



Personal Development Plan Workbook

Essential skills for an excellent career

Personal Development Plan Workbook

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Personal Development Plan Workbook

Introduced by Mind Tools CEO, James Manktelow

You have probably come to Mind Tools because you care about your career, and are prepared to work at building a happy, satisfying, successful life.

Part of this involves thinking about what “satisfaction” means to you: After all, we all get satisfaction and happiness from different things. That’s why you need to think this through for yourself, rather than just following someone else’s pre-prepared plan.



Another part of this involves making sure that when opportunities arise (as they will, if you work hard and think about what you’re doing) you have the skills needed to take full advantage of them.

“We’re here to help you learn the skills you need for an excellent career.”
James Manktelow
CEO, MindTools.com

That’s why it’s important to take a systematic approach to developing your skills, so that they’re ready when you need them. Developing a Personal Development Plan is the starting point for this.

This downloadable workbook guides you through the process of creating your own Personal Development Plan. Within it, you’ll find a step-by-step process, supported by templates and instructions, that you can use to plan how you’ll develop the skills you need for a satisfying and successful career. Tools like SWOT and PEST, and techniques like setting SMART goals are all part of the process. Using these resources and applying them to your personal plan for continued development, you will come away with a thoughtful and well-considered plan that you can follow to reach your career goals.

Your Personal Development Plan comprises seven basic steps. We’ve split these steps into these three sections:

- Understand Yourself;
- Define your Career Objectives; and
- Create Your Personal Development Plan.

Each section builds on the next, so I encourage you to work through them in order.

I hope you enjoy this workbook, and find it useful!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Manktelow". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James Manktelow
Mind Tools – Essential skills for an excellent career!
<http://www.mindtools.com>

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Why a Personal Development Plan?

Are you fully in control of your career? Do you have a clear and inspiring idea of what you want to achieve in the future? And are you actively taking steps to pursue the career of your dreams?

If you are not, then you risk seeing your dreams dashed. If you put the course of your career in the hands of others – your organization, your boss, your partner, or even (originally) your parents – you risk not going where you want to go, and not doing what you want to do. After all, if you're not working to realize your own dreams, you're most likely working to achieve someone else's.

All too often, this abdication of career direction happens without you even realizing it. See if you recognize yourself in the following scenario:

Jim had been in his current position for three years. His job was comfortable. He knew what was expected of him, his boss was great, and his teammates were his friends. Life was good.

Six more months passed and Jim started watching the clock. The 4:00 countdown became a daily ritual and by Wednesday, Jim was in Friday mode. He started wanting more excitement and challenge. The humdrum status quo just wasn't cutting it anymore. He needed something to change right away!

So, where were all the changes? Surely he'd been at the place long enough to deserve a promotion of some kind... maybe a job reassignment... well, what about a change of office at least?

Unfortunately for Jim, no one ever told him that neither his company nor his boss was responsible for his career satisfaction. No one let him in on the secret that if you do the same thing today as you did yesterday, the results for tomorrow are likely to be no different.

You have to be proactive. You have to take charge, and change the way you think about your career. When you take back control, you will realize that the only way you'll achieve what you want, personally or professionally, is to think about **where you want to go**, put in place **a plan to get there**, and then **start moving**.

Personal Development Planning is a structured way of doing just that.

- First, you understand yourself so you can set meaningful goals.
- Next, you define these goals in terms of what you want to achieve and the steps you need to get there.
- Finally, you identify gaps in your skills and experience and create an action plan that will fill them in, so that you start to move you closer and closer to your end goal.

So, let's start the process right now!

Understand Yourself: Discover Who You Are and What You Want

Personal Development Planning is all about creating a long term goal for your career, and then planning how you'll get there.

However, before you can know what you want to do in the long term, some serious reflection is in order. What are you good at? Not so good at? What opportunities are available? And are there factors beyond your control that could impact your goal?

