

A Guide for Writing a Professional Development Plan



Mid-South Christian College

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PREPARING GLOBAL MINISTERS THROUGH INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

Mid-South Christian College is a not-for-profit higher education institution dedicated to preparing men and women for full-time Christian ministry.

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Professional Development Planning Guide

To require employees to make decisions about and take responsibility for projects and initiatives for which they lack adequate training amounts to a kind of entrapment (Ashkenas, et al., 2002, 53). MSCC, therefore, recognizes its responsibility to develop its employees and to train them for success.

As stated in the Mid-South Christian College *Staff Performance Evaluation Policy*, "it is the policy of Mid-South Christian College to intentionally help its administrative staff to grow and learn and thereby enter into a mode of continuous improvement." Having completed the performance evaluation, each staff member is expected to prepare a Professional Development Plan.

MSCC also recognizes the need for staff members to take ownership of their own professional development. The Professional Development Plan is a key component of this ownership.

The purpose of this document is to help you write your professional development plan. This plan will outline a strategy for enhancing your strengths and preparing you to more effectively fulfill your current and future roles with the college. The insights you have gained through the evaluation process should guide you in choosing development activities that will help you achieve your developmental goals. These activities may include courses, seminars, books you might read, or in-house action research projects. This document is only a guide; there is no required format or length for your plan. The most important outcome is that you have a personalized strategy for your continuous professional development that will help you achieve your goals and monitor your progress.

Professional Development Planning Basics

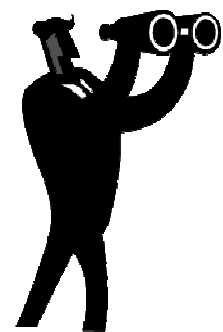
A Professional Development Plan is a written document that an MSCC staff member creates and saves for his or her personal reference. It is a tool that can be used to focus, evaluate, and prioritize professional development activities. The Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) defines a Professional Development Plan as "a planned program for faculty and staff acquisition of knowledge and development skills" (ABHE Guide, 2005, p. 67). Elements of a Professional Development Plan may include:

1. A description of professional aspirations and goals.
2. A description of professional interests and activities.

3. A history of previously completed professional development activities.
4. A timeline for future developmental activities. MSCC recommends that staff members use a timeframe of at least two years. However, planners may wish to use a longer timeframe for their plans. Keep in mind that, if your development activities require funding, you will have to get it into your Department-Specific Plan so that it can be included in the next fiscal year's budget. If the needed funds will require an increase in MSCC revenue, then you will have to put it into the Long-Range Objectives section of your DSP so that the Department of Development will have time to raise the needed funds.
5. Your plan may also include a collection of brochures, e-mails, web links and other sources of information about specific professional development opportunities that may fit your interests and goals. These materials may be gathered into a folder or portfolio.

Benefits of a Professional Development Plan

1. A Professional Development Plan will help you find ways to further enhance the skills needed to perform your current professional role.
2. It will also function as a tool you can use to evaluate educational activities and identify those that meet your criteria and needs.
3. Staff Professional Development Plans allow MSCC to target its limited resources toward those developmental activities that will give the greatest return on investment.
4. A Professional Development Plan will also help the college coordinate developmental activities with its overall budgeting and planning processes.
5. A Professional Development Plan will enable the college to save its limited financial resources. There are basically only two ways to fill the talent gaps within any institution; you can either hire new employees or you can train the ones you already have (Ashkenas, et al., 2002, 82). Training for new skills will almost always require less of a financial output than will hiring for new skills.



How to Prepare a Professional Development Plan

There is no prescribed method for creating a personal professional development plan. However, here are several tips that can guide you in your plan creation process.

1. Begin by writing down all the tasks you are currently responsible for, areas you must be knowledgeable about, the skills you need to possess to accomplish your role with MSCC, and any changes that are likely to occur within the next two years.
2. Consider the short and long-range goals you have for developing or adapting your career. Be realistic about your ambitions and about the time needed to achieve them.
3. Brainstorm ideas about your continuing education needs.
4. Once you have a sizeable list of ideas, list your priorities for the next two years.
5. Don't limit yourself to thinking only about your current professional responsibilities. Think about your career and its development, and consider whether this is a time to strengthen existing skills, develop new skills or broaden your functional capabilities. One way an institution can ensure it has the right set of employee skills to fit its future plans is to map



out the knowledge and skills that will be needed for all positions, including thus-far non-existent positions, that are called for by the institution's strategic vision, and then have each employee develop a plan for acquiring that knowledge and those skills (Marquardt, 2002, 38, 40).

