contact when your supervisor is not available.
- Take responsibility for writing or reporting on project deliverables.

Leadership Experience Examples

- Serve as a mentor to other colleagues, supervisees, or staff members or help onboard new colleagues.
- Lead a project team/manage a group where team members are experts in areas that you are not.
- Lead a project that requires innovation.
- Lead a division- wide project or task force that will have policy implications.
- Establish a divisional liaison role on processes for outreach and recruitment, managing people, etc.
- Receive training and chair a selection committee to fill a position.
- Speak at a meeting.
- Present at a conference.
- Run for a position in a professional association.
- Take on a leadership role in a social, community, or volunteer organization.

These are just some examples of developmental experiences that can help you develop your skills.

The unique experiences that can help you progress toward your career development goals will be created by you, in conjunction with your supervisor or manager. Learning how to communicate to your supervisor that you are open to and desire development experiences is important to getting the opportunity to develop your career skills.

Show openness by being receptive to new ideas and suggestions, by admitting to your need for improvement, and by actively seeking your direct supervisor/manager's feedback. Keep in mind that the end goal is your career development, not the coaching process itself. Read the steps below for details on how to manage a developmental experience.

10 Steps to More Effective Developmental Experiences

1. Take the initiative to look for ways that you can learn new skills through experiences that also help your supervisor/manager, team, unit, or organization achieve its goals.
2. Set up meetings with your supervisor/manager to discuss your proposed development experiences and get buy-in for proceeding. Use the **Questions to Ask Before, During, and After Planned Development Experiences** handout as a guide for discussions with your supervisor or manager.
3. Create a career development action plan with your supervisor/manager to track your progress.
4. As your development experience is progressing, update your plan to mark accomplishments and learning acquired.
5. Set up regular check-in meetings with your supervisor/manager.
6. Take time to review your career development action plan before meeting with your supervisor/manager for check-ins.
7. Send your supervisor/manager any major changes in advance before meeting.
8. Leave the meetings with an updated plan.
9. Review where your supervisor/manager can provide you the most help going forward.
10. Seek out feedback after a project's completion to discuss the positive, negative, and key lessons learned, as well as to begin developing a new development experience.

If you are a supervisor or manager, see **Resources for Supervisors and Managers** for handouts to manage your own developmental experiences, as well as tips on communicating with your employees regarding their developmental experiences to ensure the best outcomes for both employees and managers.

Encourage You to Learn From Work Experiences

Learning from Experiences Framework

While learning from work is one of the best ways to develop and boost your performance, it does not happen automatically. You need to be intentional about what you hope to learn from a job assignment or work experience. The framework borrowed from IBM Corporation and State Farm Insurance Co. provides a simple approach on how you can make the most out of learning from work experiences.⁴

Prepare

Determine the Targeted Outcome

- What is the outcome you are trying to achieve?
- What should you be able to do differently after this work experience?
- How will this work experience help you and the organization?

Assess Your Current Capabilities

- Where are you now in terms of your current capabilities?
- What is the gap between your current and ideal state?
- Will this work experience help you address a core challenge (or does it address a symptom of a core challenge)?

Act

Determine the Activities to Focus On

- What specific tasks or activities should you engage in to achieve your targeted outcome?

Embed Stretch and Challenge

- Is this work experience visible to other senior leaders?
- Does it involve enough risk to make it challenging?
- Does the work experience make you “uncomfortable”?
- Are there potential sources of collaboration?
- Does it introduce you to anything new?

Reflect

React to the Experience

- What surprised you about this work experience?
- What met and did not meet your expectations?
- How did you feel before, during, and after the work experience?
- What would you do differently if you were to do this work experience again? Would you prepare and act differently?

Assess the Results

- What skills and behaviors did you display most effectively during the work experience?
- What skills do you wish you had demonstrated more effectively?
- What did you learn that you can apply to work?

Review

Identify Opportunities for Sharing and Applying Learning

- How can you summarize what you have learned from the work experience to help others with similar development goals (e.g. methods, outcomes, and insights generated from the work experience)?
- What opportunities can you take advantage of to share and teach what you have learned?
- Are there additional opportunities for you to apply your learning back to work?