To answer these questions, we've adapted two classic business tools, SWOT and PEST, so that you can apply them to your personal situation. Through these analyses you will gain a solid understanding of where you are now, and where you would be well suited to go with a high chance of success.

Personal SWOT

In business, SWOT Analysis uncovers the **S**trengths and **W**eakness of an organization, and the **O**pportunities and **T**hreats facing it. Just as this is useful for organization, it's very powerful when you apply it to your own situation: By knowing your strengths, you can focus your efforts on the things you're good at, and by understanding your weaknesses, you know what to avoid, what to improve, and where to get help from people who do those things better.

Taken together, your strengths and opportunities help you to identify potential long term career goals. Your weaknesses and the threats you face are those things that determine likelihood of success and that need to be mitigated, or planned for, to ensure your goal remains achievable.

To begin a Personal SWOT you ask yourself a series of questions about your existing circumstances and fill in a four-quadrant grid like the one found on page 7. We explain these quadrants below:

Strengths

The goal here is to uncover what sets you apart from most other people. What do you and others see as the qualities that make you stand out?

When thinking about your strengths, don't limit yourself to just work skills, think of all the experiences you've had, and the opportunities you've had to grow and develop. This includes your education, aptitudes, personality factors, and interests. Answer the following types of questions to complete your strengths section:

- What are you really good at?
- What skills do other people recognize in you?
- What do you do better than most people you work with?
- What do you get recognized or rewarded for?
- What, about yourself, are you most proud of or satisfied with?
- What experiences, resources or connections do you have access to that others don't?

Personal SWOT Worksheet

Print off as many copies of this as you need for your personal use.

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
Opportunities:	Threats:

Remember to ask your friends, peers and family to give you ideas about your strengths as well. We tend to be self-effacing and downplay our own strengths, so this is a great way to get more ideas. It's also a real boost to your self-esteem when you learn what others think you do really well!

Weaknesses

Here you turn the tables and get real about the things you are not so good at, or the areas where you can improve your current performance. We list our weaknesses so we can reduce them or manage them, so they don't stand in the way of our goal achievement.

When you do this, don't "beat yourself up" about weaknesses: We all have them. The trick is to recognize them and manage them appropriately. Also, don't be too self-critical. If you're fair and forgiving about other people's weaknesses, make sure you forgive yourself your own too.

To complete your Weaknesses section, use the following questions as a guide:

- What do you try to do that you just can't seem to master?
- What do you do only because you have to in order to satisfy job requirements?
- Are there one or two aspects of your personality that hold you back?
- What do other people most often identify as a weakness for you?
- Where are you vulnerable?
- Where do you lack experience, resources or connections where others have them?

Unlike the Strengths section, don't feel compelled to list every weakness you can think of. Limit yourself to the ones that can have an impact on your career satisfaction.

Opportunities

Now that you have looked inside yourself, you turn your attention to the outside and identify elements that you can build on or take advantage of that will improve your chances of success. This is best done by setting aside some time and brainstorming in an attempt to uncover new and innovative ideas that may not have occurred to you before.

- In what ways can you maximize your strengths?
- What opportunities are open to those who do these things well?
- What would you love to do that you're good at?
- How can you minimize your weaknesses? If your weaknesses no longer held you back, what could you do?
- Where do you see the most potential growth for yourself: Within your current company, in a different company, a different industry, or different career all together?
- What trends are having an impact on your current career or one you are thinking about pursuing?

Threats

Finally, you analyze the things that can derail your success. Although threats can't be directly controlled, they can be planned for. That's why it is so important to identify as

many of them up front as possible. The more you know, the less likely you will be blindsided later on.

Now, you might feel that you'd rather avoid looking at threats, thinking it will cause undue worry and stress. The reality is, you will encounter much more anxiety if you don't think about potential threats, especially when they start building in significance.

Remember, a threat loses much of its sting when it is managed and prepared for. Ask yourself the following types of questions to uncover these potential hazards:

- Do you have weaknesses that need to be addressed before you can move forward?
- What problems could your weaknesses cause if left unchecked?
- What setbacks might you face?
- What obstacles have other people overcome to get to where you want to go?

