



When you become a leader your priority becomes the professional growth and support of your people.

Generally, you are not given the time you need and the time your staff deserves to do this effectively.

On top of supervising your team, you have all of your other many tasks that don't go away when you become a leader.

In fact, they just seem to grow and grow. But somehow some way you need to figure out how to keep your staff as your number one focus.

A lot of us have worked our entire lives thinking about client first or customer first- that that has been our focus.

This can be a hardship for leaders who now have to focus on staff who put their clients first and their customers first.

I love this visual that shows the staff person climbing up those steps and the leader adding steps as they grow.

It's not always a perfect process, but if you are committed to it with all the bumps you'll experience along the way, you are going to do a service to your team by investing in them and their growth.

Everybody is different. Everybody's an individual but the three things that most staff want regardless of level or field or tasks or responsibilities is purpose, growth, and autonomy.

As a leader you are in the position to provide these things to your staff.

You'll notice right there in the middle is growth. Staff want to grow, but it doesn't always mean they want to grow up. (We'll talk about that a little bit later.)

Sometimes they're happy in the position they're in but they want to deepen the work that they're doing.

Pay attention to the individual needs of your staff and don't just assume that everybody is on a fast track to moving up.

You've seen this slide in different videos. It's not by accident.

Because as in most everything you do, it's really important that you involve your team in their own professional growth in order to reach their goals.

Just like with goals, when you involve your staff in the process instead of just telling them what to do, this increases their buy-in, accountability, impact, and retention.



It is not your job as a leader to give your staff a list of professional development they must go through and they just follow whatever you say.

There will be some professional growth opportunities where this makes sense, but that should not be your entire professional development plan. Your staff should have a lot of say into the professional growth they are interested in and how it is delivered.

Help them come up with a plan that works best for them as well as works best for your team.

What are they trying to do?

What is the goal?

Where are they trying to grow?

And how do they want to do it?

Are they really interested in things like trainings and workshops and conferences?

Or do they prefer things like courses and certificate programs?

Do they like to watch webinars or listen to podcasts, read books or articles?

There are so many different ways to grow professionally and many times we get stuck in only thinking about conferences or trainings. There's nothing bad about conferences and trainings.

There's a lot of value to be had there, but it's really helpful to expand your mind and think about the many ways that people learn and grow.

Then think about how much in terms of time and money. Is this a one-time thing or is this an investment that will continue throughout that staff's tenure with you?

Here's a list of just some different types of professional development. There are many more but again break out of that limited belief that professional development equals trainings. There's so much that goes into it. Allow your staff the freedom to explore lots of different ways to see what works best for them.

Be open to what they're interested in learning. Even if it seems a little disconnected from their current job.

They may be exploring new things or they may just be interested in learning something new for the sake of learning something new.

You don't want to be investing too much time and money on things that are not related



to the vision and mission of what you're doing. But there's also a line where you can indulge your staff in things that they're interested in.

When I was at my first supervisory job, I had an opportunity to go to Cuba with a group of fellow social workers. It kind of came out of nowhere. It wasn't something I had been planning, and it was more expensive than I was expecting. I reached out to my HR and asked them if that was something that they would be willing to help invest in as part of my professional growth.

To be honest, I wasn't really expecting a yes, but I got one and when I came back, I gave a presentation to my teammates on what I learned on how Social Work works internationally and how I could take that learning back to our organization.

Even though it sounds like a little bit of a stretch it made me so excited to go on that trip. And I was so grateful to my organization for investing in me that it helped me stay motivated and stay at that position because I knew that they were willing to invest in me.

Be open to ideas and don't just immediately go to no.

Don't always look externally. There is a lot of wisdom on your own team and in your own organization. Where are there opportunities for your staff to train each other, to mentor each other, to be in groups together- mastermind groups, book clubs, all kinds of ongoing opportunities for growth.

It's not just always paying some outside person to come in or sending your staff somewhere outside. You can access a lot of the wisdom that you already have on the team.

Kim Scott creates this really interesting division in her book, *Radical Candor* that I recommend to everybody. (I'm sure I've recommended it to you multiple times). She says when she was first starting out, she was really ambitious and wanted to climb up that ladder. She assumed everybody else did too and when she ran across staff that were not interested in that, she had this negative reaction like they weren't very motivated or they weren't very ambitious.

As she grew as a leader, she really shifted her thinking and she learned to appreciate staff who really care about the work and are not interested in climbing up that ladder.

The way that she designated these groups of people is rocks and rock stars where your rock stars are always looking ahead to the next step- Where can I grow? How can I get promoted? When can I be the boss?

Your rocks are people who are solid, good workers who aren't interested in necessarily moving on but they still deserve as much investment and encouragement and celebration as our rock stars do. As with most things, it's your role as a leader to model.



If you're asking your staff to really focus on their professional growth and development, how are you modeling that? How are you investing in your professional growth and development?

How do you let your staff know that so that you can be a good model for them?

So the most important question for you is how will you make professional growth your priority?