Ignite Development Potential:
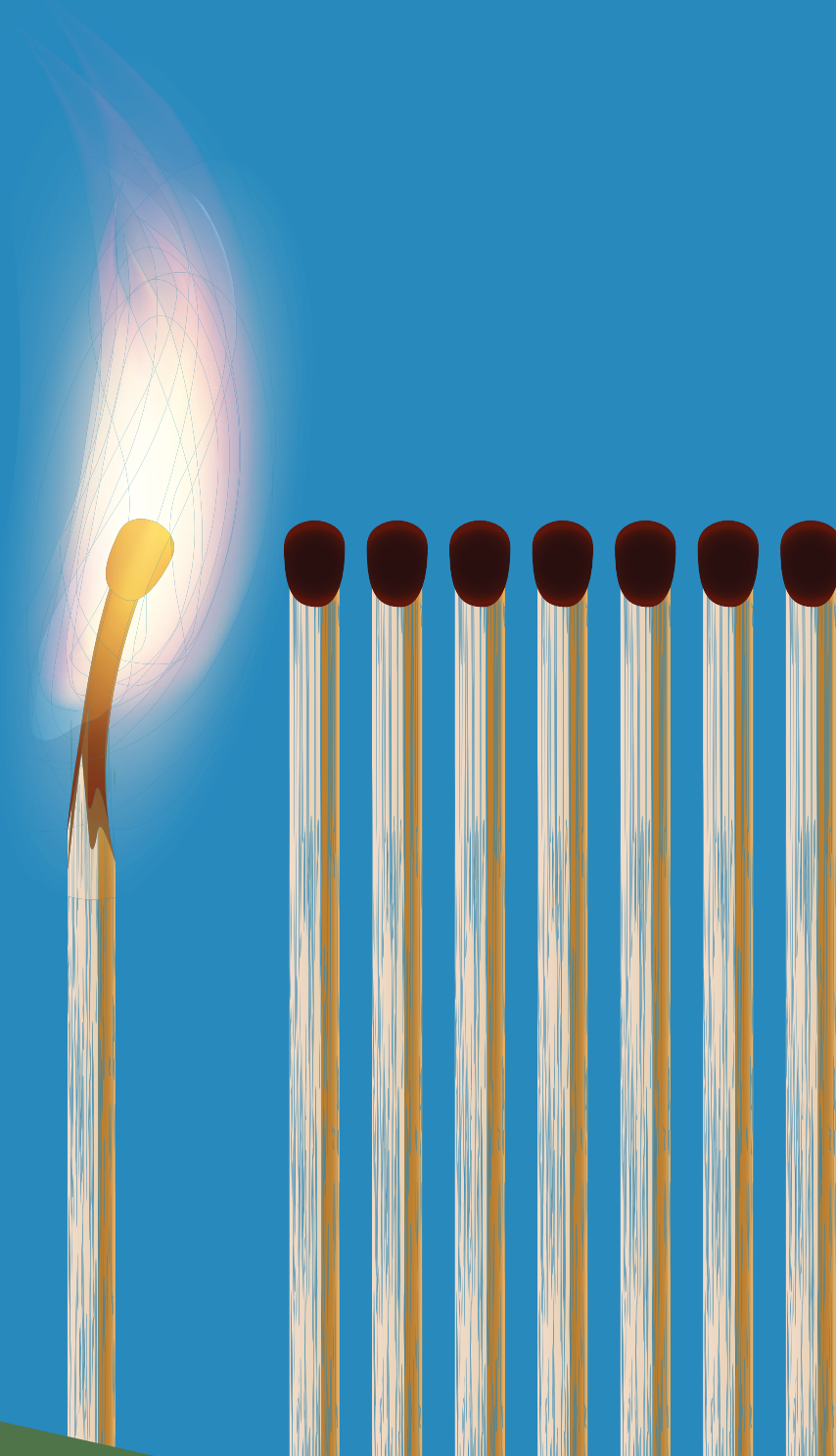
The Modern IDP

**Based on the
Thought Leadership of:
Beverly Kaye and Julie Winkle Giulioni**

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Here are some truths about employee development as we approach a new decade: Workers crave it. Managers struggle with it. And organizations struggle to balance offering relevant learning and growth to a diverse workforce with the escalating needs of the business.

