

NOT HAPPY WITH YOUR CAREER?

A Happier—
and Scrappier—
Approach
to Career
Development

by Julie Winkle Giulioni



In today's rapidly evolving workplace, traditional approaches to career growth can no longer deliver the professional development that many employees crave and demand. Shrinking budgets, limited promotions and moves. Dramatically evolving skill gaps. Fewer formal learning opportunities. Stretch-to-the-limit managers who lack visibility to their remote and hybrid workforces. Is this a recipe for the end of career development?

Not in the least! In fact, it's a recipe for a more vibrant, meaningful, and personally satisfying approach as current conditions conspire to underscore what we've known for some time: responsibility ultimately rests on individuals to drive their own growth. And driving development today means adopting a "scrappy" style—using what's available and within their sphere of influence, enriching their current roles, getting creative, and wringing every ounce of development from routine activity. No promotions or training programs? No problem – and no reason to be unhappy. Just get scrappy.

Understanding the Scrappy Approach

Gallup has researched and reported on employee engagement for the last 20 years. Pre-pandemic, we saw that engagement levels were improving year after year, peaking in 2019. However, [Gallup reports](#) that in 2020 "engagement levels have fluctuated more than ever before." In some cases, organizations are seeing engagement scores return to pre-pandemic levels or even exceed them while other organizations continue to experience challenges and less-than-satisfying engagement results.

Organizations along the entire continuum have responded impressively to the challenges presented by the pandemic by focusing on employee well-being, from amping up wellness programs to funding work-from-home set-ups, to virtual team building and flexible work hours to accommodate at-homeschooling. But, what will happen when we transition to a new set of norms?



Practice with Purpose

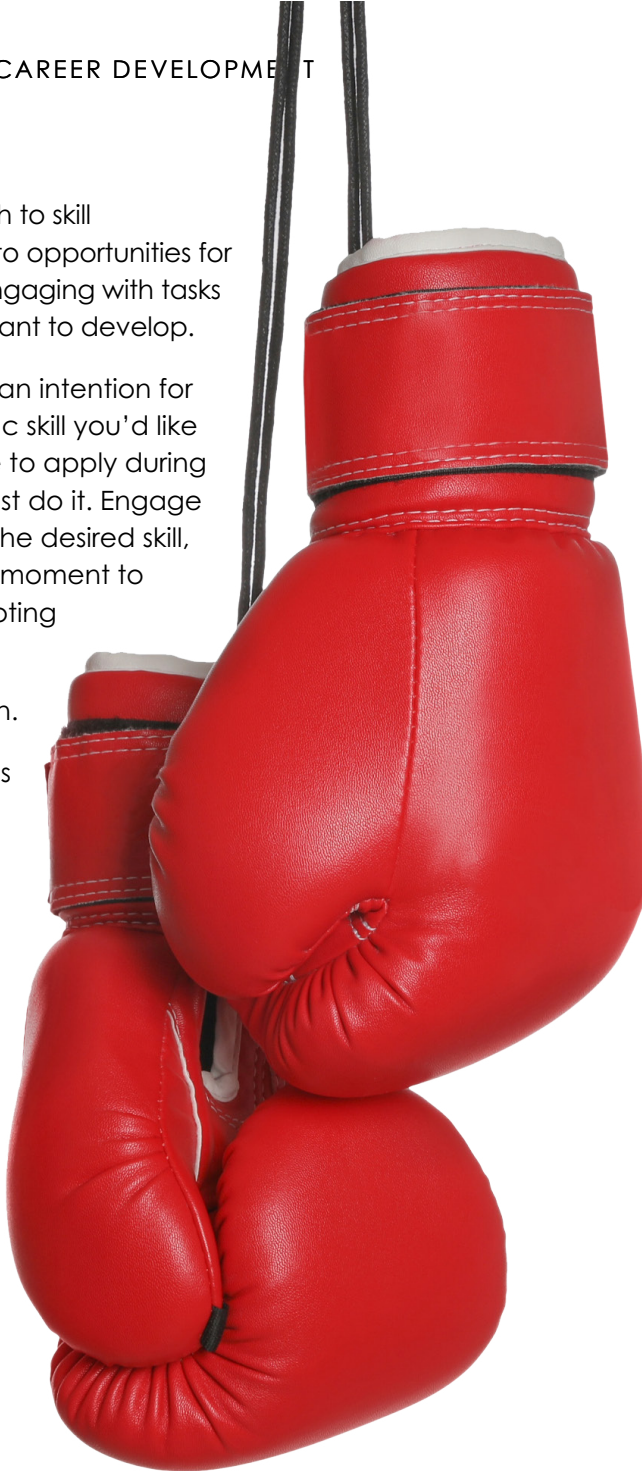
Purposeful practice is an organic, mindful approach to skill development that transforms everyday activities into opportunities for growth. It's about being curious and consciously engaging with tasks to marry potential opportunities with the skills you want to develop.

To implement purposeful practice, start by setting an intention for your next interaction, such as focusing on a specific skill you'd like to improve. Then, choose a behavior or technique to apply during a particular work-related event or activity. Then, just do it. Engage in the required task with the intention of applying the desired skill, behavior or technique. And when it's over, take a moment to reflect and extract lessons from the experience, noting what worked and what didn't.

Here's an example of purposeful practice in action.

