

Tuning Up Your Game for Career Advancement

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At this time every year, avid golfers take pride in “Tuning Up Their Game” in order to prepare for another season of fun and excitement out on the links. Among other things, enthusiasts spend hours at the driving range perfecting their swing, take lessons with a golf professional to fine tune the mental aspects of the sport, and spend time on and around the practice green to improve their short game. For those who wish to perform well on the golf course, this preparation may take many hours and span several weeks, but pays huge dividends over the course of the summer.

In like manner, employees who wish to excel in their roles at firms need to make the investment in continuing education to compete in the field of play called “corporate America”. In their latest book (“The Real-Life MBA”) Jack and Suzy Welch admit they are “huge fans of continuing education” and Jack’s former company (GE) has always been considered a leader in promoting education and skill development for its employees.

In my experience, making a constant effort to improve knowledge, skills and abilities is worth the effort and normally translates to promotional opportunities, not to mention greater responsibilities at your firm.

The best companies in today’s business world create a process for enhancing employee development and ensure that it is managed proactively year after year by the Manager. Other organizations place the onus of this endeavor on employees who are tasked with managing their own personal growth.

Regardless of the approach, it is critical for employees to take both a short-term and long-term view of professional growth and development in order to maximize the return on their investment while enhancing their career opportunities.

As a first step in the process, employees need to meet with their Manager and map out a strategy for assessing developmental needs. Once the assessment has been conducted, I suggest a two-pronged approach for addressing the needs.

Short-term

In the short-term, employees should collaborate with their boss to identify the following opportunities in the coming year:

- Hands-on experiences and assignments or projects
- Mentoring, coaching or other collaborative learning activities
- Courses or seminars that target specific skills or knowledge areas

Throughout the year, progress in each area should be monitored and measured to assess the degree to which development has occurred.

Long-term

In the long-term, employees need to partner with their Manager to identify the following opportunities that support career growth in the next three years.

- Longer term assignments or projects that involve a leadership role
- Mentoring, coaching or other collaborative learning activities that can showcase certain skills and abilities
- Courses or seminars that incorporate practical application via simulation or work activities that span weeks or months

Throughout the three year period, progress in each area should be monitored and measured to assess the degree to which development has been accomplished vis-à-vis the employee's career development plan.

Employees who approach professional development with both a short-term and long-term game plan tend to achieve more success over time than those who approach development haphazardly or with only a short-term view.

In closing, like those who take their golf game seriously, employees who are dedicated to continuous learning and career advancement need to "Tune Up Their Game" to reap the benefits over the course of their career. My role in this process is to guide employees and Managers in the creation of short-term and long-term plans that target assessed needs so that objectives can be achieved with maximum results. I can also help devise effective ways to gauge progress toward attaining both short-term and long-term goals as the employee's career unfolds.