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Developing Personal Professional Competencies



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An important activity within the Professional Development Tool (PDT)¹ is designing a self-directed professional development plan that reflects each person's unique professional knowledge, skills, goals, and aspirations. As part of the process, we must identify specific goals and develop individual competencies. While completing the PDT, one asks: What are competencies? How do I decide what to concentrate on? How do I establish my competencies?

Competence and Competencies

The creation of a professional development plan requires that we prioritize personal goals based on our current professional responsibilities and roles.² A necessary step is to develop realistic goals and clear competencies. There is limited information on establishing personal professional goals.³ We seem to assume that if we can write goals for clients we surely must be able to write relevant professional goals for ourselves. I suggest that whereas the process is similar, writing personal professional goals has its own unique elements. Lastly, based on these goals we must write clear competencies that explicitly state the required knowledge, the set of complex skills, and the criteria for skillful performance.²

Making a Decision-Focusing

After completing the PDT or any self-assessment, the first step is to determine areas to focus on. We begin by writing a short personal professional mission statement that summarizes aspirations and desires. The next step in writing professional goals is difficult. While taking into consideration our professional mission statement, we analyze our own assessment data to determine areas to focus on. We candidly assess our strengths and areas of concern against what we need or want to achieve. We need to decide whether we are going to establish goals based on current job responsibilities and roles, potential future responsibilities, areas of personal professional growth, or other factors. After completing this self-examination, we consider our own life situation and work circumstances before writing four to six goals. We base these goals on our professional mission statement, which articulates our vision of where we wish to be in 3 to 5 years.

Writing Personal Professional Goals

At the core of setting personal professional goals is the person with his or her own life situation and available resources and challenges. Self-reflection, personal attributes, obligations to family and community, and job responsibilities, among other factors, are considered when establishing goals. Professional goals are statements that put forward where we will put our efforts to achieve projected outcomes. Professional goals should be consistent with each person's professional mission statement. Whereas a person develops goals based on expectations and incentives,³ goal attainment depends on personal ability and the appropriateness of the goal. Lewis and Smith^{4,5} have outlined criteria for assessing professional goals that are useful when finalizing the four to six goals for our individual professional development plan. These criteria are: (a) specific and measurable (identifies explicit behaviors, skills, attitudes, and actions), (b) personally and professionally important, (c) consistent with mission (personal and institutional), (d) attainable, (e) challenging, (f) feasible (consider personal, professional, institutional resources), (g) performance focused, (h) observable, and (i) verifiable.⁵

Composing Competencies

After we have identified our professional goals, we need to write competencies specific to each goal. Each goal may have one or more competency. When completing this process, it is important to be realistic and practical. We do not need to check our performance against all the possible competencies; we only need to

measure performance against key, critical competencies. Competencies should outline specific knowledge, critical reasoning, performance skills, interpersonal skills, and ethical reasoning needed to demonstrate competence under specific circumstances. Competency statements are explicit statements—they delineate the specific area of expertise and expected performance.² Although this step may be time-consuming, the end result will be a comprehensive professional development plan that can be used to guide and assess our own self-directed professional development.

In summary, all therapists and assistants are challenged to continually maintain competency through a professional development plan. A key aspect of the plan is clearly stated goals and competencies.

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