

# Take Hold of Your Career Through Personal Development

BY SCOTT THOMAS, AIC, CPCU

Peter is a very good adjuster. He works hard and cares about doing a good job. Sure, he struggles just a tad with some interpersonal skills, but for the most part, he is well-liked by his co-workers and customers.

For some reason, however, he just seems to keep plodding along, without any noticeable advancement. Every once in a while he'll earn "adjuster of the month" in his office, but mostly he just coasts along. It isn't that bad. He likes the comfort of knowing his job well, and he's learned to manage life's daily stressors.

Nothing is wrong with Peter. He's fine. However, there is one thing that bugs him. He thinks he's not advancing fast enough. Other people he went to home office training with have since been promoted and moved on. Peter's always felt he's management material. He knows he'll get his chance someday, but still can't help feeling he has missed the boat.

## What Are the Steps to Success?

What Peter needs is his own personal developmental plan. He needs guidance to help him identify how to grow and perhaps be better balanced.

A personal development plan refers to a full and honest review of oneself, from deep within, not just a temporary personality change for a specific situation.

You may have numerous designations and degrees, but unless you put your knowledge to work, you may never see your skills improve or achieve your career ambitions. Personal development is essential to flourish in both work and personal domains. The first step is recognition that we can all benefit from a

personal development plan.

Peter's personal development starts with an assessment of Peter, including how others view Peter.

Peter will need to identify people in his private and business life that have known him for at least two years, and have come in contact with him on a regular basis. This may include a spouse, past or present bosses, peers, those under him, or anyone who has worked with him in a close capacity.

Peter will need to contact the people he wishes to participate in his assessment, to make sure they are comfortable with the process and are willing to provide him with honest and valuable feedback.

The next step is to seek feedback from them. It is best to ask for initial feedback in written form, as people tend to be more direct on paper than they would face-to-face. Peter should provide the same set of questions to everyone to get a complete and consistent picture of how others see him. He may want to rate responses on a numerical scale.

For example, Peter may ask the question, "Do people view me as an innovative person who is willing to take risks?" Responses might be on a scale from one (viewed as not very innovative) to five (very innovative).

## Delving Deeper

Other questions might include topics about organization skills, his ability to communicate effectively, whether or not he displays empathy towards others, and if he cooperates with others, etc.

Once Peter has gathered the feedback,

he should compile the results to get a clear picture of how he is perceived. He should also consider meeting with those who assessed him to discuss their feedback. However, he must be willing to keep an open mind and not be defensive to those who assessed him.

Next he must identify the areas of development upon which he wishes to concentrate. To do this, it is best for him to decide which areas, among those identified, most directly impact his current job responsibilities. Another consideration is, Which areas will most impact his future responsibilities, should he advance?

Once areas of development are identified, Peter needs to create an *action plan* to establish his goals. He should also outline what his idea of success looks like. In other words, he needs to pinpoint what he wants to accomplish and how to achieve and recognize those goals.

For instance, let's say Peter has determined that people see him as not being effective in meetings. His opinion is not voiced and ideas are not readily shared. When they are, they are not taken seriously. He wants to improve in this area so that he has an impact and his ideas are clearly and effectively communicated, as well as understood and respected.

To accomplish this, he prepares in advance for meetings by jotting down ideas and deciding how he wants to communicate them.

Soon, Peter is attending a meeting about

**Personal Development** see page 10