Pressure to crack the code on development is at an all-time high because:

► Profound skills gaps exist. Research from Deloitte revealed that fewer than 4 in 10 millennial employees and 3 in 10 Generation Z workers have the skills they need to succeed—skills they are looking to their employers to provide.[1]

► Development is becoming an expectation. A Udemy study of millennials found that 42 percent of respondents said that learning and development is the most important benefit they consider when choosing a job.[2]

► Development can attrition-proof an organization. A LinkedIn Learning report discovered that 94 percent of workers would stay at a company longer if it invested in their careers.[3]

► Dissatisfaction with development is a significant problem. A survey for The Conference Board found that only 37.5 percent of respondents were satisfied with their potential growth at their organizations, 32.6 percent were happy with educational/job training programs, and 26.3 percent were satisfied with their company's promotion policy.[4]
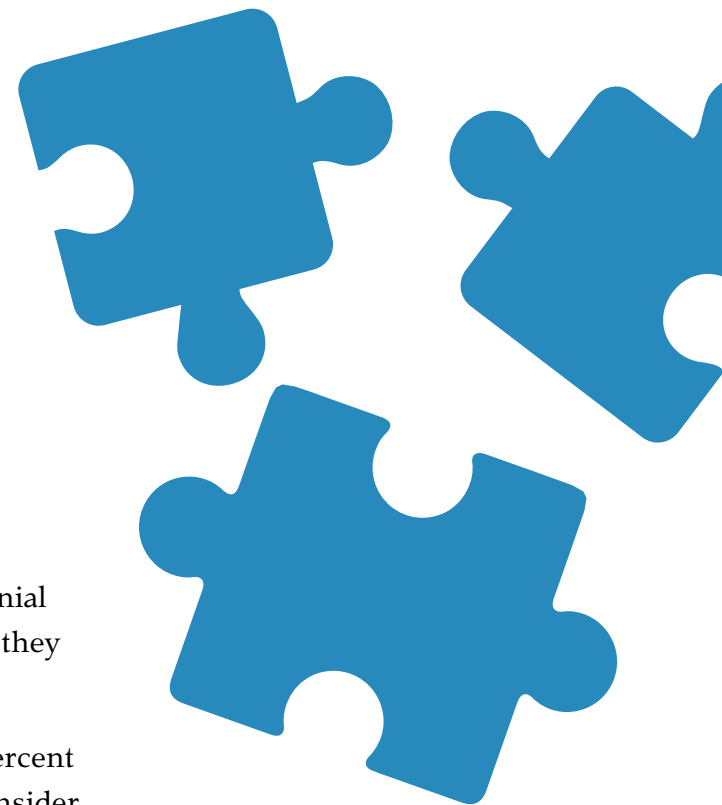
Effective development fosters retention, productivity, job satisfaction, and much more. This is why organizations originally introduced the individual development plan (IDP). It was a tool to ensure that every employee would enjoy the benefits of development through at least one structured conversation each year. The idea was great in theory, but in practice, many organizations now find that IDPs have fallen woefully short of their potential. The initiative has become branded as an arduous human resources requirement, and in many cases, IDPs have lost the simplicity and humanity associated with just helping people grow.

Beverly Kaye and Julie Winkle Giulioni, experts in leadership and career development and authors of *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go: Career Conversations Organizations Need and Employees Want,* have observed this dynamic and understand its implications.

THEY WRITE

"Even during challenging economic times, your best and brightest have options. Failing to help them grow can lead employees to take their talents elsewhere. They become 'history.' But what can be equally as damaging as this sort of talent drain are the employees who stay and become disengaged. Their bodies remain but their commitment has quit. In this way, history plays out, repeating itself over and over again in too many organizations."

The situation isn't hopeless. Organizations willing to take a hard look at how they approach the IDP will not only create better individual development plans, but also help the acronym take on new meaning, becoming a tool to "ignite development potential" and "inspire daily progress"—because that may be exactly what is needed to get employees excited about their prospects within an organization.

This guide, based on Kaye and Winkle Giulioni's thought leadership, explores:

► Why IDPs so frequently fall short of what's possible.

► How transforming the process can deliver the results organizations need, managers strive for, and employees want.

