The Career Toolkit

Development Program

Essential Skills For Success That 𝖭̶𝗈̶ 𝖮̶𝗇̶𝖾̶ HR Taught You

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## Copyright

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## Purpose

This document is intended to be a guide for HR departments, organization leaders, or other groups that wish to employ [*The Career Toolkit*](https://www.thecareertoolkitbook.com/) as a professional development tool for their organization. Individuals can also use this to create reading groups.

## Overview

No one ever became a great baseball player simply by studying baseball in the classroom. Nevertheless, field work is better optimized by training, review, coaching, and feedback off field.  
 [*The Career Toolkit*](https://www.thecareertoolkitbook.com/) contains a number of tools and techniques to build professional skills to make your employees or team members more effective. There are multiple components you can leverage all at little or no cost.

1. The book
2. Discussion groups (free)
3. Additional content described below
4. App (free)

One or more options are provided for each component, allowing you to design a program best suited for your specific organization.

Together this can create three, six, or twelve-month long training programs for about as little as $20 per employee (simply the cost of the book).

## 

## Discussion Groups

The purpose of the discussion groups is twofold. First, the lessons learned by reading a chapter or taking an afternoon seminar on a topic can be quickly forgotten. Discussion groups reinforce the content and expose the reader to a deeper understanding of the topic. This is well established by research on spaced repetition. Second, these topics are deep and complex; different people will approach topics with different perspectives, ideas, and approaches. Much like the benefits of class discussions of case studies in top MBA programs, these discussions will help expand the participants’ understanding of the topic by exposure to different viewpoints.

### Small Group

Groups of 5-8 people in size typically have the right balance for deep discussion. At that size the group feels intimate and everyone is able to contribute to discussions.

Optionally include a facilitator (possibly from HR). Some groups may prefer having a facilitator while others may not want someone “corporate” listening in on what can feel like intimate discussions.

### Medium Group

Groups of 20-50 can be used for larger group discussions. At this size there’s a larger range of opinions but less individual contribution. An experienced facilitator (possibly from HR) is necessary to help guide the discussion. 60-90 minutes would be an appropriate duration. If doing 90-120 minutes, having a break in the middle is recommended.

### Large Group

Large groups of 50+ people will have less of a free-flowing discussion and more of an extended, formalized conversation. It works well for a lecture. To make it more interactive, participants can write brief responses to prompts ahead of time. The (experienced) facilitator can review ahead of time and select individuals to share relevant stores and experiences and moderate some responses to them.

The right composition of the group (particularly for small and medium sized groups) will vary based on corporate culture. There needs to be some degree of trust and comfort within teams. Ideally there would be a diverse range of members, with diversity across departments, roles, gender, and background. That is not always logistically feasible.

In larger companies there may not be sufficient trust or sense of emotional safety because of lack of familiarity; i.e. someone can’t know all the other employees in a company of 5,000 people. Having these conversations among a group of strangers can feel risky, limiting the amount of discussion and learning. In such cases, forming groups with peers from the same team can be a better option.

One category to be careful of mixing is seniority. Certainly, having people on a team with their manager (or anyone more senior in their reporting chain) can be awkward. Likewise having people viewed as executive or senior management mixed with more junior employees can be intimidating to the more junior employee. Creating groups of homogeneous or near homogenous levels of seniority is often a better choice. Optionally you can mix experience levels, two people in the same role but one with a few years of career experience and another with a decade or more of experience. That can provide different perspectives, although even then some junior employees may feel intimidated by significantly more experienced employees.

Use your judgement on what’s right for your corporate culture. I would recommend staying close to homogenous seniority as much as possible, and then encouraging one on one conversations with more senior people as desired by an individual.

## Ground Rules

This is not expected to be a problem, but the purpose of HR is to have guidelines for those edge cases. As with your sick leave, harassment, and other policies, having ground rules avoids any future, “I didn’t know that wasn’t appropriate” issues.

Each group should have a clear set of rules. People likely will share stories of personal experiences. There needs to be an understanding of what is safe to share. In organizations with a high degree of trust, employing [Chatham House Rules](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chatham_House_Rule) of another type of confidentiality is ideal. There are also possible legal concerns about things that are said, especially with ethical issues. It is likely to be the case that no confidentiality is to be expected.

Ground rules should be set and made explicit for all teams, so everyone is clear from the start what expectations there are (if any--or if there are explicitly none). Specifically address confidentiality, and how any information they share may be used (e.g. shared outside the group, used in their own reviews).

In some cases, a company may choose to ask participants not to talk about examples and situations at the company. Instead employees will be asked to share examples (possibly anonymously with respect to organization name) from prior companies, other organizations, stories that have been shared with them by others, etc. but not from the current company. This is recommended for companies with a low degree of employee trust and those who are working on a cultural turnaround. It allows discussion of these important topics but prevents it from turning into a complaint fest about the company.

## Schedule

The simplest approach is to divide the book by chapter, which can work on a monthly cycle over the course of a year. Chapters take approximately one hour each to read.

The companion The Career Toolkit Development Cycles spreadsheet provides a number of proposed cycles for different needs. Each is briefly described below. These can be used as is or modified by you for any specific topics you want to address. The order to any cycle can be easily changed since most topics stand independently.

### New Hire Cycle (10 units)

Great for larger companies with regular new hires, this cycle has ten units, with about fifteen minutes of reaching each. It can easily be done over ten weeks, or units can be combined to make a four to five-week cycle. It covers learning how a company works, personal leadership, teamwork, communication and ethics.