Tip:

We're assuming here that you're reasonably confident that you're already in the right career and are thinking about your development within that career. If you're still exploring different careers, consider visiting our partner site, Assessment.com, or visit a local career counselor specializing in your situation (a good starting point for this is to Google "career counselor" or "career counsellor".) Even then, use your SWOT Analysis to inform your choice, our next tool, PEST Analysis, to review it, and the rest of this document to plan your development within that career.

Personal PEST Analysis

Personal SWOT Analysis looks at the factors within you and close around you that can influence your success. PEST Analysis, on the other hand, digs deeper into the "big picture" external factors either help or hinder your career success. Using it makes the difference between choosing an exciting career that's aligned with the forces of change in the world, and struggling for survival in a dying industry.

PEST stands for the **P**olitical, **E**conomic, **S**ocio-cultural, and **T**echnological environments in which you function. To complete a Personal PEST Analysis you first identify the external factors that can influence what goals you set. Then you analyze each for the inherent opportunities and threats they present. PEST Analysis is set up in a grid much like the SWOT. Use the following lists of questions to fill-in your Personal PEST on page 11.

Political Factors

Here you consider the influence that government and its policies may have on the opportunities you're looking at:

- What new laws or regulations are likely to affect these opportunities?
- Will any of these affect my ability to work in a certain area, make a certain amount of money, or be reasonably secure?
- Is there a change in government or government policy expected?
- What opportunities and threats do these changes or events represent?

Economic Factors

The elements you are looking at here include monetary factors that may influence your decision to pursue a particular goal:

- What are the average compensation levels in the careers or industries I'm interested in?
- Are wages expected to go up, go down, or stay the same?
- What is the current and forecast rate of unemployment in these sectors?
- What is the long term demand for people in these careers?
- Can I meet my economic needs based on the expected remuneration?
- What opportunities and threats do these changes or circumstances represent?

Socio-Cultural Factors

These are the societal trends that influence how attractive a particular opportunity may or may not be. Things to consider here include:

- What demographic trends will impact these professions?
- Are educational requirements for them expected to change?
- Are there lifestyle trends and changes that will impact the desirability of these careers?
- Are there familial expectations you have to consider when making a career decision? How will these affect your ability to be successful?
- What opportunities and threats do these situations represent?

Technological Factors

Finally, you need to look at the technological impacts affecting your career decisions. Technology changes can be lightening fast and you don't want to get left behind because you failed to consider the potential impacts of these changes.

- What are the technological trends affecting the careers you're considering?
- Are there aspects of the careers that will be replaced by technology in the next few years?
- What technologies are emerging to take their place, and how do you get experience with these technologies?
- How is technology influencing the type of work we do and/or the way we compete our work?
- What opportunities and threats do these situations represent?

Opportunity Analysis

After completing your SWOT Analysis, you probably had a range of opportunities in front of you. Now you've done your PEST Analysis, you may see that some of these are particularly exciting, and that some just aren't worth pursuing.

This is the time to explore the best of these opportunities in more detail, and identify the ones that you want to focus on. This can involve talking to people already doing these jobs to find out what they're really like, exploring reports on the industries and companies within them, and confirming that your strengths really do suit these career paths. When you do this, you make sure that the development path you choose gives the best opportunities, and is least fraught with obstacles that are difficult to overcome.

Picking your top opportunities, look over your strengths and weaknesses, as well as the trends or events you identified in your PEST, and mark down what you see as supporting and opposing factors. Include your personal interests in here too. After all, you want to pursue a development plan that you can be excited about! Use the Opportunity Analysis Worksheet on page 13 to organize your breakdown of the supporting and opposing elements.

Then narrow these options down until you have one or two preferred opportunities, which you feel you really can commit to enthusiastically (the more you narrow things down at this stage, the more effort you can devote to your best choice.)

Opportunity Analysis Worksheet

Print off as many copies of this as you need for your personal use.