► Strategies for realizing the maximum benefits of the IDP before, during, and after IDP conversations.

The IDP can be a powerful tool for inspiring employees, developing individual capacity, and building an organization's greatest competitive advantage: its talent. That's what this guide is designed to help you do.

01 IDPs: The Inconvenient Truths

Despite organizations' and managers' good intentions, development planning frequently fails to deliver on its promise of development. Here are some reasons why.

The IDP is treated as a one-and-done activity: The manager and employee engage in a single development conversation, and everyone leaves the meeting feeling good—but no one ever follows up or acts upon the outcomes of the discussion. Even inspired employees can get bogged down with other duties, and without proactive support from the manager, the IDP can be forgotten ... until this time next year.

The IDP becomes a check-the-box activity: If leaders and employees focus only on the paperwork and the process, the IDP devolves from what should be a deeply personal and meaningful conversation into simply an administrative to-do that fails to generate enthusiasm or follow-through.

Processes become the priority: Organizations can pack too much into the IDP process—steps, actions, and forms—and shift the focus away from the conversations required for growth. In these cases, accountability (making sure that there is 100 percent compliance) takes priority, overshadowing the core goal of development.

It is unfamiliar to many: Many executives, managers, and other business leaders struggle to facilitate effective IDPs because they haven't experienced it for themselves. Without this personal frame of reference, managers lack a good model to follow and may even fail to see the value of the IDP.

Managers perceive they can't make the time commitment: Development planning paperwork and processes, actual conversations, and follow-up require an investment of time on the part of managers. If they don't see the value of the IDP or feel that they are already too busy (and who doesn't?), they might forego the process or devote the bare minimum effort to it, undermining its potential for development and growth.

What a Great IDP Can Accomplish

These are the pitfalls and obstacles that organizations encounter—and have created for themselves—with regard to the IDP. But it is worth it for leaders to address and overcome these obstacles because development is a powerful contributor to organizational success.

In addition to the obvious career development benefits for the employee, an effective IDP offers another kind of development: improved manager-employee relationships. The personalized attention shown by a manager who is not just going through the motions instills engagement, loyalty, and satisfaction. Employees feel valued because they see that their workplace sincerely wants them not only to succeed, but also to grow with the organization and make bigger contributions to its future.

Deep down, most employees crave the opportunity to talk about their hopes, dreams, and aspirations with the people best positioned to help them achieve those goals. Given a plan and sincere conversations with a manager, an employee can see the path to something more—something worth striving for, and something fully supported by the organization.

