

Developing Leaders Throughout Your Organization

**Your Guide to Building
a Personalized Development Plan**





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Why should we invest in employee development?

If you're reading this, you've probably read all of the leadership books and articles telling us that today's employees want more than just increased pay or a trumped-up title. They want careers where they can learn, grow, be challenged, and be valued for the ideas they bring to the table.

Harvard Business Review found that **9 out of 10 people** are willing to take less pay to do more meaningful work.

A study by LinkedIn found that **94% of workers** would stay at a job longer if the company simply invested in their growth.

And McKinsey tells us that companies in the top quartile for manager skillsets saw a **43% increase in shareholder** returns over 5 years versus 2% for the bottom quartile.

So, why do we want employees to be engaged in the first place? Engaged employees are fired up by your mission. They get the why behind what you're doing. The more invested they are, the harder they'll work. Not only that, but if they feel committed to your mission as if it's their own, they'll be inspired to create new solutions, deliver on outcomes, and serve your customer with intentionality.

Basically, whether or not you develop your staff impacts engagement, retention, customer attrition, and ultimately, your bottom line.

There is vast data supporting that our workforce is craving development. But what are the steps we can take to make that goal a reality?

Enter: The Personalized Development Plan (PDP).



What is a personalized development plan?

A personalized development plan is simply determining the **best next step** for every employee.

It's an opportunity for a manager and employee to collaborate on an aspiration that the employee has and create action steps to make that goal a reality.

Personalized growth plans are a tool to build employee engagement by putting each team member's growth into their own hands while equipping them to succeed. But they also benefit you as the leader. A more qualified, equipped, and prepared team is a direct path to increase effectiveness and results.

Growth plans celebrate the fact that everyone can be a leader even if they're not the leader. By helping our team members build new strengths, habits, and skills, we're setting up the future leaders of our organization up for success. At the end of the day, we don't need more cogs. We need more leaders. Personalized development plans are the key to creating them.

Here's the general concept:

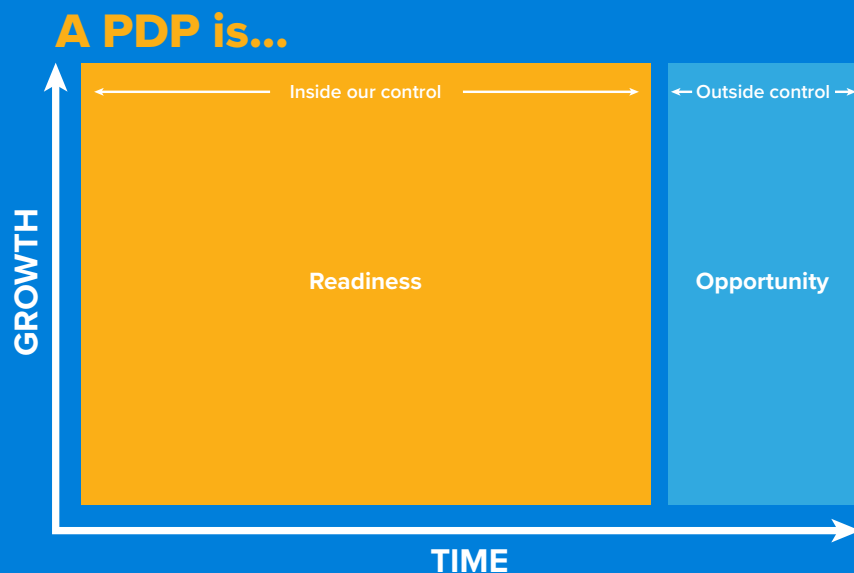
- Employees determine a goal or skill they want to work towards.
- Employee and manager work together to break that goal down into tangible milestones or action items including:
 - Training
 - Books, articles or podcasts
 - Shadowing
 - Learning or practicing a skill
- Each milestone is reflected on and celebrated along the way.
- Repeat the process with a new goal.

Readiness vs. opportunity

Before we dive into the practical, let's address one more critical philosophy around effective PDPs. The goal is to help team members achieve readiness (circumstances within their control) to prepare for an opportunity that may or may not come along (outside of their control).

