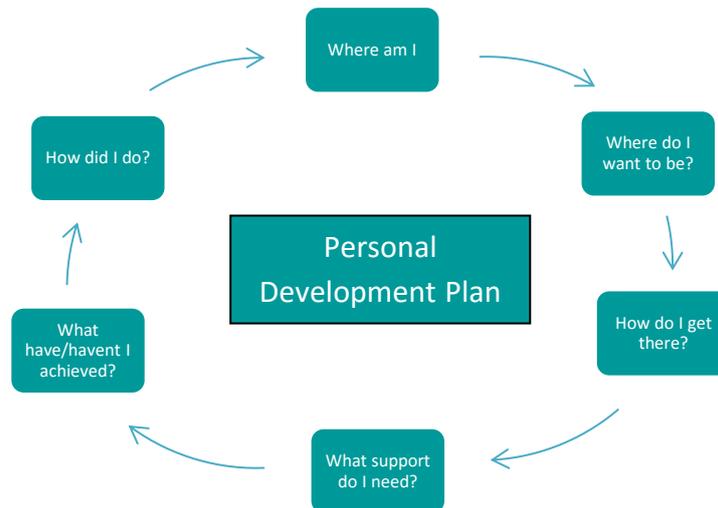# HOW TO WRITE A PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (PDP)

What is a Personal Development Plan?

A PDP is a structured process that reflects on your current learning, work experience and performance which is then developed into a plan for your future personal, educational and career development.

A Personal Development Plan (PDP) enables you to identify key areas of learning and development activity that will enable you to either acquire new or develop existing skills and behavioural attributes, mainly for the following purposes:

- to enhance performance in your current role
- to address anticipated changes in your current role
- to address career aspirations towards a future role

It is often undertaken in conjunction with or as part of an annual appraisal process but it is also a very useful stand-alone exercise. They are always forward looking – helping you create a plan that identifies how best to meet your development needs and reach your longer term goals. You may have identified some clear high level goals but the PDP will help identify 'how you reach the goal' by concentrating effort on the activities that will help you get there.

What is included in a PDP?

A PDP focuses and develops four key areas of your development:

Where are you now?
You start by assessing your current situation by considering:
- What are you good at?
- What do you need to work on? It may help to think about this in terms of skills, knowledge/experience/behaviours you want to develop.
- What help you may need?
- What might stop you?

Where do you want to be?

The next stage of the plan is to have a vision of where you are going in the future, your aspirations and goals. It may help to think about:

- knowing what drives your goals
- being honest with yourself and your capabilities
- define milestones along the way
- Setting short, medium and long term objectives

How will you get there?

Setting goals is not enough on its own; in addition you should set yourself a development plan focusing on:

• the actions needed to achieve these goals
• the success criteria by which to tell whether you have achieved your goals
• any necessary resources required e.g. time, finances
• feasible timescales to achieve the objectives
• Remember to set SMART objectives

Smart Objectives

S	• Objectives must be Specific. What exactly do you want to accomplish? What, which, when, who, where, why? • Can they be broken down into specific activities?
M	• Measurable - how will you track progress? • How will you measure success?
A	• Goals need to be Achievable • Do you have the resources to complete the task?
R	• Is the goal Realistic within the time, resources and knowledge available? • Is it Relevant eg. does the person have the right level of responsibility to get it done?
T	• Goals need to be Time Bound – set a deadline for completion. • Add in milestone dates if appropriate.

It also helps to identify what support you may need to reach your goal. Support could take many forms. For example, this could be support from your manager, department or colleagues to enable you to undertake learning or to learn a new skill or methodology, access to training, time way from your role to carry out study, or even additional funding.

Identify target dates and review dates so that you have milestones to work towards. You may also be able to identify factors or 'threats' that may hinder progress and review how you have managed these during your reflections.

How well did you do?

Reflecting is a key aspect for keeping your PDP live as a working development tool. Upon reflection, often reality turns out to be different from your initial expectations and helps you to decide whether the activities met your expectations and requirements as planned. Personal development is on-going and changing so you need to keep reviewing and updating your goals, vision and plan by reflecting on what you have achieved and thought about.

Helpful Tip

It is often easy to identify a main goal eg **'achieve Team Leader status within two years'**. It is more difficult to identify the actions that can get you there. If this is a sticking point for you try this:

- Imagining yourself successfully in the position – what have you done to get yourself there?
- Use a notepad or sticky pads to jot down all the things you will have had to have done **(eg, high performance rating in appraisal; completed first line supervisor course, deputised for Team Leader, contributed to improved team performance, suggested new way to record data, trained new member of staff, helped project team with system upgrade etc)**
- Prioritise those things that you can influence from where you are now.
- These will become your PDP objectives.

How many objectives should I set?

Ideally, 3 or 4 main objectives will allow you to pass the 'Realistic' test – any more and you will be in danger of over committing, feeling stressed and not achieving your plans. You can always review during the reflection process and add in further objectives if you make good progress. It may help to prioritise your development objectives so that you tackle the ones that will help you achieve your goal:

Is your development objective:

- **critical** to your **current role**
- **beneficial** but non-critical to your **current role**
- **critical** to your progressing in to **future role**
- **beneficial** but non-critical to progressing in to **future role**

Benefits of having a PDP

Drawing up a PDP, helps you naturally consider your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and enable you to create a plan that identifies how best to meet your development needs.

Once you have gone through the process you will probably find that the PDP benefits you in more ways than you may expect, both in your professional life and your personal life, such as having clearer ideas about the kind of life and work you want, greater confidence and a more positive attitude in the skills, qualities and attributes you bring to your position and the choices you make and be in a better position to compete for jobs in the future.

Want to know more?

See our Template PDP that accompanies this information guide.

If you have questions or want to know more about writing a PDP, then please call Angela Spooner on 01768 753001 or email angela@peopledecisions.co.uk