

# 7 Ways to Advance Professional Growth in Your Career

Professional development is about learning skills to improve your career prospects. To get ahead quickly, consider these professional growth strategies.



by Jenna Glatzer

Published on June 7, 2022

✓ Edited by Giselle M. Cancio



Image Credit: 10'000 Hours / DigitalVision / Getty Images

- Professional development is about developing skills to help you reach career goals.
- Devoting yourself to professional development is an ongoing process throughout your career.
- It's important to let your boss know your goals and ask for feedback.

Most of us don't plan to stay in one job forever; we hope to advance within our chosen field. Millennials, in particular, are looking for jobs with the potential to help them move forward. According to a [2016 Gallup poll](#), 87% ranked professional or career growth and development opportunities as important to them in a job, as opposed to 69% of non-millennials who said the same.

Setting and working toward professional development goals can help propel you further along your career path. Here, you'll learn about strategies to advance your professional growth so you can wind up in your [dream job faster](#).

ADVERTISEMENT

Ready to start your journey?

## Commit to Professional Development

What is professional development? In short, it's all the ways you learn and develop skills and insights relevant to your career path. Sometimes professional development is formalized and required — such as in the [teaching profession](#). State requirements dictate how many academic credits teachers must have to renew their [professional licenses](#).

But in most fields, it's up to you: The more you hope to grow, the more incentive you should have to [find opportunities](#) for professional development. It's not a one-time venture early in your career but a limitless work in progress.

## Learn Beyond Your Job Description

Those who do a good job in their positions can generally be assured of one thing: Employers will want to keep them in those positions. If you're hoping for something more than that, it's a great idea to show that you're willing and eager to [learn new skills](#).

Your current job description might not include proficiency in certain software, knowledge of what competitors are doing, or how to analyze a [profit and loss statement](#). But if your aim is to show that you have a strong interest in moving up in your industry, it's great to learn beyond what's required of you.

You may ask supervisors [if training is available](#) to you, or you may look outside of the company and take classes, read books, listen to industry podcasts, read trade magazines, and so on.

## Attend Conferences and Talks

Many industries have conferences, seminars, and other gatherings meant for professional development and networking. Attending these events may speed up your career development in many ways.

You can grow and develop your professional connections in person far easier than online. Attending talks and Q&A sessions can give you access to leaders in your field who you wouldn't otherwise meet. Telling those leaders, "I enjoyed your keynote speech last April" can open conversations and allow you to [ask for career advice](#) or learn about job openings.

Sometimes, attendees are privy to opportunities that haven't been announced elsewhere. You may get a chance to pitch yourself or your ideas on the spot to employers or other decision-makers.

## Ask for Developmental Positions

In public service agencies and larger private companies, there may be positions that are meant to be rungs on a career ladder. Developmental positions are temporary assignments that are meant to help you learn something new in your career. You're not supposed to have all the skills for the role yet, but you're expected to have the aptitude and desire to learn.

You may have a specific position or type of position in mind, or you may simply ask your boss if there are any developmental positions available for you.

This may mean moving to a different branch, taking on a "managerial trainee" role, adding a [part-time position](#) to your regular work, or other changes that will help you expand your employment possibilities.

## Show Initiative

Don't wait for someone to offer you career development opportunities. The most [successful employees](#) are usually the ones who are bold in asking for what they want. Tell your superiors what you hope to achieve and ask what you can do to get there.

Be specific in your requests. Ask something like, "I would like to be in a management position within two years. Is that reasonable? What can I do to be a good candidate?"

When there are "extras" to do that don't fit neatly into anyone's job description, raise your hand. That might mean anything from picking up supplies to showing someone new around the office. Show that you're not afraid to lead.

## Stick to Your Boundaries

It may seem counterintuitive to mention boundaries in an article about getting ahead — after all, don't bosses want to promote the people who show up early, stay late, answer texts at all hours, give up vacation time, and never take a sick day? Not exactly.

When you're willing to overwork yourself, you teach people that they don't need to do better for you. You can easily become the scapegoat for company problems, but you're unlikely to rise to the top by being overly agreeable.

Instead, to advance your professional growth, practice knowing your worth. Give it your all when you're on the clock, but also prepare to say no or negotiate for more when it feels like a boss is taking advantage of you.