6. You may want to divide your developmental activities into three major categories:
 - Activities that will enhance your current MSCC functions.
 - Skills and knowledge that may not be vital right now but that will be needed as the college continues to develop and grow.
 - Activities that are designed to enhance your professional strengths, irrespective of their direct application to your current MSCC roles.

Typical Professional Development Topics

1. **Communications:** The increasing diversity of today's workforce brings a wide variety of languages and customs. This kind of training is particularly needed for a bi-lingual institution such as MSCC.
2. **Computer skills:** Computer skills are vital for conducting administrative and office tasks.
3. **Service to Students and other Constituents:** Increased competition and educational options available to potential students make it critical that employees understand and meet the needs of constituents.
4. **Diversity:** Diversity training usually includes explanation about how people have different perspectives and views, and includes techniques to help employees gain gender, cultural, and ethnic sensitivity.
5. **Ethics:** Today's society has increasing expectations about institutional social responsibility. A Christian institution such as MSCC must pay special attention to ensuring that its employees maintain a high standard of ethical behavior.
6. **Human relations:** The increased stress of today's educational environment can include misunderstandings and conflict. Training can help people to get along in the workplace.
7. **Quality initiatives:** Initiatives such as MSCC's goal of becoming fully compliant with the Comprehensive Integrated Standards of the Association for Biblical Higher Education require basic training about quality concepts, guidelines and standards for quality.
8. **Safety:** Safety training is critical where working with certain kinds of equipment, hazardous chemicals, repetitive activities, and other potentially dangerous work-related activities, but can also be useful with practical advice for avoiding assaults.
9. **Sexual harassment:** Sexual harassment training usually includes careful description of the organization's policies about sexual harassment, especially about what are inappropriate behaviors.
10. **Management.** Motivating and coordinating the efforts of others are critical skills for all department heads. These skills will become increasingly important as the college grows.

11. **Self-Awareness.** There are many tools and resources out there for helping employees obtain a clearer picture of their particular gift and personality configuration. Such self-awareness will help the staff member to focus on his or her strengths for future development.
12. **Function-Specific Topics.** Staff members may receive training that is very specific to the particular set of tasks for which they are responsible. These may include areas related to marketing, spiritual mentoring, library administration, statistical analysis, event planning, project management, etc.

Types of Professional Development Activities

1. Traditional graduate school programs.
2. Non-traditional adult learning courses and/or distance education programs.
3. MSCC-Sponsored on-campus training events (seminars, workshops, special speakers, etc.)
4. Off-campus conferences, conventions, and workshops.
5. A personal reading plan focused on a particular area of development.
6. On-line webinars
7. Mentoring or coaching.
8. An in-house action research project. Sambrook (2005) states that "small companies tend to use on-the-job training because it costs less" (581). Using action learning principles, you can design a learning project that will not only stretch and develop your professional skills, but also, at the same time, will benefit the college.



When to Prepare Your Professional Development Plan

The preparation of a Professional Development Plan is a key component of MSCC's Staff Evaluation Process and Policy. Once the Staff Performance Evaluation worksheet has been completed and assessed by the staff member's supervisor, he or she is to discuss ratings with their supervisor and then design a Professional Development Plan (Step 5 in the procedure section of the Mid-South Christian College Staff-Performance Evaluation Policy).

The Staff Performance Evaluation Policy states that the performance evaluation must take place some time during the Summer Semester and that all evaluations must be completed before the start of the Fall Semester.

In order for the staff member's development activities to receive funding, they must be included in the next Department-Specific Plan that corresponds to that staff member's position and role in the college. A suggested timeline might look like the following:

1. **July:** Complete the Staff Performance Evaluation worksheet and discuss results with your supervisor.
2. **August:** Research development activities that will help you achieve your learning goals and objectives.
3. **September:** Write your Professional Development Plan.
4. **February:** Include development activities in your Department-Specific Plan.
5. If the funding is available, the development activities can begin with the new fiscal year starting in July.