Leaders also benefit from a great IDP. Besides the personal satisfaction of seeing employees succeed and grow (and guiding them in that direction), managers are increasingly evaluated and held accountable for their subordinates' development along with traditional criteria such as creating innovation and driving results that benefit the entire organization. Individual development planning (and the relationships that are the byproduct of it) helps leaders succeed because it actively supports their employees' success.
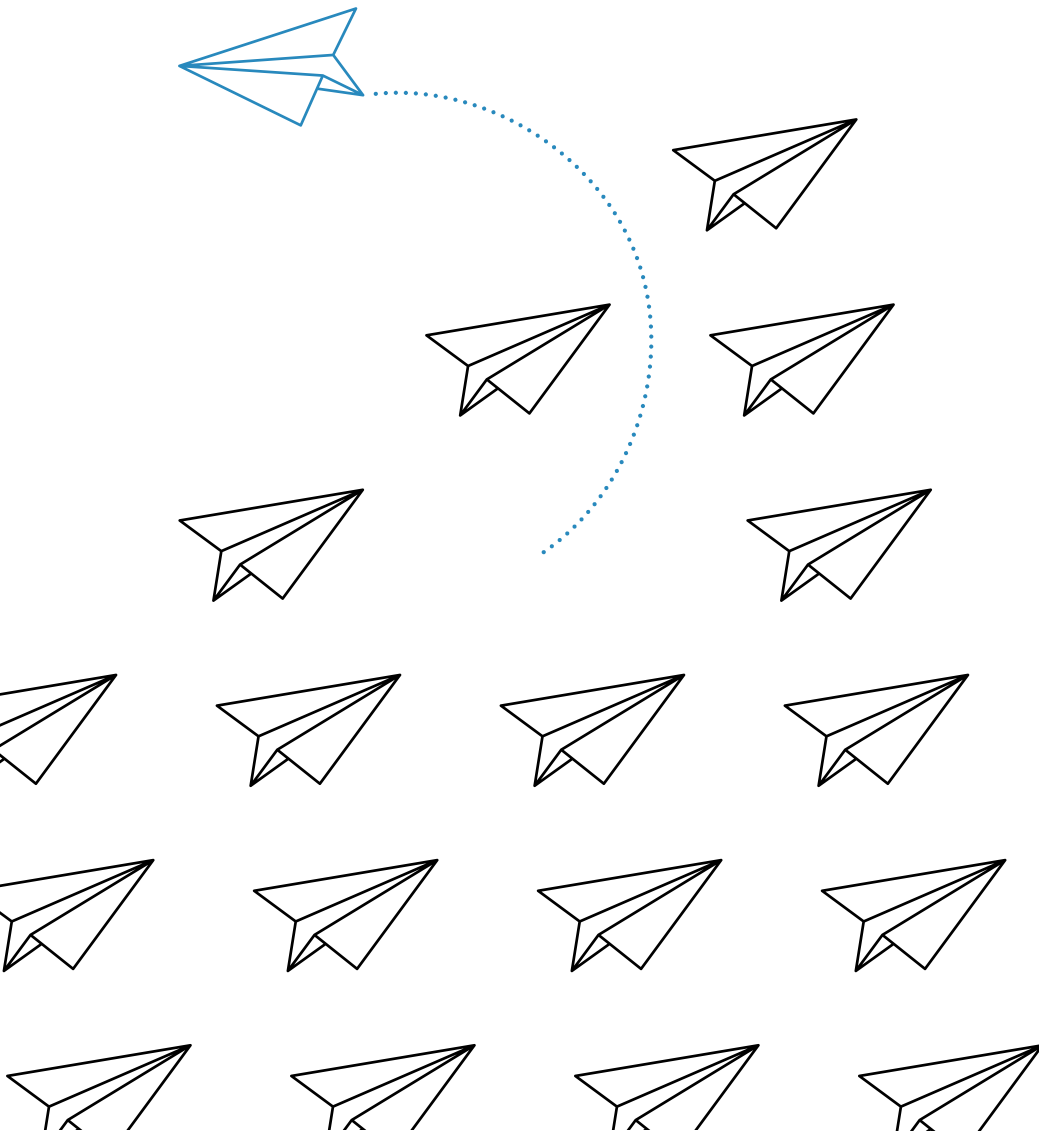
The IDP Transformation

For organizations and leaders wishing to transform their development processes into something truly game-changing, the underlying challenge involves replacing perfunctory processes with dynamic and opportunity-filled dialog. The key is turning the IDP into an engaging interaction—and maybe even a celebration—that inspires reflection, discovery, exchange of ideas, motivation, and growth. And this doesn't happen by chance—it happens as a result of intentional effort on the part of both the manager and the employee.

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02 Getting the Juices Flowing

The preparation for the IDP conversation with an employee might be just as important as the conversation itself. So here are some strategies to incorporate into the IDP process to get everyone thinking about what they want to bring to and get out of the development discussion.

Tap the Power of Reflection

Coming to the conversation thoughtfully can ultimately transform a traditional IDP into an inspiring and memorable interaction. Reflection and introspection allow the manager and the employee to approach the conversation with the right mindset. The IDP then becomes more than just another required activity; it evolves into an intentional, interactive discussion that benefits everyone.

And the good news is that the mere expectation of joint reflection changes the dynamic of the IDP. No longer is the leader required to do all the heavy lifting. Employees take on a bigger role in preparing for the conversation, and the implications are enormous:

► Leaders stop dictating the terms of an employee's development and focus instead on understanding what is most important to their subordinates.

► When less time is spent documenting, leaders can dedicate more time to conversing.

► Employees experience a great sense of ownership and can ultimately have a stronger hand in driving their career development.

