

Five ways to take control of your career in 2013

Takeaway: Your career development and progression are ultimately your responsibility. Here are five things you can do to make sure you're optimizing your performance and development, and preparing for advancement.

Employees, particularly IT pros, can no longer afford to rely 100% on their employers to help develop their skills, talents, and competencies. But continuous development is critical if you want to get ahead in your career, let alone keep current with technology. Here are five practical ways you can take control of your career.

1. Start a performance journal

Do you regularly keep notes on the highs and lows of your performance? Now I don't mean that weekly or monthly report you're required to write for your manager. I mean making notes on things you observe about your day-to-day performance:

- the accomplishments you're most proud of
- the things you consider failures or sub-par performance, and what you learned from them
- the thank you's and other forms of acknowledgement you receive
- the criticisms you received, justified or not

Collected, this information helps to give you perspective on your performance and potential, uncovering areas of strength and weakness. This kind of performance journaling will make your weekly/monthly reports, as well as your annual performance appraisal, easier to write. But more importantly, they'll help you see your strengths, the things you're passionate about, the areas where you need to develop, the stuff you hate, etc. Then you can use that information to drive your career development and progression.

2. Solicit feedback

Research shows that [regular feedback improves performance](#). So if you want to take control of your career and improve performance, solicit feedback from others. Ask your manager, peers, internal and external customers, about how you're doing and what you could do improve. Feedback expert [Jamie Resker](#) suggests you ask two key questions:

- What's one thing that I'm doing that's working or that I should keep doing?
- What's one thing I could do to be more effective in my role?

The key here is to get information on *one strength and one weakness* and then tackle them. If you're gathering feedback from multiple sources, identify the most commonly mentioned "thing" and then focus your efforts on leveraging your strength and addressing your weakness.

3. Complete a self-appraisal

Don't treat your performance appraisal like a spectator sport! Your performance appraisal should be something you actively participate in. One of the best ways to do that, and to start a dialogue with your manager is to complete a self-appraisal, whether your performance management processes requires you to or not. A self-appraisal is a great way to take charge of your performance, progress and development. It gets you thinking about your performance, accomplishments, learning needs and career aspirations. You should not only complete a self-appraisal, you should share it with your manager before they complete their appraisal of you, to give them your perspective and open the conversation.

4. Draft your goals

Drafting your goals is another way you can easily take control of your career. Start by looking at your organization's high-level goals and any department level goals. Then think about how you in your job, with your role and responsibilities, can contribute to achieving those. Draft goals that capture your contributions. If there are any projects on the go that you're passionate about or would love to work on, draft a goal to do so. And think too about your own development and career progression. Are there stretch goals you'd like to take on that will help you acquire new skills, or broaden or deepen existing ones? You'll of course need to negotiate all this with your manager, but taking the initiative to draft your goals first will help make sure you tackle work that will benefit your career.

5. Own your development

Lots of us still fall into the trap of waiting for our managers to assign us development activities. But your career and development are ultimately your responsibility, not your manager's. So think about the knowledge, skills and/or experience you need to do your job better today. Then identify what areas you need development in to support your career progression (your performance journal notes can help you with this). Next, think about how you learn best: by seeing, hearing or doing? Do you learn better on your own, or do you need social stimuli? Once you've figured that out, it's time to start identifying learning activities and opportunities. What can your company reasonably support you in doing, and what can you tackle on your own, outside of work? Then start learning, taking advantage of all the opportunities at your disposal: courses, conferences, e-learning, podcasts, blogs, newsletters, work assignments, job shadowing, mentors, volunteer work, cross functional teams, etc.

It's your career. Make the most of it by being proactive about your performance, development and career progression. No one else will do it for you.

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