How personal development helps professional development

Technology, economies, legislation and market demands are constantly changing – often very quickly. To remain competitive, organizations in every sector must continually adapt, adjust, and evolve. So must their employees. Continuous learning is essential to remaining relevant and furthering careers and it involves more than professional development -- it includes personal development.

Professional vs. personal development
While it's vital to keep our technical knowledge up-to-date, learn new skills and expand our understanding of our area of expertise, why is personal development as important? And what does it encompass?

Personal development or growth means acquiring knowledge and skills that expand our self-awareness, help us meet our potential and enhance the quality of our lives. This means different things to different people and can involve the physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual (this doesn't necessarily mean religion or faith, it can mean believing in yourself and what makes you feel fulfilled, happy and at peace) parts of our lives. For many people, it's about self-actualization.

It's not just our private lives that benefit. Personal development can have tremendous professional benefits. It can improve our skills in:

- Communication/public speaking

- Interpersonal relationships

- Conflict resolution

- Negotiation

- Cross-cultural understanding

- Time management

Staying focused on learning

Learning and development takes time and energy and is not always easy, especially when life gets busy or stressful. The secret is recognizing that learning is not just about classrooms. We also learn by reading novels, traveling, attending conferences, watching others, playing sports and through our mistakes. Here are some ideas to help you stay motivated and on track:

- Focus on one thing at a time

- Make learning fun and fulfilling

- Schedule regular time for yourself

- Constantly set new – and realistic goals

- Do things you've always wanted to do

- Reward yourself for achievements

- Have a support system and involve others

- Challenge yourself to try new things

- Find mentors and role models

- Get involved at work and in the community

- Read everyday

And finally, give yourself a break. Don't be afraid to fail. Continuous learning is not about being the best at everything you try, it's about learning to be the best you. Contact us for support and resources.

How to support your team through mental health challenges

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health disorders are the leading cause of disability worldwide. For North American businesses, mental health issues (particularly depression and anxiety) are costing billions of dollars annually in lost productivity and those costs are rising rapidly. Supporting the psychological health of employees has become a business priority for organizations in every sector.

Supporting workplace mental health
Every workplace is different, but a psychologically healthy workplace has the following features:

- Encouraging and expecting respectful behaviors and having clear guidelines regarding harassment and bullying
- Clearly defining employees' duties and responsibilities
- Allowing people to voice their opinions on subjects that concern them
- Recognizing good work and service
- Social programs
- Professional development and learning opportunities
- Resources for those who need help and programs to reduce the stigma of mental health issues

Supporting employees
As a manager, you play a significant role in creating and maintaining a psychologically safe workplace. Here are few strategies to keep in mind:

- Have regular one-to-one conversations with team members to ask them how they're doing. This will help build trust and give people opportunities to talk about both professional and personal issues.
- Know your team. This way you'll notice early signs of struggle. These might include:
  - Changes in behavior, mood or interactions with others
  - Drop in productivity, engagement and focus
  - Appearing tired, anxious or withdrawn
  - Difficulty making decisions, solving problems or getting organized
  - Increased absence from work
- Encourage people to take breaks and vacations.
- Find ways to have fun as a team.
- Lead by example. Be seen as honest, fair and respectful. Praise good work, be a coach and mentor, support people's professional development and take care of your own mental health.

Access your program 24/7 workhealthlife.com

Having a conversation about mental health

Discussing performance or behavioral issues with employees is never easy. Here are some tips to get a conversation started:

- Choose a comfortable, private space where you won't be interrupted.
- Ask open and non-judgmental questions and let the individual explain what they're experiencing and what support they need. Ensure the employee that your conversation will remain private and confidential.
- If you suspect a mental health issue, refer the employee to their family physician or their Employee Assistance Program. Don't make assumptions.
- Work to find ways to support the employee. For example, moving him or her to a quieter location or adjusting responsibilities.

It's a good idea to take notes about the conversation and seek advice or guidance from Human Resources as needed. Contact us for more resources to help you better support the mental health of your team.