The quality of preparation, from both sides, directly influences the quality of the interaction.
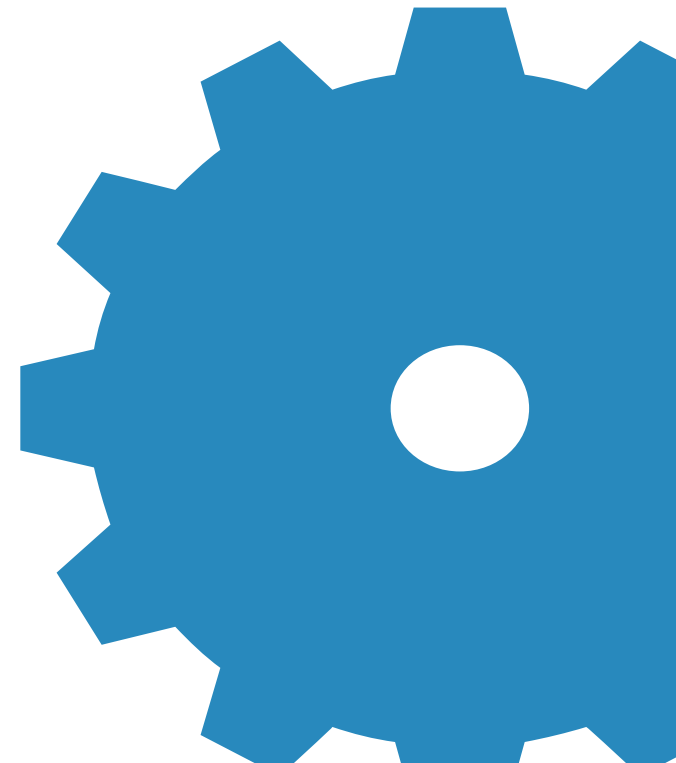
Get Employees Thinking in Advance

Help employees prepare and get their creative developmental juices flowing with the following worksheet. It is a simple yet profound tool of self-reflection that can turbocharge the IDP.

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Give It Some Thought

This worksheet is designed to help you reflect and prepare for your upcoming individual development planning (IDP) meeting. It offers you a chance to step back, think deeply about what is important to you and what you want, and get ready for a rich and rewarding exchange with your manager. Answer honestly and thoroughly—this is your career, so take control of it!

1. What is the unique value proposition you bring to our team and the organization?

2. What is changing in the larger business context that could have an effect on your career development?

3. What challenges, problems, customers, technologies, materials, industries, etc. are you interested in learning about and/or working with?

4. What skills or abilities are screaming or yearning to be recognized or used?

5. What's your personal brand in the workplace and how would you like it to change or expand in the future?

What Managers Can Do

A successful IDP that affects real change doesn't rest exclusively on the shoulders of the employee. Managers will facilitate a richer conversation if they have also engaged in some advance reflection. But there is a difference between pre-thinking and making plans for others in a vacuum. Managers should come to the conversation with ideas and perspectives, but leave plenty of room for dialogue, collaboration, and co-creation of a plan to help the employee move forward.

Doing this effectively demands a certain skill set, but it also demands a certain mindset—one based upon the premise that development is a partnership.

The development partnership mindset

► Career development is an ongoing relationship between employees, leaders, and organizations.

► Employees own their development and leaders have a key role in supporting them.

► The free flow of candid information promotes development relationships and opportunities.

► Sustainable career development is based upon trust and offers value to employees and the organization.

► Employees, leaders, and the organization have a mutual interest in each other's development—we all have a stake in seeing each other grow.

These beliefs create a mindset that facilitates meaningful connections and enable conversations that drive employees to take ownership of their development plans and make a real difference. This mindset also has the power to inspire employees to become better versions of themselves ... and to contribute to a better version of the organization in the process.

Making the Most of the Interaction

Reflection, preparation, and the proper mindset are critical to a successful IDP. But ultimately, it is the conversation that counts because, as the authors describe in Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go, "careers are developed one conversation at a time ... over time."

The best conversations are rich, generous, curious exchanges that yield greater connection, understanding, and engagement on both sides. And the good news is that it's not magic or art—it's a set of skills that any leader can master. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

Conversation Starters

Questions are at the center of any conversation, and career conversations are no exception. Leaders can dramatically improve the quality of their IDPs by simply being prepared with some great questions. Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go contains 100 career conversation starters, and the Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go card deck features 56 more insightful questions that business leaders have been asked or wish they had been asked.

