

Writing a Leadership Development Plan

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Listen to any motivational speaker describe actions that lead to success. You'll hear "write down your goals and your vision of the future."

Why do those experts make such a big deal about writing everything down? Can't you just *think about* your goals and your vision?

Sure. You'll accomplish more if you think about these things than if you don't. People who don't imagine what is possible in the future rarely take the actions that lead to achievement.

Just last week, one of my clients asked the members of her leadership team to share their personal goals for the next twelve months. She was surprised by the blank looks on several faces—many of her key leaders had not thought about their goals and plans for the coming year.

Beyond *thinking about* your goals and plans, studies show that putting thoughts in writing accomplishes more than just pondering possibilities.

My clients are typically successful individuals who want to be even better. When they examine what has worked for them in the past, they acknowledge that when they disciplined themselves to write down a plan for accomplishing a goal, they were more successful than when they just "winged it."

I help leaders discipline themselves to write a "leadership development plan." Why? Usually, they've never had a defined process to identify growth opportunities. Oh, they have a history of growing! Many have become quite successful. But they realize that the process of growth has been haphazard. They'd like to experience a more intentional approach.

There are three reasons why I encourage you to generate a written leadership development plan.

It engages the brain constructively. Science is making huge strides in understanding how our brains function. A thought that remains unexpressed is very different from one that passes through that section of your brain where you select words to describe it. The contemplation is even further strengthened when you engage the muscles required to hold a pen and write the idea down. A written inspiration is more tangible and more explicit than if you just allow it to remain floating around in your brain.

It provides accountability. We are creatures of habit. Given the opportunity, we'll take the easy route. Comfort, however, is the enemy of growth. Situations that demand action beyond our current capabilities stretch us, encouraging us to look for new insights, try new responses, and build more refined skills. Sharing our plan with someone we respect helps to ensure we follow through on our good intentions.

It encourages a strategic timeframe. You are action-oriented, right? You jump right on new ideas, making them happen NOW! But when you think about growth over a year, if you don't write it down, you won't remember everything you intend to do. And writing it forces you to prioritize, keeping only those activities that will yield the greatest return on your investment of time and energy.

Writing a plan for developing your leadership skills ensures that you stretch yourself beyond your current capabilities, allowing you to reject really good ideas in favor of those that you consider are even better.

My clients **write** a focused, year-long "to do" list of the activities they will combine with their daily "real work." The more your plan coincides with your real work, the greater the likelihood you will act on it. You enhance your skills while accomplishing the practical necessities of today's demands.

To see a sample "leadership development plan," send Dennis Hooper an e-mail at dhooper2@juno.com or call him at 478-988-0237.

AN EXAMPLE ONE YEAR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Focus Area	Action Items	Progress to Date
Developing Direct Reports	Spend an hour a month talking with each of my direct reports about their growth as a leader. Discuss performance expectations and results. Talk about training, career development, and succession planning. Help them learn. Ask them what they have learned recently that increases their skills and awareness. Help them appreciate what they can do now that they couldn't do a year ago. Document successes and future opportunities in each person's file.	
	Imagine each of my direct reports assuming my role and responsibilities. Determine what development each person needs to be able to do that. Overtly suggest opportunities that will stretch each person.	
	Move the organization toward a learning environment by asking after each project, meeting, interaction with customers or suppliers, etc---"What can we learn from this experience? How might we improve next time?" Stated another way, teach the SEE—DO—GET—REFLECT model in our department, then use it intentionally and consciously to reflect on the most recent situation and our response to it.	
	Consciously consider assigning a project with a tight deadline to individuals interested in personal growth. The objective and methodology should be stretching and something new for them. Arrange to provide periodic feedback.	
	Open up the world of opportunities so that my direct reports can better judge for themselves what's "out there" and what part of it they want. Document their increase in awareness, and their potential future job assignments, in their personnel files.	
	Meet monthly with Jane Smith, who I admire for her delegation skills. Seek her help in building my own delegation skills through better use of the "Expectations and Accountability" guide, role-plays, her coaching me, etc. Share what I learn with Pete Jones who is also interested in this area. Consider initiating a study group with Pete, seeking others who would like to become better delegators.	
	At least monthly in my department, teach something I know how to do well. Watch in detail how others learn and how my natural teaching style may not match. Practice flexibility to adapt my teaching style to better fit with the learning style of the individual.	
	Keep a journal of when I give feedback and when I receive feedback. Change nothing for a month except to record when it happens. (By doing this, I will raise my awareness of "what currently is.") At the end of the month, analyze the results with my coach and consider potential improvements. My desired outcome is to improve the frequency and quality of feedback that I receive and that I provide to others.	
	Coach a soccer team for my child's league. Look for similarities/applications I can make at work.	
	Read <i>The Secret: What Great Leaders Know and Do</i> by Ken Blanchard and Mark Miller	
	Read <i>The Next Generation Leader</i> by Andy Stanley	
	Listening	Seek feedback from trusted allies about my nonverbal body language and facial expressions; how do these help me and how do they hurt?
Consciously work to improve my "attending" to the person who is talking to me (being present both in body and mind).		
After each conversation, summarize for the other person the commitments I have made and that the other person has made.		
Read the chapters on "Think Win/Win" and "Seek First to Understand" in <i>Seven Habits of Highly Effective People</i> by Stephen Covey. Adopt a policy of letting the other person speak their mind first. Paraphrase back to the individual what was said until he or she agrees that I've really heard the message. Truly listen before I share my perspective.		
Use the SEE—DO—GET—REFLECT model to SEE the other person as a fascinating expert, sharing a fascinating subject that I know little about. Be deeply intrigued, working hard to understand, asking clarifying questions so that the other person's perspective is clear to me.		
Be sensitive to when I DO listen well. Observe what the differences are between times like this and times when I don't listen well. Catalogue three or four items that work for me, then consciously engage these items when I listen to others.		
Observe good listeners to learn what they do so well. Interview them to learn how they "see" the speaker and how they engage with the speaker. Ask how they are able to so deeply <u>attend</u> to the person. Experiment with how I can adapt these characteristics and methods.		
Train myself to become comfortable with silence. Allow the other person to fill in the silence with their conversation---realize that they are as uncomfortable with silence as I am.		
Be sensitive to creating an environment that encourages "option generation." Realize that people who create an environment for idea-generation are considered better listeners than those who push for closure, or drive for a decision, or insist on finding "the right answer."		