It's about sharpening your sword during a time of peace.

It's truly about the journey, not the destination.



Claire Vo, CPO at LaunchDarkly says, “People that want to be promoted need to solve a problem for the organization; NOT solve for their career growth. The conversation needs to start from a place about how changing roles is what’s best for the team and why the team needs it.”

That’s precisely why Personal Development Plans (PDPs) aren’t merely about grooming team members for promotion. They’re designed to empower individuals to enhance their skills and contribute greater value across all

facets of the organization.

We call this the 4 'E's to readiness. Here's the breakdown of how to coach your team members to be prepared for growth.

1. Excellence - Thrive where you are today. Rather than focusing on having the right skills in the future, help your team recognize that excelling at what's in front of them now is the best foundation for future growth.


2. Education - Never stop learning. Encourage continuous development by providing access to relevant resources such as books, podcasts, and blogs tailored to each team member's professional interests.

3. Experience - Stretch projects increase strength. Like all things in life, experience is where you build the muscles needed in the next season. Give your team the opportunities for stretch projects related to their goals. This offers them a safe place to fail, get up, try again, and ultimately, get the experience they need to progress.

4. Express - Share desires for growth or promotions. Foster an open and supportive environment where team members feel comfortable expressing their career aspirations. Goals change over time, so ensure it's an ongoing conversation.


Okay, now we can dive into the practical.

Here are two easy ways to visualize and structure your PDP from a birds-eye view.