Some fan favorites that you can use to add richness to any IDP include:

► What is so embedded in your DNA that you just can't help doing it?

► What skills do you appreciate in others that you don't always see in yourself?

► What can your coworkers always count on you for?

► How is the competition currently challenging us? What could we learn from our competitors?

► What is one sure way our organization is changing? How might that impact your work?

► How are current business conditions likely to affect the products, services, and revenue streams that you contribute to?

► What is your definition of career success?

► When you look at what might be possible in the future, what would you most regret not trying?

► What are you willing to invest to achieve your growth goals?

Three themes emerge in these questions:

► Questions 1-3 focus on hindsight, challenging employees to think about where and who they've been and how they have been perceived by others.

► Questions 4-6 address foresight and deal with where the organization and the larger industry is headed and how any changes could affect the future.

► The final three questions deal with insight, helping employees consider opportunities, actions, and learning.

All three themes are important in facilitating an effective IDP. Used together, they focus on the past, present, and future and create a personalized development strategy tailored to and by the employee.

"Leaders can dramatically improve the quality of their IDPs by simply being prepared with some great questions."

IDP Dos and Don'ts

Preparation is key—and so is execution. Effective leaders and developers of others take these guidelines to heart.

| DO	DON'T
✓ Give the employee your full attention.	✗ Don't rush or become preoccupied with filling out the IDP form.
✓ Focus on facilitating a great development conversation.	✗ Don't confuse this conversation with a performance appraisal.
✓ Ask open-ended, thought-provoking questions.	✗ Don't make assumptions about what others want or need.
✓ Be genuinely curious.	✗ Don't fear silence; give employees a little time to reflect if needed (particularly if you're asking great questions!).
✓ Listen instead of lecturing.	
✓ Empower the employee to assume responsibility for his or her development.	✗ Don't compromise possibility by prematurely rushing to planning.
✓ Be honest but also optimistic, and never be dismissive.	✗ Don't try to hammer out every detail in one meeting; some time and reflection can yield terrific results.
✓ Set the expectation for future interactions.	✗ Don't forget to express your confidence and appreciation.

03 Beyond the IDP

The IDP is critical, but it is just the beginning of your employees' development journeys. Let's be clear about this: Even the best and most perfectly orchestrated individual development planning conversation is not enough to drive a year's worth of development.

One conversation does not development make! It's a start … that needs to be followed up on routinely, day in and day out, in the workflow. This is the only way employee enthusiasm and commitment will grow, action plans will actually be executed, and growth will become a reality. Here is what it looks like.

Give Employees a Chance

Offer ongoing developmental activities and other opportunities to pursue growth goals—whether it is formal learning and educational programs, coaching, or something within the employee's day-to-day responsibilities. When managers leverage their spheres of influence, they can help people turn their current roles into powerful vehicles for learning and growth. Some ways that employees can expand their current roles and grow right where they are include:

► Taking on a new responsibility that aligns with career goals—this helps develop new competencies within the context of real work.

► Leveraging a skill they excel at to mentor or coach others.

► Leading a meeting they wouldn't normally lead—this is great for developing interpersonal and planning skills.

► Assembling and leading a team on a special project—this gives employees a taste of management.

► Sitting in on executive-level meetings to get a better sense of expectations, skills, and competencies required at higher job levels, as well as the goals and priorities of the organization.
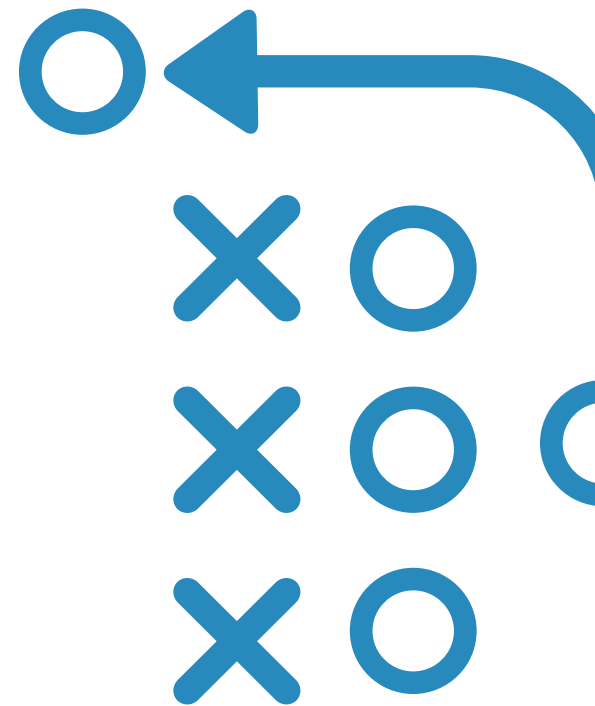
Encourage Experimentation