## Keep It Moving

Don't let yourself stagnate too long in one position if you're not happy with the job as an end goal. [Apply for promotions](#) even when you're not sure if you'd be taken seriously yet — you have nothing to lose, and it shows your supervisors that you're ambitious.

If it becomes apparent that you're not being given the opportunities you want or getting overlooked for positions you're qualified for, be straightforward about it. Ask for feedback about what else you could do to get to where you want to be.

If you don't get satisfactory answers, [consider transferring](#) to a different department or moving on somewhere new.

## Resources to Help Your Professional Growth

### TED Talks

TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design because it grew from a conference on those topics, but today, TED Talks cover all kinds of ground. On their website, you can type in search terms related to your industry, or more general keywords like "professional growth" or "career development." You'll find short talks (18 minutes or fewer) meant to educate and inspire you.

### Udemy

Udemy offers online classes on various topics that are generally reasonably priced and self-paced. This is a great spot to [expand your skills](#) and ask an instructor for feedback on your schedule.

### Coursera

If you search for "professional development" on this hub, you'll find about 1,000 options. Many courses are completely free, while others are free to audit but charge a fee if you want feedback or a professional certificate.

### So Good They Can't Ignore You

This book by Georgetown University professor Cal Newport suggests that "follow your passion" isn't great advice and that learning skills that are "rare and valuable" can instead lead you to a career you love.

### Career Warrior Podcast

The CEO of a resume-writing website hosts this weekly podcast where he interviews various industry professionals about topics ranging from [how to write cover letters](#) to [how to ask for a major raise](#).

# Frequently Asked Questions About Professional Growth

Collapse All

Expand All

## Is professional development different from professional growth?

Some people use these two terms interchangeably, but there are nuanced differences between them. Professional development may be defined as everything you do as you aim for professional growth.

Professional development consists of training, certifications and degrees, and attending seminars. Professional growth refers to the results: the assignments, promotions, and [job changes you make](#) as you move toward your ultimate career goals. They're two pieces of the same puzzle.

## Why is professional growth important?

It depends on your own goals: If your aim is to make a higher salary or to have a position with more authority, creative control, prestige, or opportunities to make a difference, [professional growth matters](#). You'll want to take the right steps to get you to your objective in the shortest time.

On the other hand, if you're satisfied with your position and have no desire to move higher, that's a valid choice. You may still choose to continue learning and growing to keep up with your industry, be a valuable employee, gain respect from co-workers, and do the best job you can.

## How do you tell your boss you want to grow?

It's important to share your goals with your boss. It can be as simple as saying, "I'm hoping to reach this position. Do you think that's possible for me? What do I need to do to get there? What kind of timeframe do you think is reasonable?"

You may assume that your boss realizes that you want to advance, but that may not be the case. Often, supervisors assume that workers are happy where they are. They may even believe their workers don't want extra responsibilities or extra time commitments, or that they don't want to put in the effort of new training.

Good bosses want their workers to feel fulfilled so that they stick around. Retaining workers is a crucial part of a supervisor's role; they don't want [workers resigning](#) because of mismatched expectations.

### 5 Signs You're Ready for a Better Job

There are the obvious signs (receiving a low salary) and then there are the quieter signs (feeling bored), but they all result in the same conclusion. Here are the top...

Evan Thompson

### Why Networking Feels Gross and Why You Should Do It Anyway

Networking is an important part of getting ahead. So why does it feel so icky? Research has an answer; we have some tips.

Meg Embry

### Upskilling: 3 Ways to Land a More Lucrative Job

To beat out the competition for a new job, you may need to brush up on or learn some new skills. Here are the top areas for upskilling to land...

Evan Thompson  
March 28, 2022

[ADVERTISEMENT](#)

# Compare your school options.

View the most relevant school for your interests and compare them by tuition, programs, acceptance rate, and other factors important to find your college home.

I WANT MY  
Select a degree



IN  
Select a category



FOCUSING ON  
Select a subject



SEARCH PROGRAMS

[About Us](#)[Media and Press](#)[Advertising Disclosure](#)[Do Not Sell My Info](#)[Our Contributors](#)[Press Releases](#)[Advertise With Us](#)[Rankings Methodology](#)[Contact Us](#)[Privacy Policy](#)[Sitemap](#)[Partner with Us](#)[Editorial Policy](#)