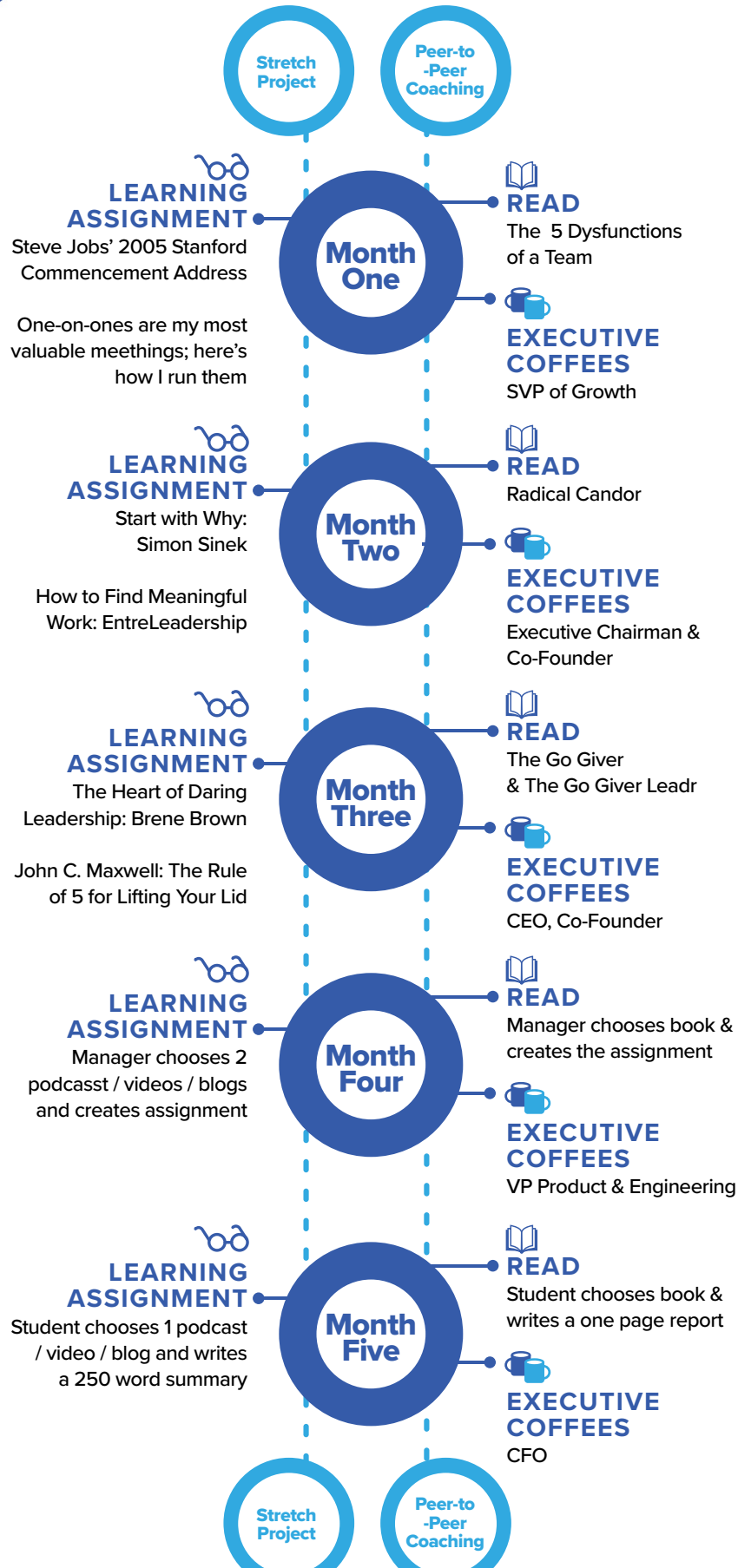


Personalized Development Plan

Employee Name

Content/Project	Due Month 1	Due Month 2	Due Month 3	Due Month 4	Due Month 5
Books	The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team	Radical Candor	The Go Giver & The Go Giver Leadr	Manager chooses book & creates the assignment	Student chooses Book & writes a 1 page report
Learning Assignments	#1 - Steve Jobs' 2005 Stanford Commencement Address #2 - One-on-ones are my most valuable meetings; here's how I run them	#3 - Start with Why: Simon Sinek #4 - How to Find Meaningful Work: EntreLeadership	#5 - The Heart of Daring Leadership - Brene Brown #6 - John C Maxwell "The Rule of 5 for Lifting Your Lid"	Manager chooses 2 Podcast/Video/Blog & Creates assignment	Student chooses 1 Podcast/Video/Blog & writes a 250 word summary
Executive Coffees	SVP of Growth	Executive Chairman & Co-Founder	CEO & Co-Founder	VP Product & Engineering	CFO
Peer-To-Peer Coaching	Session on ____	Session on ____	Session on ____	Session on ____	Session on ____
STRETCH PROJECT					

DOWNLOAD THIS
 TEMPLATE TO
 CUSTOMIZE YOUR PDP.



NOW LETS BREAK DOWN
THE FULL PROCESS.

Who needs to be involved in the PDP process

Who's involved in the process will differ depending on the complexity of your org chart. But here's a good general rule of thumb.

THE EMPLOYEE

The employee should be the primary decision maker when it comes to their PDP to ensure they're fully invested in their success and growth in the areas they're most interested in.

THE EMPLOYEE'S DIRECT MANAGER

The manager should collaborate with the employee on the goal itself and help determine the action items that will help them achieve their goals. The manager's ultimate role is to help enable the employee to succeed by providing support, asking intentional questions throughout the process, and providing feedback along the way.

EXECUTIVE TEAM

The executive team should be given the overview of each employee's PDP to have visibility into their team's growth. This is important for leaders to know where their employee's time and effort are going and to have opportunities to celebrate and encourage their growth.

PDP tracks and examples

It's first critical to note that every employee is going to have unique goals for their growth. The most simple example of this is Kim Scott's description of Rockstars and Superstars in her book, Radical Candor. She explains that some employees are driven by a desire to become experts in their role, but aren't necessarily looking to rise to leadership (Rockstars). While others are driven by career growth and enjoy the challenge of trying new roles (Superstars).

We need Rockstars, Superstars, and everything in between to have a thriving organization. We also need to prioritize growth at every level: from hire to retire. That's why there are different forms of growth plans. That's where the first "P" of "PDP" comes in. Personalized.





This part is critical. PDPs are not one-size-fits-all. That's why step 1 of a PDP is asking each person to seriously consider what they're looking to accomplish.