Identified Opportunity	Supporting Elements (Strengths, PEST trends and events, personal interests)	Opposing Elements (Weaknesses, PEST trends and events)

Define your Career Objectives

Now that you are clear about your own strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities available to you, you're equipped to start thinking about where you want to go.

You start the process by creating a career "mission statement" that sets out your long-term career aspirations. This is then broken down into a set of Major Career Goals that will help you achieve your mission.

Career Mission Statement

Just as all good corporations create a statement of their intended purpose, you too must define the basic direction of your career. This is a fundamental starting point for your Personal Development Plan. It sets the compass direction, and the plan itself then maps the route you'll take.

Take some time and decide what you want to do. Consider these questions:

- What do you intend to accomplish?
- Why is this accomplishment important to you?
- What values are at the core of your decision?
- Does this make you feel you're making a significant contribution to society?
- What deep emotional value or meaning does this have for you?
- How do you want others to perceive you?

When writing your career mission statement, remember this is your long-term vision for yourself. Typically this will give you a five-year perspective (it's hard to know what your life will look like further than five years into the future) but this can be modified to suit your needs.

A Career Mission Statement is very personal so there's no formula for writing one. For example, one person might choose a very specific mission such as *"To be a Finance Director by the time I'm 45"*, while another's could be less specific, perhaps *"To really make a difference and improve the quality of care for the elderly in my town."*

Spend a little time drafting and redrafting your mission statement until it's a punchy and motivating statement of where you want to go. You'll record it on your Personal Development Plan later.

Major Career Goals

With your mission statement as your guide, now break down your long term objective into manageable pieces. To do this you set Major Career Goals. These are major steps toward accomplishing your mission. You will use these goals to ensure that your Personal Development Plan is on track.

For instance, your Mission Statement may indicate you want to be a Finance Director by the time you're 45. If that is five years away, you must ask yourself what major accomplishments you need to have within those five years to get to that position, such

as completing your management accounting qualifications, or gaining experience in another division.

So, you need to work out what the Major Career Goals are that you need to do to achieve your mission. Typically, this will involve 3-6 key things. To help work out what these are, ask yourself questions like these:

- Do you need to upgrade your education or qualifications?
- Do you need to gain a promotion from your current position?
- Do you need to gain experience in a particular department?
- Do you need to move to a different organization or industry?
- Do you have to master a particular skill or set of skills?

If it is appropriate, you may want to include your current manager in the discussion as well.

You will need assistance and information along the way in terms of support and perhaps access to training, so enlisting the help of a professional body in the area, or of people who are in a position to help or advise you (for example, who are already doing the job you want) is a good career move.

A Note on Goal Setting

Whenever you need to set a goal, be sure to follow the SMART principle. For goals to be meaningful and accomplishable, they need to be:

Specific – make sure your goal pertains to one particular outcome.

Measurable – there must be a definable end point so you know exactly when the goal has been accomplished.

Achievable – you must be reasonably able to accomplish your goal otherwise you will frustrate yourself and risk damaging your self-esteem.

Relevant – goals must relate to what you're ultimately trying to achieve.

Time bound – there has to be a time requirement, otherwise your goal can sit unaccomplished forever.

For more on goal setting, visit <http://www.mindtools.com/page6.html>.

Thinking about the Mission Statement you wrote down earlier, draft out 3-6 goals that you'll need to achieve to fulfill that mission. Then rewrite these using the SMART framework, and polish them to make them compelling, dynamic goals. You'll record the final version of these goals in your Personal Development Plan in the next section.

Well done, you're making great progress!

You've now got everything in place to start drafting your Personal Development Plan.

Create your Personal Development Plan

You're now ready to start pulling together everything you've done so far into a format that is measurable and actionable and will keep you on track as you progress along your chosen path. By the end of this section, you'll have a Personal Development Plan that you'll be able to refer back to regularly to help you make solid progress towards your career mission.