### New Manager Cycle (12 units)

Designed for people promoted to managerial positions, or employees looking to move into such positions as the next step in their career, this is a twelve-week cycle with fifteen to thirty minutes of reading per week. It covers hiring, leadership, management, communication and ethics. Having new hires across multiple departments works especially well, since they will provide diverse perspectives.

### Annual Review Cycle (3 units)

This is a quick program focused on career planning. It can be used prior to annual reviews to help people reflect and plan to make the most out of the review process.

### Chapter Cycle (12 units)

In this cycle each chapter is a unit, taking thirty to sixty minutes to read. It is helpful for both new hires and existing employees. Because the chapters can be read in almost any order you can revise to fit into larger HR themes throughout the year.

### Bi-weekly Cycle (24 units)

This is the most in-depth version. It divides the chapters into logical sections, allowing for deeper discussion on reflections on the topics. The reading is five to fifteen minutes per unit. It can be turned into a six-month or twelve-month training program.

For a monthly chapter cycle it’s about one-hour of reading, thirty minutes of reflection, and two hours of meetings so an investment of only three and a half hours per month for professional development. If you’re using smaller cycles, then it’s five to fifteen minutes of reading, fifteen minutes of reflection, and likely a one-hour discussion, so only about one and a half hours per one or two-week cycle. Overall these programs are about ten to twenty hours of professional development.

You can also combine or extend the sections above. For example, you can include case studies for leadership, negotiation role play exercises, communication games, mock interviews, or other types of activities appropriate to the topic. When doing so you may want longer sessions or a second session on the topic for the activity. Another option is to cycle back a month or two later. For topics like leadership, management, and working effectively people may implement things on their teams based on what they’ve learned; coming back to the topic a few months later can help people reflect on how things are working, reinforcing the lessons and providing an opportunity for course corrections early on.

Two sections should be explicitly noted as you design a program. First is a three-page section called *Corporate Politics*. The lesson is that politics aren’t bad, they are simply a relationship-based approach to office work. We must recognize that more political and less political people simply have different styles, and both are valid in different ways. This can be empowering when done right, and allow for a conversation people otherwise couldn’t broach, but it can also be a difficult conversation in dysfunctional organizations.

Second, *A. B. See.* is about being prepared in case of layoffs. For a demoralized organization, this can be seen as risky. When done right, it allows HR to have a solid discussion about what employees want in a company and what makes them want to stay, giving HR fantastic insights for employee retention.

Ultimately the philosophy of *The Career Toolkit* has been that topics are best when openly discussed and not taboo. But this is your organization and you should include and skip such topics as most appropriate for your organization's needs.

## Standing Groups

Alternatively, these discussion groups do not need to be done continuously or with the same groups. For example, a large company can simply have three to chapter groups offered each month, perhaps with a dedicated facilitator from HR for each.

An employee could choose to pick a chapter for a particular month and join that cycle for only that month, take a break, and join another chapter group a few months later. For example, an employee could join the leadership group in February and join that monthly discussion. The employee skips, March, April and May. In June and July, she joins the interviewing discussion group and then networking discussion groups respectively. She takes off August and September and then in October goes back to the leadership group to reflect on what she had learned and put into practice since February.

Such groups should bring in additional books and resources beyond *The Career Toolkit* to continue to provide new information.

## Additional Content

In addition to the individual discussion groups, you can supplement it with additional programming for your organization.

**Meta Sharing**

At the end of a group discussion a group may select one or more ideas or stories they found particularly helpful. These can be shared with everyone in an email, on a wiki, or in a larger, cross-discussion group meeting. This can be done monthly or on whatever cycle you choose to use.

**Outside Speaker / Activity**

Bringing in an outside expert to provide a professional perspective can supplement the reading. Local universities or speaker bureaus can provide a number of options. They can do a lecture, webinar (allows for remote speakers), or even workshop about the topic under discussion. This works well if you do it chapter by chapter, or have a regular cadence by topic, even if you do smaller subjections.

**Case Studies**

There are many case studies available from business school and other organizations for a number of topics covered in the book. You can purchase case studies (or find free ones online) and do case studies with the discussion groups. Alternatively, you can also do the case studies with people across discussion groups to further mix perspectives.

**App**

There is a Career Toolkit App which provides a tip of the day to help reinforce lessons. Users can also swipe through tips ad hoc and have the option to set the tips to a subset topic(s) to reinforce what they are reading specifically. (Buttons below are links.)

[](https://apps.apple.com/us/app/the-career-toolkit-app/id1520119819) [](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.thecareertoolkitapp)

**Other**

The [resources page](https://www.thecareertoolkitbook.com/resources) of the book’s website will be adding more resources so be sure to check back from time to time or sign up for the website mailing list.

## Use in Development Goals

Many of these topics will tie into development goals of your employees. You can use a particular chapter as part of development, e.g. using the Leadership and Management chapters for people looking to get promoted into a managerial role (or for recently promoted people).   Likewise, people may choose to have a particular topic (e.g. Communication, Negotiations) as part of their personal development goals. Providing a discussion group for people organized around the topic can help foster their development goals.

## Feedback

Please don’t hesitate to reach out with any questions, concerns, suggestions or other feedback. I’m happy to discuss ways to develop such plans with you. Contact:

[hershey@thecareertoolkitbook.com](mailto:hershey@thecareertoolkitbook.com)

<https://www.thecareertoolkitbook.com/>

## Next Steps

Create a pilot program with a handful of employees interested in professional development. Try it with 4-5 units and see how it works in your organization.