Part 1: Help them as their leader by asking intentional questions like:

- What's one skill you'd love to learn more about?
- Do you dream about having a different role? What would that look like?
- In 3 years, what role would you like to have?
- Does the idea of leading others interest you?
- What tasks or projects do you lose track of time when working on?
- What makes you feel accomplished at work?
- What's a skill you have that you don't get to use as much as you'd like?
- Is there someone you'd like to work with or learn from?

Part 2: Once you have those conversations and identify some goals, it's time to lay out a plan.

At Leadr, we have 4 types of growth plans.

 <p>Develop a New Skill This could be a practical skill or a soft skill related to your role or in a different field altogether.</p>	 <p>Level Up in a Current Role What skills or experiences would help you become even better at your current job?</p>	 <p>Advance Career Track What do you need to learn before being promoted?</p>	 <p>Switch Career Track If you're interested in switching things up in your career, it's best to try out a new path before making the change.</p>
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Whether it's one of these paths or a different growth direction, here are the steps to take within each one.

Let's walk through an example of a PDP focused on developing a new skill.

Step 1: Create a goal

Let's say your team member wants to learn the Photoshop skills needed in their everyday role. Getting to this point should be a collaborative process. Help them create a goal that is refined enough to track and accomplish, but still stretches their current capabilities.

Step 2: Define markers of success

Creating clarity around what it looks like to win is critical to feeling accomplished at the end of your PDP. For our example, let's say the marker of successfully learning more photoshop skills is to not have to outsource any photo editing needs by the end of the PDP.

Once you know the goal and markers of success, you can determine the timeframe. We recommend most PDPs last somewhere between 3-6 months. This is long enough to create habits and account for unexpected challenges, while being short enough to stay focused and intentional.



Step 3: Break your goal down into 2-5 smaller goals that achieve your markers of success

Broad goals often don't make it to the finish line. That's why it's critical to map out the path to accomplishing your goal. If you know and control your inputs, the results will follow.

For our example, maybe that's learning X, Y, and Z skills in photoshop. Once those goals are mapped out, it's time to create the action items to get there. This is where the different components of a PDP come into play.

These are some of the learning opportunities we use in our PDPs at Leadr, but feel free to add and adapt to meet your team's needs.

Learning & Application - These can be videos, podcasts, articles, or trainings that help you learn more about the skill you're pursuing. These assignments should stretch your employee's thinking. Help them to apply their learnings by asking intentional questions about each learning opportunity afterward and discussing their experience together.

We suggest having one or two learning assignments per month throughout a PDP.

Shadowing - The best way to learn is from people who have gone before you. Who in your organization or elsewhere could your employee shadow or have a Q&A session with? This experience offers undivided time for team members to ask questions and request feedback from leaders they likely don't get to speak with on a daily basis, equipping them to witness leaders they admire in action.

The more shadowing opportunities you can fit within a PDP the better, but at least one is recommended.

Peer-to-Peer Coaching - Offering opportunities for team members with similar PDPs to meet and discuss what they're learning helps build stronger interdepartmental relationships and further drives these learnings home.

Monthly peer-to-peer connection points ensure a steady flow of communication without taking too much time away from your organization's work and mission.

Stretch Project - The concept here is that the employee chooses an initiative they are interested in that helps them step outside their comfort zone and moves the company forward. Some of our best innovations as a company have come from PDP Stretch Projects, including launching our company website in three months and starting our regional thought leadership events we call LeadTable.

There's nothing more powerful than helping an employee realize they can accomplish more than they ever thought they could and seeing how challenging themselves to grow also grows the company. It's the epitome of the alliance.