Resources and Tools

There are many resources available to you at your organization to help with the career management phase of your career development planning. These include workshops, books, online resources, and worksheets.

Trainings and Workshops

Statewide Training is offered to help staff in building a career at your organization through professional development.

Books

Change

- Building the Bridge as You Walk on It: A Guide for Leading Change. Robert E. Quinn, Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- The Dance of Change. Peter Senge, Doubleday, 1999.
- Managing At the Speed of Change. Daryl R. Conner, Villard Books, 1993.
- Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change. William Bridges, Perseus Books in 2003.
- Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers. Robert Kriegel and David Brandt, Warner Books, 1996.
- Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes. William Bridges, Addison-Wesley, 1980.

Career Planning

- It's Only Too Late If You Don't Start Now: How to Create Your Second Life at Any Age. Barbara Sher, Dell.
- I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It. Barbara Sher and Barbara Smith, Dell.
- Now, Discover Your Strengths. Marcus Buckingham and O. Donald Clifton, Free Press.
- What Color is Your Parachute? Richard N. Bolles, Ten Speed Press.

- Wishcraft : How to Get What You Really Want. Barbara Sher and Annie Gottlieb, Ballantine Books; 2nd Ballat edition, 2003.

Job Search

- The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Perfect Interview. Marc Dorio, Alpha Books, MacMillan USA.
- Job Interviews for Dummies. Joyce Lain Kennedy, Hungry Minds.
- Knock'em Dead: The Ultimate Job Seekers Guide. Martin Yate, Adams Media Corporation.

Worksheets

- **Strengths Scan & Talents Inquiry exercise**
- **Connect to Other Key Leaders Handout**
- **Mentoring Log**
- **Career Development Action Plan**
- **Career Planning Conversation Guide**
- **Career Conversation Topics for Managers**

Skill Development Resources and Tools

There are many resources available at your organization to help employees with the skill development phase of their career development planning. These include training and educational opportunities on and off site; online learning opportunities; training programs for leaders, supervisors, and managers; books; and worksheets.

Training and Educational Opportunities

- Provide Learning Opportunities at your Organization
- Learning Opportunities from External Providers

The following is just a sample of the many external training and educational providers:

- **State of California, Human Resources (CalHR)** — Numerous classes organized by Audience Type, Classroom or Webinar.
- **Cooperative Personnel Services (CPS)** — Provides over 100 on-line and instructor-led courses for public- sector employees. Covers topics such as communication, analytical skills, leadership, managerial development, math and budgeting, personal development, presentation and instruction, relationship & behavior development, supervisory development.
- **State of California, Department of General Services** — Classes for staff involved with state contracts or those with health and safety duties.
- **State of California, Department of Finance** — Provides budget-related courses for finance staff.
- **State of California, Department of Technology** — Classes for information technology staff to expand their skills in project management and leadership.

- **Los Rios Community College District Government Training**
- **University of California at Davis, Extension Program**
- **California State University, Professional Development**
- **California Community Colleges**

Skill Development Books

Managing Teams

- The Team Building Tool Kit: Tips, Tactics, and Rules for Effective Workplace Teams. Deborah Harrington-Mackin, American Management Association, 1993
- The Wisdom of Teams. Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, HarperBusiness, 2003

Communication Skills

- Don't Be So Defensive: Taking the War Out of Our Words with Powerful Non-Defensive Communication. Sharon Ellison, Andrews McMeel Publishing, 1998

