

Fact sheet – Getting the most from professional development workshops

Introduction

When you're selected to attend any professional/leadership development event, it's important to realize what an opportunity it is. Not only does this mean that your organization values you enough to invest in you, but it means they expect for you to stay with the organization long enough for these improved skills to provide a return on their investment. When your organization believes in you, and invests in your future, it's crucial that you get the most out of that experience by being prepared. Here are seven ways you can maximize a professional development session:



1. **Come prepared.** Before you attend the session, make a list of your personal goals. What do you hope to learn? What are your major concerns? Think about the topic for the session and reflect on times in the past when you've experienced challenges related to that topic. For example, if the session will cover communicating difficult information, remember a time when you had to discuss a below average performance review. How did you prepare for that experience? What happened? What did you learn from it? How would you handle things differently in the future? Be prepared to share previous experiences with your facilitator so you can hear their thoughts on ways you could improve in the future.

2. **Be vocal about your goals.** Many facilitators will open their session by asking participants to share their objectives for the event. This is a great ice breaker, but it also really helps a nimble



facilitator adjust the content to the needs, experiences, and expectations of attendees. If you have a particular development area you want to address, express it openly early on in the process so the facilitator can devote adequate time to the topic. Also, don't be afraid to ask for help. As the session progresses, if you need more time or advice on a particular topic, don't hesitate to ask the facilitator for help! They're there to ensure your success.

3. **Sit with people you don't know.** If you are attending a group leadership development session, make a point of sitting with people you don't know (or don't work with on a regular basis). Not only is this important for networking purposes but working through scenarios with diverse individuals could bring new ideas and solutions to light. Find people who think differently and experience different challenges than you experience on a daily basis.

Fact sheet – Getting the most from professional development workshops

4. **Connect offline.** After the session is over, stay connected with the other attendees. As you go back to your respective offices, you'll all be looking for ways to apply what you've learned and keep the learning fresh. Support one another by sharing your wins and challenges along the way. At EngPro, we established a private LinkedIn Group for all Leadership Alumni to stay connected. As they progress through their careers, they always have a place to go online to share their experiences and ask for advice from peers.



5. **Connect with the facilitator.** When you finish the development program, you may still have questions for the facilitator, or want to share a success story. Be sure to exchange contact information with your facilitator so you can connect with them in the future. If you had a positive experience in your development session, you'll want to have your new employees go through the same development experience in the future.

6. **Disconnect from the office.** It can be so difficult to leave your laptop at the office and power down your iPhone, but it is absolutely necessary during a professional development experience. You can't give your undivided attention to building new leadership skills when your attention is divided between the facilitator and everything happening back at the office. A great leadership session is held off-site for a reason. You need to mentally separate yourself from the day-to-day activities of the office and invest yourself completely in self-improvement. Power the electronics down. Everything can wait until 5 pm.



7. **Be open to new ideas.** Inevitably, your facilitator will make some suggestions that are either counter to your usual process or outside of your comfort zone. Before you shoot those ideas down and build a case for why they won't work in your situation, give them a try. You may be surprised by the results. Established Leadership Facilitators deliver content and techniques that have been perfected over the years and are known to achieve positive results. Not every technique/suggestion will work for you, but you won't know until you try.

When you come to a development session prepared, engaged, and open to new ideas, you'll be amazed at how much more valuable the experience is. Your organization is investing in you, now it's time to match that investment with your focus and energy.