



Career Development Plan

Whether you are a recent graduate or an established professional considering career advancement (or a transition), this checklist offers a comprehensive look at the skills, documents, and messages you need to develop your career holistically – in line with your core wishes and goals.

Most people focus on the process of finding a job when they need one. I often hear from clients who apply for hundreds of jobs online, sending one application after another.

This checklist offers a strategic approach to your career development. Just like students need learning skills to succeed in college and researchers need research skills to do their work, professionals need to see their career development as a strategy – a sequence of steps with specific tools.

Use each section and item on this list to brainstorm new ideas for your career planning. Are you aware of all of these steps? Which is them do you do well and which need more practice?

Define Your Own Path to Professional Development

- List professional training/continuous education you may need at this stage.
- List professional associations you want to join for learning, networking, credibility, and exposure.
- List additional networking ideas (Facebook or LinkedIn groups in your field; a list of 10-40 target employers; names of colleagues with whom you want to maintain relationships).
- List conferences you want to attend and identify the topics you want to learn about.
- List your favorite skills – the type of work you would love to do daily so it does not always feel like work. What do you need to hone those skills? What jobs and industries rely on those skills?

Define Your Personal Brand

- Online:** List social media channels where you would like to be present and that you will enjoy using.
 - Update your online profiles (LinkedIn and/or other directory listings).
 - Edit your email signature to reflect key achievements, memberships, or website links.
- On paper:** Review your resume, cover letters, and other career letters, such as:
 - introductory networking messages
 - letters to recruiters
 - thank you letters.
- In person:** Review your recommendations for key skills and soft skills you have been complimented on and define your unique professional offer/value. List any additional practices you need to improve your professionalism and poise in the workplace:
 - mindfulness, grounding, networking, public speaking, time management, task delegation, negotiations, phone skills, email communication, concise writing, etc.
- Align your online, on-paper, and in-person behaviors and voice for consistency.

Improve Your Networking Strategy

- Understand competition and why getting a job as a referral should be your preferred strategy.
- Identify companies and decision-makers with whom you would like to start conversations.
- Decide what knowledge you can share with your network as a subject matter expert.
- Identify industry events where you would like to be present.

Research Potential Employment Opportunities

- Create a list of top 20-40 target employers. Research these companies (via their websites, Glassdoor, Better Business Bureau, LinkedIn, YouTube, or former employees).



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- Create a list of your desired job titles (if unsure, use O*NET OnLine or search LinkedIn for profiles of people whose jobs you would like to do).
- Choose your preferred job boards (remote, general, local or niche); monitor them for job ads by setting email alerts.
- Analyze each job description for key requirements and state how you match them in your resume and cover letter.

Revise Your Key Career Documents

- Resume
- Cover letter
- LinkedIn profile
- Recruiter letter / introductory networking letter
- Follow up letter
- Thank you letter
- Association member profile
- One-page networking resume
- Website, if applicable
- Business card

Prepare for Job Interviews & Negotiations

- Prepare your 'elevator pitch' ("Tell Me About Yourself").
- Know your unique selling points/top differentiators.
- Understand behavioral questions and what they mean.
- Learn more about introducing yourself on the phone or during meetings (practice assertiveness, confidence, and clarity to start conversations).

Prepare to Negotiate

- Prepare to negotiate offers.
- Learn about negotiating your compensation package as a whole (not just salary).
- Define the components of the package that are important to you at this stage of your career.
- Learn to articulate your measurable results to request a promotion or prepare for future interviews.

Know How to Manage Work-Related Uncertainty or Stress

- Remember what works for you to relax and regain focus. Self-care, health, and relationships are essential.
- Know what part of the process you can control and how (follow up, delegate tasks, plan to take small, regular steps toward the goal, or break larger projects into parts.)

Free resources on career topics:

[The Career Confidante](#) podcast with Marie Zimenoff, CEO of Career Thought Leaders

[Career Central podcast](#) with Lorraine Beaman, Past President of National Résumé Writers' Association

[Articles on interviewing](#) by Career Thought Leaders

In this [podcast episode](#), interview coach Thea Kelley talks about the elevator pitch ("Tell me about yourself"), illegal questions, salary questions, and body language during interviews.

This [podcast episode](#) has excellent examples of phrases to use to negotiate salary.

My blog offers articles on [resumes](#), [interviewing](#), and [networking](#).