- Set an intention: I will stop monopolizing meetings because of my technical expertise so that more people can feel a part of the process.
- Plan: During our next team meeting, I'm going to practice curiosity. I'll ask more questions and withhold my opinion or comments until the end, sharing only what's necessary.
- Reflect: I asked 4-5 questions that helped drive a good conversation. I asked for clarification and Roger seemed to appreciate that. I only jumped in once when it probably wasn't necessary. Next time, rather than offering my opinion, I'll find a way to ask a question that will get the team talking about a necessary topic.

This simple process can help transform routine tasks into powerful learning moments that drive personal and professional growth.



Get Scrappy

What aspect of your performance or how you show up would you like to change?

In the space below, clarify your intention.

I intend to

so that

What specific steps will you take to act upon your intention?

What did you learn from engaging in this purposeful practice? What else will you do to make your intention part of your daily life?

Seek Out an Opportunity Zone

Every organization has unclaimed areas where the needs are known but not clearly owned. This is your opportunity zone to make a difference. Perhaps it's the gray area between departments or the pinch points in the customer's journey. Being scrappy and stepping into these spaces offers a rigorous informal course of study in complexity, collaboration, creativity, execution, and more. By addressing these unclaimed areas, you can distinguish yourself for your initiative, gain visibility, and learn valuable lessons that cannot be taught within the confines of your regular duties.



Get Scrappy

Brainstorm (with your manager, others, or just yourself) where some of these opportunities lie. They might include inelegant customer handoffs, cross-functional glitches, missing process steps, departmental representation to organization-wide initiatives, etc.

POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES	WHAT MIGHT YOU STAND TO LEARN?

Optimize your Extracurriculars

Not all developmental needs can be met at work. Look to your volunteer efforts outside the workplace to gain new skills. For example, if you aspire to a supervisory role but aren't quite ready, seek leadership opportunities in your extracurricular activities. Chair a committee or lead a project to develop those skills. Scrappy self-developers find opportunities to learn in the most unlikely settings and squeeze development from even the most mundane experiences.

Get Scrappy

Consider what you are currently engaged in outside the workplace... and how you might wring some learning and development out of these activities.

CURRENT EXTRACURRICULARS	HOW IS IT CURRENTLY SUPPORTING YOUR GROWTH?	WHAT ADJUSTMENTS COULD YOU MAKE TO YOUR INVOLVEMENT TO ALLOW FOR MORE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

Cast a Wider Net

In many cases, your organization might not be able to offer the development you need within their four walls. Scrappy self-developers don't capitulate to those limitations. They explore up- and down-stream partnerships for development. How can relationships with suppliers, vendors, and even customers be used for growth? Are external rotational assignments a possibility? Sometimes the development you need requires thinking outside the usual box.

Get Scrappy

For a moment, just ignore the usual suspects and sources of learning and development. Get creative – even a little wacky. Who do you cross paths with from whom you've got something to learn? Invite a couple of colleagues to join you for a cup of coffee and hold a 5-minute brainstorming session (reminding them of the rule that there are no bad ideas and even ridiculous ones might spark some innovative thinking). After letting the list sit for a day or two, review it and you might be amazed at the fresh thinking it inspires.

Soak It Up

Mentorship is invaluable. But what if you don't have access to that kind of relationship? You can still learn from those you admire... even from a distance. Enjoy some career development by osmosis by observing how successful individuals get important things done. How do they handle challenges? Manage their time? Lead their teams? Absorb the free wisdom around you and take note of and incorporate new strategies into your own practice. Your best mentors might be those you don't interact with directly – and who don't even know you're watching – but who offer important lessons through their example.

Get Scrappy

Who are some people in the organization that you admire and from whom you could learn something?	
What could you learn from each person noted above?	
Which people do you know well enough to approach directly?	
Who in your current network might be able to facilitate an introduction to those you don't already know?	
What specifically will you ask of those you will approach for mentoring?	

The beauty of a “scrappy” approach to career development is that it's about making the most of what's already around you. It's not about waiting for the perfect opportunity but about seeing each moment as a chance to stretch, learn, and grow. When formal structures fall short, scrappy self-developers create their own paths, drawing lessons from routine tasks, unclaimed areas in their organization, and even external relationships.

By leveraging this mindset, anyone can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, transforming every experience into a stepping stone toward growth. It's not about having more resources—it's about being more resourceful. This approach is a reminder that we have the power to direct our own development, no matter the circumstances.



LEARN MORE

Looking to offer the kind of career development team members really want?

[Contact](#) Julie Winkle Giulioni to explore a range of training and consulting solutions based upon her two best-selling books.



ABOUT JULIE

Julie Winkle Giulioni is a champion for workplace growth and development and helps executives and leaders optimize talent and potential within their organizations through consulting, training, and keynote speeches. One of Inc. Magazine's Top 100 speakers, she's the co-author of the international bestseller, *Help Them Grow or Watch Them Go*, translated into seven languages. Her latest book, *Promotions Are So Yesterday: Redefine Career Development. Help Employees Thrive*, has been recognized with Nautilus and Axiom Business Book Awards.

Julie is a regular columnist for Training Industry Magazine and SmartBrief and contributes articles on leadership, career development, and workplace trends to numerous publications including Fast Company and The Economist.

Did you find this guide helpful?
CLICK TO SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



 julie@juliewinklegiulioni.com

 juliewinklegiulioni.com

 JulieWinkleGiulioni

 @julie_wg

 GrowBot