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Personalized Development Plan

Employee Name

Content/Project	Due Month 1	Due Month 2	Due Month 3	Due Month 4	Due Month 5
Books	Book 1: Foundations of a Team	Book 2: The 100 Essential Skills of a Leader	Book 3: The 100 Essential Skills of a Leader	Book 4: The 100 Essential Skills of a Leader	Book 5: The 100 Essential Skills of a Leader
Learning Assignments	A1 - Study John 2008 Leadership Communication Address	A2 - Study with Why: Essential Skills	A3 - The Power of Giving: Leadership Skills	A4 - How to Build a Winning Team: Leadership Skills	A5 - How to Build a Winning Team: Leadership Skills
Executive Coffees	CEO of Growth	Executive Chairman & Co-Founder	CEO & Co-Founder	VP Product & Engineering	CEO
Peer-to-Peer Coaching	Session on ...	Session on ...	Session on ...	Session on ...	Session on ...
STRETCH PROJECT					→

Once you have a list of the projects and/or tasks that will lead to accomplishing the goal, you can use the template on page 6 to plug in each of the activities and create a timeline for the PDP.

Step 4: Check in on progress every week in your 1:1 meetings

The key to successful development is how you follow through once the plan is made. To ensure your team members are set up for success, be sure you have intentional progress conversations each week in your 1:1 meetings. You can also set up separate meetings specifically for the PDP.

Either way, here are the discussion points to hit along the way:

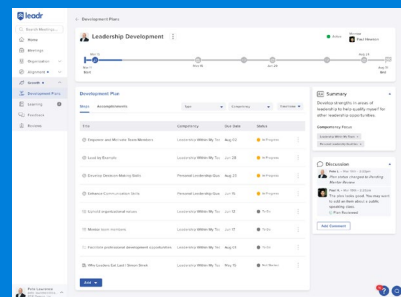
Discuss learnings. Ask intentional questions about what they're taking away from each of their activities. That will help their learnings sink in and show your investment in their growth.

Celebrate successes. As they make progress toward their goal, be sure to acknowledge the hard work they're putting into their development. What's celebrated gets repeated.

Provide feedback. Whether it's tips for time management as they're working through their PDP or additional learning opportunities you uncover along the way, be sure you offer your team members feedback throughout the process. Remember: your primary role as a manager is to coach and enable your team.

Don't be afraid to change the plan if you realize something else makes more sense.

PRO TIP



If this seems overwhelming, we've got your back.

At Leadr, we've built a tool to simplify the process step-by-step. Leadr has an entire PDP module where you can plan, track, and communicate throughout your PDP. [Click here to get a custom tour of Leadr.](#)

Next steps

The goal of a PDP isn't to create more work or have a way to check "developing my team" off the list. It's a direct path to encouraging your team and enabling them to reach their goals. Once you get through a PDP, don't let the momentum slow down.

Embrace all of the progress made throughout the PDP by holding a post-mortem to discuss the main takeaways, evaluate next steps, and plan for the next growth opportunity.

Or use Leadr's Feedback module to keep things simple.

Here are a few key questions to ask in a post-mortem or feedback request:

- What did you learn about yourself?
- What big takeaways did you uncover?
- Which exercise was most helpful to you during your PDP? Why?
- Do you feel more confident in your role, career, or planned career change?
- What next steps can you take to keep growing?
- Do you have ideas for a new PDP?

When Not to have a PDP

PDPs are an incredible way to support employees who are looking to grow in a skill or career path.

That being said, it's key to make sure the employee has the personal and professional bandwidth to commit to their PDP. Monumental life changes like a big move, adding or losing family members, or health concerns require a lot of personal energy.

Having a regular care question in your 1:1 meetings can help you uncover when your team members may be in one of those life stages.

In those times, a full PDP may be overwhelming. If you have a team member who's looking to grow but has less capacity during a specific season, you can invest in them by reading a book as a team, simply discussing their personal growth goals in 1:1s, or having a less strenuous plan for professional growth.

Remember, the goal isn't to check development off the list of to do's. It's to help your team grow and thrive in their career and life.

Why thriving teams use Leadr for their PDPs.

When you invest in your team members, you invest in your mission.

Leadr helps organizations invest in their teams to help every team member become a leader in their space. Our software is built to help you implement and track this PDP framework, including your 1:1 meetings, personality insights, goal tracking, and more.

Lead on.



Get a product overview of Leadr or request a custom tour with one of our team members today.

