

The One-Page Development Plan: How To Develop Stronger, More Productive Direct Reports

By Kent Porter

Developing key people doesn't happen by accident. It requires purpose, direction, commitment and, above all, a written plan.

A written development plan offers many important benefits. For starters, it takes vague statements or observations about behavior and makes them tangible and measurable. It also enables people to identify and shore up shortcomings and blind spots as well as strengths that are often taken for granted or overlooked.

From an organizational standpoint, a written development plan demonstrates your commitment to investing in your people and helping them reach their full potential. It helps to boost morale, cut down on turnover and lower recruiting costs by turning poor performers into good ones and good employees into great ones.

To implement a one-page development plan for your direct reports:

1. **Select the goals and put the plan into action.** Using the Development Plan Sheet, select one strength you want the direct report to develop and use more often. Be very specific about the behaviors you want to see and what they look like. Next, identify one or two development areas whereby significant improvement will have a huge impact on the person's performance.

The key at this stage is to focus on one or two high-leverage areas that will have the most impact on the direct report's performance. Don't try to correct all the problems at once. Instead, aim for steady progress that allows the person to experience early and ongoing success.

2. **Follow up at regular intervals.** Commit to a series of meetings (one every four to six weeks) to review progress of the plan. Ideally, each meeting should take place in person and last about 45 minutes. However, a 15-minute phone conversation is better than no meeting at all.

Prior to the meeting, seek out feedback from others. During the meeting, review that feedback and then give your own. (See [How to Give CEO-Level Feedback.](#)) Inquire of the direct report, "What's working and what isn't? What barriers are you encountering and how can I help?"

Reinforce the value of working the plan by asking, "Assuming you work your plan to perfection, what difference will it make to you? To those around you?" Close by scheduling the next meeting.



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3. **Provide the carrot or the stick.** Too often, rewards and consequences get left out of the developmental equation. However, both are critical to reinforcing the desired behavioral change.

During step one, carefully lay out the possible rewards of achieving the development plan goals. These typically include things like additional job responsibilities, a promotion, a monetary bonus, public or private recognition or some combination of all. At the same time, clearly spell out the consequences of not following the plan, up to and including possible termination if the person cannot or will not produce the desired behaviors.

How do you get people to buy into such a development plan? You go first. Make a commitment to your own development and model the process for your direct reports.

When you (the boss) demonstrate a willingness to grow and stretch beyond your current comfort zone, others are much more likely to follow in your footsteps.

In general, a well-implemented development plan leads to the following:

- Improved employee retention
- Better “bench strength”
- Open communication
- Less “dancing around the real issues”
- Stronger relationships with your direct reports
- Higher levels of performance from the individual and the team

Best of all, well-executed development plans are contagious. As others see the positive changes in your direct report, they will be drawn into the process. They will also have more respect for you as a manager and a leader because they will sincerely believe that you have their best interests at heart.



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Development Plan

Date:

Goals: (Maximum of one strength and two development areas)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What barriers do you face when working toward this/these goal(s)?

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Describe specific actions for implementing your goal(s) that others can observe so that they can provide feedback. (This is one way of keeping score). Pick two for each goal.

- 1.
 - 2.
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- 1.
 - 2.
-

- 1.
 - 2.
-

This is a key step. List people who will observe you and who will commit to telling you when you are using “old” behaviors and when you are using “new” behaviors. They can be at work, home or in any other context.

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Trade-offs (What will you have to give up?)

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_____ (Your signature) _____ (Date)