But before we get into more detailed planning, print off the Personal Development Plan Worksheet on page 20. Start filling it out by entering your name, current position and today's date (the last two will help you to remember how far you've come as you progress towards your mission.) Then you can add in the Career Mission Statement and Major Career Goals that you defined earlier. Remember to include dates by which you need to achieve the Goals if you are to reach your mission by your planned target date.

Conduct a Skills Audit

Having defined where you want to go and the major steps you need to take to get there, we'll now take a critical look at your current situation, and determine where there are gaps between what you need to know (or be able to do), and what you *currently* know (or are able to do).

You can then set specific development goals to address these shortfalls, and put yourself on course to achieve your goals – and therefore your long term objective.

Your Personal Development Plan includes a Skills Audit section (see page 20) to assess the skills and strengths you currently possess against the skills and strengths you need. Here's how to complete it:

Looking at your Major Career Goals, note down on a separate sheet of paper the skills and experience you'll need to achieve each. A good way of identifying these is to put yourself in the mind of the people who control access to achievement of each of the goals, and think about what they'll be looking for in a good candidate. (Yes, you might think that people should take a chance on you without some of these things, but the reality is that they probably won't.)

Tip:

Remember to include important career skills such as team management, leadership, and communication skills, as well as skills that are directly related to your company or profession.

If you have the opportunity to ask these people what they want directly, make sure you do. Alternatively, research the skills needed to achieve the goal. As an example, if the goal is to get a particular job, look at what people ask for in job descriptions or advertisements. Talk to your HR department or check out online job sites. If the goal is to get a particular qualification, research the best courses for yourself, and understand what skills or qualifications you'll need to access those courses.

Go back to your SWOT and PEST Analyses, and review the weaknesses and threats you identified. Do any of these point to skills you need to develop if you're to pursue your

career goals successfully? If so, add these to the list. From these lists of skills, identify, say, the 10 most important skills. Write these down in the two columns of the Skills Audit section of the Personal Development Plan. (You'll find space for 16 skills – try to keep to fewer than this!)

Rank your current ability in each of the areas you have listed. Use the following scale:

- A I have accomplished this skill/I demonstrate high levels of competence
- B I have this skill/competency but some improvements could be made
- C I need to improve this skill/competency
- D I need to put in considerable work to develop this skill/competency
- E I need to acquire this skill/ develop this competency

Analyze the Skills Audit section and identify gaps between the skills you have and the skills you need. For each skill or competency, rank your ability now. Revisit these skill rankings every 6 months (make a diary entry to do this now.) This will help you maintain focus and stay on target.

Create an Action Plan

You're finally ready to put together the information you've been gathering to create an Action Plan. This contains the short term Development Goals and actions that you can start work on straight away to help you build the skills and experience needed to achieve your Major Career Goals.

These Development Goals will focus on what you need to do within your planning period to make progress towards your Major Career Goals and fill any skills gaps that you identified in your Skills Audit. Typically, your planning period will be the next six to twelve months. Choose the planning period that fits your circumstances and circle this on the Action Plan template on page 21 (print off as many of these as you need).

For instance, the aspiring Finance Director we used as an example earlier might need to identify what course modules he needs to pass in the next year.

For each Major Career Goal, now consider what you need to achieve within your major planning period. Write down these Development Goals on your Action Plan.

Then, carefully evaluate each of the skill gaps you identified in your Skills Audit, and think about how you intend to close that skill gap. Write these Development Goals on your Action Plan as well.

Then, for each Development Goal, list the specific actions you will take to accomplish it. For example, if you need to go on a course, you may need to write a business case for your boss or for HR, setting out why the organization should pay for this. Depending on the nature of the goal there may be actions here that depend on the involvement of other people like your supervisor or teammates. Factors to consider here include:

- What training or education do you need?
- What experience do you need?

- How will get that training and/or experience? (Job share, on-job training, courses, computer-based training, experience through voluntary work)
- What kind of support do you need?
- What are you responsible for?
- What will others do to help you? (mentor, coach, evaluate)

Write down the date by which you intend to accomplish the goal.