General Management

- Talent Wins: The New Playbook for Putting People First. Ram Charan, Dominic Barton, Dennis Carey, Harvard Business Review Press, 2018
- The Culture Code. Daniel Coyle, Bantam Books, 2018
- The Mind of the Leader: How to Lead Yourself, Your People, and Your Organization for Extraordinary Results. Rasmus Hougaard, Jacqueline Carter, Harvard Business Review Press, 2018
- The Art of the Long View; Paths to Strategic Insight for Yourself and Your Company. Peter Schwartz, Doubleday, 1991
- Driving Fear Out Of the Workplace: How to Overcome the Invisible Barriers to Quality, Productivity and Innovation. Jossey-Bass, 1991
- Effective Succession Planning: Ensuring Leadership Continuity and Building Talent from Within. William J. Rothwell, Amazon Books, 1994
- Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making. Sam Kaner, New Society Publishers, 1996
- The HR Scorecard: Linking People, Strategy and Performance. Brian Becker, Mark A. Huselid, and David Ulrich, Harvard Business School Press, 2001

Creativity

- Breakthrough Creativity. Lynne C. Levesque, Davies-Black Publishing, 2001
- The Circle of Innovation. Tom Peters, Random House, 1995
- The Creative Brain. Ned Herrmann, Brain Books, 1995

Worksheets

- **Experience Inventory**
- **Questions to Ask Before, During, and After Planned Development Experiences**
- **Work Experience Inventory**
- **Learn from Work Experiences**

Mentoring Log

This is a log for mentees to use to keep track of mentoring meetings and record follow-up activities.

Date	Time/Place	Agenda	Action Steps	Check-in on Progress

Career Planning Conversation Guide

As important as it is to build strengths and development areas that employees need now, it is also important to build skills that employees will need for future roles. This conversation guide is designed to ensure that you have a firm understanding of your employees' career aspirations; by assuming that employees will follow a particular career path, you risk expending effort developing skills that they may not want or need in the future.⁵

Questions to Ask Your Employee	Employee Responses
Current Goals	
What is your favorite part of your current role?	
What would you describe as your biggest strength?	
What one skill would you like to develop to improve in your current role?	
Future Roles	
Where do you see yourself in 1-3 years?	
Where do you see yourself in 5 years?	
If there is one task or project type you'd like to do more frequently in your future roles, what would you select?	
Manager/Supervisor's Role	
How can I best help you in your current role?	
How can I best help you achieve your career goals?	

Transferable Skills Checklist

Check off the skills you already have; use these to help build your resume.⁶

Adaptability Skills

capacity to adapt to new situations and settings and to tolerate change well; flexibility to adapt to the needs of the moment

Administrative/Clerical Skills

able to operate computers and other basic office equipment; able to design and maintain filing and control systems

Advanced Computer Skills

able to use a variety of software programs; knowledge about desktop publishing or web design

Advanced Writing Skills

able to select, interpret, organize, and synthesize key ideas; able to edit a written text to ensure that the message is as clear, concise, and accurate as possible

Analytical/Logical Thinking Skills

able to draw specific conclusions from a set of general observations or from a set of specific facts; able to synthesize information and ideas

Artistic Skills

uses color and design creatively; able to design displays and publicity material (print, video, Internet)

Care-giving Skills

able to empathize with others; able to give sensitive care to people who are sick or elderly or who have severe disabilities

Critical Thinking Skills

able to review different points of view or ideas and make objective judgments; investigates all possible solutions to a problem, weighing the pros and cons

Creative Thinking Skills

able to generate new ideas, invent new things, create new images or designs; find new solutions to problems; able to use wit and humor effectively

Coaching/Mentoring Skills

gives feedback in a constructive way; helps others to increase their knowledge or skills

Counseling Skills

responds to what others have said in a non-judgemental way ("active listening") builds trust and openness with others.

Customer Service Skills

able to build a relationship of mutual trust with clients; able to handle complaints and concerns in a sensitive way

Decision-Making Skills

able to identify all possible options, weigh the pros and cons, assess feasibility and choose the most viable option

Financial Skills

able to keep accurate financial records; able to manage a budget (that is, preparing sound budgets, and monitoring expenses)

Interpersonal Skills

able to interact successfully with a wide range of people; knows how to interpret and use body language

Interviewing Skills

asks and responds to questions effectively; able to make others feel relaxed and to create a feeling of trust

Language Skills

functionally bilingual; able to translate and/or interpret a given language

Leadership Skills

motivates and empowers others to act; inspires trust and respect in others

Mechanical Skills

able to install, operate, and monitor the performance of equipment and mechanical devices; able to repair mechanical devices

Mediation Skills

able to resolve conflicts that stems from different perspectives or interests; able to deal with conflict in an open, honest, and positive way

Transferable Skills Checklist

Check off the skills you already have; use these to help build your resume.