Conclusion

Attitude is critical for an effective Professional Development Plan. Since this process has to do with your own development, it should be an exciting and fun exercise. To help you maintain that perspective, you are not required to follow a prescribed format for your plan. Use your creativity and find a system that works for you. The eventual written plan should be a practical document that will help you measure and monitor your own developmental progress. Please don't see this as just another bureaucratic requirement to get past so you can get on to your real work. Put your heart into this process; ask the Lord to guide you as you think and pray about your own professional and personal growth. Have fun with it as you dream about the future and your role in that future.

Sources Cited

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ABHE, *Guide to Conducting a Self-Study: An ABHE Evaluation Series Booklet*. Orlando, FL: The Association for Biblical Higher Education, 2005.

Marquardt, Michael J., *Building the Learning Organization: Mastering the 5 Elements for Corporate Learning*. Davies-Black, 2002.

Sambrook, Sally. "Exploring Succession Planning in Small, Growing Firms." *Journal of Small Business & Enterprise Development* 12, no. 4 (2005): 579-594. Emerald (accessed May 15, 2006).

Forms to Help You Prepare Your Plan

The forms on the remaining pages of this booklet are offered as aids to your professional development planning. Please feel free to adapt them to fit your needs and preferences. These forms—or any other method you may use to record your professional development history—should always be prepared in duplicate, one to be turned in to your supervisor and one to be placed in your own professional development folder and reviewed frequently. Your supervisor will give your forms to the Business Manager to be stored in your professional development history file. This provides the college with the evidence it needs to show that the college is committed to helping its staff develop professionally. Following is a list and brief explanation of the forms that make up the remainder of this document:

1. **Professional Development Activity Record.** This form should be used to record each individual development activity that you take part in. It should be completed upon the completion of that activity.
2. **Employee Professional Development History.** The purpose of this form is to keep a running record of your professional development activities along with the key skills that you have acquired through these activities.
3. **Professional Development Plan.** This template may be used to create your professional development plan. It may be adapted to fit your particular needs and preferences.
4. **Professional Planning Worksheet.** This form is a brainstorming tool to help you think creatively about your professional development needs and possible activities that may meet those needs.
5. **Questions to Facilitate Your Planning.** This is another “working” form to help you generate ideas that can then be used in the development of your plan.

Professional Development Activity Record

This form is designed to keep a history of individual development activities. It should be filled out after the completion of a development activity such as the completion of a course, attendance at a seminar or conference, or completion of a reading plan.

Activity Name/Description: _____

Activity Date: _____

What I learned:

What I will do differently as a result of this experience:

Employee Professional Development History

Date	Activity	Key Learning Points

Professional Development Plan

Development Aim	Planned Actions	Time Scale	Estimated Cost

Professional Planning Worksheet

The following worksheet was designed to help you formulate your ideas for a professional development plan. The objective is to identify your developmental needs and to find ways to meet those needs.

Your Needs	How you can meet those needs	How you will measure success?
What are the challenges in my current job?		
Where do I want to be in 2 years?		
Where do I want to be in 5 or 10 years?		
How does that fit in with what the college wants?		
What adjustments will I need to make to my goals?		
What adjustments will other people need to make for me to achieve my goals?		
What else should I consider?		

Questions to Facilitate Your Planning

6. What are the tasks for which you are currently responsible?
7. What kinds of knowledge and skills do you need to carry out these tasks?
8. What changes do you expect to occur in the next 2 years?
9. What changes do you expect to occur in the next 5 to 10 years?
10. What are your short-range goals for developing or adapting your professional career?
11. What are your long-range goals for developing or adapting your professional career?
12. What current skills and strengths do you want to further develop?
13. What are the new skills and knowledge you will need to develop?
14. What are your three top priority training needs?
15. What are some development activities that might help you fill these needs?
16. What activities will help you enhance your current functions?
17. What activities will help you develop the skills you will need in the future?
18. What are some activities that will help you perfect your strengths?
19. What additional resources will be needed to implement these activities?
20. How do these activities fit into the strategic plan of MSCC?
21. How will you evaluate the success of these activities?
22. How will you know when you have achieved your learning objectives?
23. How do you plan to share your learning with the rest of the college?