Growth happens outside of one's comfort zone, so encourage employees to stretch and try new things. Create an environment that supports intelligent risk-taking. Recognize the value of experimentation. Help people embrace the value of mistakes and the lessons associated with failure. Actively work with employees to unpack their learning and ensure that they squeeze the most development value out of each success or failure.

> "Create an environment that supports intelligent risk-taking. Recognize the value of experimentation."

Look for the Cues

Leaders don't have to wait for annual IDPs to talk about development. Opportunities can be found every day, but only for those who are aware of the cues around them. Small, mundane moments can become powerful developmental drivers when leaders seize the opportunity and ask a question.

For instance, how frequently do you observe your employees doing the following?

► Starting a new project or concluding an old project

► Returning from training

► Experiencing setbacks

► Being passed over for an opportunity or assignment

► Displaying a noticeable lack of interest, effort, or motivation

► Mentioning an interesting tidbit they read, watched, or heard

► Reacting to organizational decisions that may or may not affect them

► Meeting or failing to meet milestones

► Receiving awards and honors

► Complaining about a lack of recognition for hard work

Now, how frequently do you see these situations transformed into development conversations? It is as easy as picking up on a cue, choosing a question, and chatting with the employee for just a couple of minutes. You're likely going to have a conversation anyway—why not use it to promote insight, understanding, and growth?

Want to see what it looks like? Here is an example of a quick development conversation—a two-minute, in-the-moment exchange during which the manager picks up on the cues the employee is giving:

Employee: "I really lost sleep over that presentation, but it went pretty well."

A couple of cues present themselves here. The employee feels good about the presentation but had some concerns. Pause.

Manager: "I agree. You did a great job. Why'd you lose sleep over it?"

Nice confirmation, but the manager doesn't leave it there. He moves the ball forward with an opportunity to reflect and look inward and backward. That's hindsight.

Employee: "I've never been all that comfortable presenting in front of others. It always makes me nervous. Especially with those senior guys in the room."
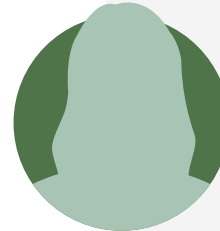
Manager: "I know. That can be unnerving. What did you do that helped make this presentation so successful?"

The manager is staying in the game with another hindsight question that helps the employee reflect on strengths, skills, and talents.

Employee: "I did my homework and had all the right data at my fingertips."

Manager: "Preparation and research are definitely a couple of your key strengths. Given the new strategic direction, do you see yourself doing more or less of this sort of presentation work?"

With only seconds left on the clock, the manager nimbly weaves together the hindsight and foresight into insight, pointing the employee toward a possibility.

Employee: "Yeah. Maybe so. I'd better get a handle on those butterflies if I'm going to spend more time doing it."
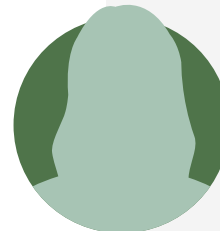
Manager: "How might you go about getting those butterflies in line?"

But the manager doesn't stop there. He carries the ball across the goal line by moving the conversation into the realm of action. Touchdown! This is what "growing with the flow" looks like. It's about having unplanned conversations like this that honor the cadence of business and the authentic, real-time, iterative nature of development. When you spot the cues and ask questions, you encourage growth not just once a year, but day in and day out.

ARE YOUR DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS PAYING OFF?