Negotiating Skills

able to negotiate skillfully;
knows how and when to make
compromises

Oral Communication Skills

presents information and ideas
clearly and concisely, with
content and style appropriate
for the audience (whether
one-to-one or in a group);
presents opinions and ideas in
an open, objective way

Organizational Skills

able to organize information,
people, or things in a
systematic way; able to
establish priorities, and meet
deadlines

Perceptual Skills

able to visualize new formats
and shapes; able to estimate
physical space

Performing Skills

able to make presentations
for video or television in
an interesting way; able to
entertain, amuse, and inspire an
audience

Persuading Skills

communicates effectively to
justify a position or influence a
decision; able to sell products
or promote ideas

Planning Skills

able to plan projects, events,
and programs; able to
establish objectives and needs,
evaluates options, chooses
best option

Problem-Solving Skills

able to clarify the nature of a
problem, evaluate alternatives,
propose viable solutions and
determine the outcome of the
various options

Public Speaking Skills

able to make formal
presentations; presents ideas,
positions, and problems in an
interesting way

Research Skills

knows how to find and
collect relevant background
information; able to analyze
data, summarize findings, and
write a report

Supervising Skills

delegates responsibilities and
establishes an appropriate
system of accountability; able
to monitor progress and assess
the quality of job performance
of others

Teaching/Training Skills

able to help others gain
knowledge and skills; able to
create an effective learning
environment

Technological Skills

understands technical systems
and operates effectively within
them; understands technical
specifications; reads technical
manuals with ease

Decision-Making Exercise

Try the following exercise, adapted from *The Pathfinder*, by Nicholas Lore, to help you better understand your decision-making style.

Write down three important decisions you have made over the last few years.

1.

2.

3.

Think about how you made each of these decisions. What models and styles did you use? Did you start with one method and then switch to another?

Write down how the process worked for each decision. How well did this method(s) work for you? Did you get what you wanted? How well has the decision held up over time? If you didn't feel you made the right decision, how did the method fail you? If you switched to another method, could the outcomes be improved?

People make decisions using different styles. Some like to be logical and rank their options using a scale. Others like to use more subjective factors like their feelings and gut instincts. Yet another method would be to speak with others whose opinions you respect and trust. It is a good idea to use all three methods in making your decisions.

1. First, look at your options objectively in terms of how it measures up to your desires, priorities, and needs.
2. Then look at your options subjectively and gauge which options feel right.
3. Finally, consult a few people you believe would have the ability to help you accurately assess your options — this might be a mentor, a trusted colleague, or a significant other.

Once you have thoroughly considered all your options, make a commitment to move forward and take action on your decision!

Stretch & Challenge You Through Work Experiences

Work Experience Inventory & Worksheet

This worksheet provides a solid foundation for proactively identifying the work experiences you may need exposure to in order to progress in your career. Some of these experiences may be difficult to assess and you need to prioritize which align best with your career aspirations. Use your responses as the basis of your conversation with your direct manager to help him or her understand which work experiences to broker on your behalf.⁷

Work Experience Inventory	Have you been exposed to this work experience?	Follow-Up with Direct Manager
Managing People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing and developing employees • Assessing employee performance • Leading teams 		
Managing the Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting strategy to meet changing priorities • Setting business strategy • Leading a unit • Managing a significant budget 		
Managing Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing, assessing, and allocating resources for cross-unit projects • Developing new processes 		
Managing Customers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing projects with new customers • Building solid relationships with external customers 		
Managing Ambiguity & New Environments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deals constructively with problems that do not have clear solutions or outcomes • Deals comfortably with the uncertainty of change 		



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