Use the obstacles and solutions column to list obstacles you foresee having to overcome. Think about how you'll overcome these, and, if necessary, add more goals. As you start working on your development goals, add to this column the things you actually *did* have to overcome, and your planned and actual solutions. You can use this information as you plan and prepare subsequent Development Goals.

Make a plan for evaluating your progress and add this to your Action Plan. What criteria will you use to determine whether you succeeded, and when and how will this be measured?

Finally, commit yourself to your plan, and sign it off as a sign of your commitment. By committing your plan to paper you have already taken the first critical step toward making your mission become a reality.

From Paper to Practice

Well done – you now have something that very few people have – a well-thought through Personal Development Plan.

Now you need to take the self-organizational steps needed to bring this plan to life:

Add the goals and action steps you have identified to your To Do List, and prioritize at least one of them for action.

Review the threats section of your SWOT and PEST Analyses, and see if you need to take any actions to mitigate these threats. Add these to your To Do List.

Schedule six-monthly reviews of your plan in your diary. As you make progress in building skills and developing your career, you'll find that you need to learn new skills, and your perspectives will change. By updating your Personal Development Plan, you'll keep your personal development relevant.

Once you've done this, it's time to take action!

Only you have the power to take your Personal Development Plan to the next level: execution. Planning your goals is the first, very important step. Now you have to commit to work your plan everyday.

- Keep your mission in the forefront of your mind, and perhaps at the top of your To Do List.
- Do what you need to do to beat procrastination into submission.

- Let other people who you trust know what you are doing, and why. Use them as your personal support network.
- Don't forget to reward yourself along the way. Sure it's nice when others recognize your accomplishments, but you can do it yourself too.
- Remember that your plan is as dynamic as you are. As circumstances change, you may need to adjust your plan. Where you need to, make changes along the way to keep it current and relevant.

Moving On...

We hope you have enjoyed this Mind Tools Personal Development Plan Workbook!

We have put a great deal of effort into developing this and our other material. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve it for the future, then please let us know at customer.helpdesk@mindtools.com or through the Mind Tools web site at www.mindtools.com. Alternatively, if you have enjoyed this guide and found it useful, please [let us know!](#)

As you'll have discovered for yourself in this workbook, to make the most of your career, you need to work hard on important skills like leadership; team and project management; strategic thinking; problem solving and decision making; persuasive communication; and personal effectiveness. These are some of the most important skills needed to be a successful performer in business.

You can get new training in areas like these each and every working day, as well as the help and support you need to take full charge of your career, in our members' area, the **Mind Tools Career Excellence Club**. [Find out more](#) about the [Career Excellence Club](#) at <http://www.mindtools.com/rs/CXC> today!

Best wishes, and enjoy using Mind Tools!



James Manktelow
CEO
Mindtools.com



Personal Development Plan Worksheet

Name:		Current Position:		Date Started:							
Career Mission Statement (What you intend to accomplish and why)											
Major Career Goals (What you need to accomplish in the medium term to further your mission)											
Goal:		Target Date		Goal:		Target Date					
Goal:		Target Date		Goal:		Target Date					
Goal:		Target Date		Goal:		Target Date					
Skills Audit											
A: I have accomplished this skill/ I demonstrate high competence				C: I need to improve this skill/competency							
B: I have this skill/competency but some improvements could be made				D: I need to put in considerable work to develop this skill/competency							
E: I need to acquire this skill/ develop this competency											
Skill/Competency		Rank				Skill/Competency		Rank			
		Now	6m	1yr	3yr			Now	6m	1yr	3yr

Action Plan for the next 6 / 9 / 12 months (circle the appropriate timescale)				
Development Goal	Action Steps	Complete by (Date)	Obstacles/Solutions	Evaluation

I am committing to these goals and will review this Personal Development Plan on a regular basis and update it as necessary.

Signature: _____

Date: _____