Implementing these strategies won't yield results overnight, and measuring success isn't always so clear-cut. Here are some positive indicators to watch for—if you see them, you can be confident that your development efforts are working:

► Less turnover

► More productivity

► Employees moving on to new roles/being promoted

► Greater cooperation among team members

► Greater trust in you (and not just for development)

► Team members more confidently offering opinions

► Better engagement

04 From Nicety to Necessity

Development has quickly become a mission-critical priority for many organizations. It drives engagement, discretionary effort, innovation, quality, job satisfaction, customer satisfaction, retention, productivity, and more.

Whereas in the past, development was considered an "extra"—something we might get around to after the real work is done—now it is an essential expectation of employment. Organizations that crack the code on delivering meaningful development experiences will survive and thrive.

Updating, refreshing, and breathing new life into the old, stale IDP is a non-negotiable step in this process. And that boils down in large part to preparing for and facilitating rich exchanges that bring out the best in each individual while supporting the organization and its mission. But expecting that one conversation each year will meet employee needs and actually produce meaningful growth is laughable.

Smart leaders and organizations understand that although the process begins with and is punctuated by a formalized planning meeting, it is the ongoing development dialog, embedded right into the workflow, that keeps people satisfied, engaged, and growing over time. And when you bring the two together, a whole new "IDP" opens up: inconceivable development potential.
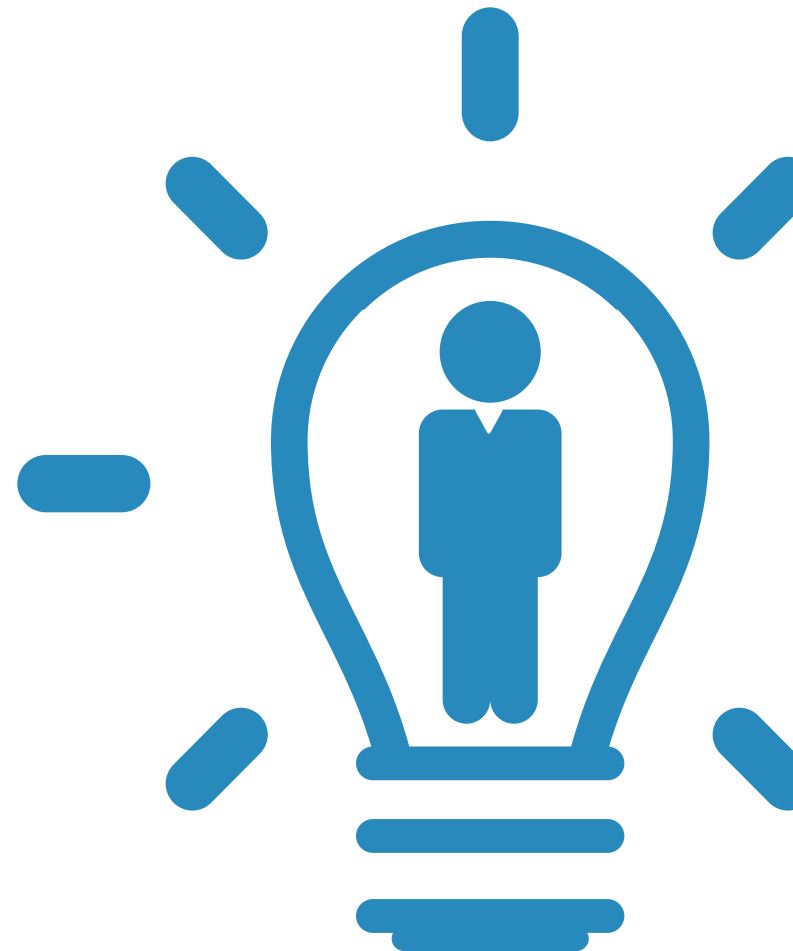
This guide is based upon the expertise of Beverly Kaye and Julie Winkle Giulioni. They would love to hear from business leaders who want to learn more about developing employees and leaders alike.

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For greater depth, developmental activities, conversation starters, and more, purchase their resources, *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go* and the accompanying card deck, both of which are available from Berrett-Koehler Publishers, a leader in books and resources connecting people and ideas to create a world that works for all. Berrett-Koehler offers a deep library of works committed to improving and revolutionizing the modern business, written by foremost experts in the field. Visit our website and subscribe to our blog to learn more.

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