Taking responsibility for your own development

- What developments do you face at work?
- What can you do to get a promotion?
- What must you learn to take on new roles and new responsibilities?

Being a leader is not easy. When you are appointed to a leadership role you can’t just decide ‘I want to be a leader’ and automatically have the knowledge and skills you need. After all, that’s why you are using Building Success 2, to enable you to become an effective team leader. But even when you have completed this programme, you will still need to keep on learning. Learning how to apply what you’ve learnt, learning what works with your team and what doesn’t, and learning to take on new roles and new responsibilities.

As new ways of working, new processes, new technologies and new markets are developed, the people who work in organisations have to learn how to adapt. Although good employers will train their employees, they are increasingly expecting employees to take some responsibility for their own development as well. This doesn’t just mean going on courses; it includes employees recognising their own strengths and weaknesses, keeping up to date with what is happening in the industry and the organisation, using opportunities at work to learn and develop their own performance, and using colleagues as role models, coaches and mentors. In this session we’ll look at all these ways of developing yourself.
Taking responsibility for your own development

Assessing your own strengths and weaknesses

In the session *Assessing your own performance* there is an opportunity to assess yourself against the 12 main characteristics of effective leaders. This asks you to rate yourself as:

1. I am known to be very good at this; other people model themselves on me
2. I am quite good at this but there are ways I could improve
3. I am adequate at this, and do need to get better
4. I am poor at this and really need to improve a lot

As you can see, this emphasises that you can range from being very good to being quite poor, with various points in between. What's more, it also emphasises that you can always improve if you aren't the best. This is what assessing your strengths and weaknesses means.

Whereas strengths and weaknesses are personal, and are a result of your previous experience and current work, opportunities and threats are in your environment. They come from decisions that other people make, people you may never meet but who can affect your life. You can do something about personal strengths and weaknesses; opportunities and threats are things that you have to recognise and respond to, but can't easily do anything about yourself.

Assessing your own strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and threats you face is called a personal SWOT analysis, where SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. On the next page there is a table for you to fill in.

Being aware of opportunities and threats

The other half of knowing your own strengths and weaknesses is knowing what opportunities exist to develop yourself and your career. It also means being aware of any threats to your career that exist.

These could be changes in your organisation or your industry that may lessen your chance for development or promotion, or personal changes that may make it difficult for you to take up any opportunities.

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Think about your personal strengths and weaknesses in your role and what opportunities and threats you face in developing yourself and performing your role more effectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My personal strengths</th>
<th>My weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- what I'm good at in my role</td>
<td>- what I'm not so good at</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities to develop and progress my career</th>
<th>Threats facing me in developing and progressing my career</th>
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Case Study

Laura works as a quality control team leader at a food processing company. She has to check the food for contaminants, that the packaging is sealed correctly and that the weights and volumes are within the right limits. Laura was trained in catering, so she can handle the job at present, but she would like to progress within the quality assurance area and needs to know more about this aspect of her job. She also knows that the Food Standards Authority is cracking down on food processing and that she doesn’t know enough about the rules governing what she does or the science of the job.

She talks to her manager about a course at the local college, to become qualified in quality assurance. He agrees this would be useful as the company is thinking about becoming ISO 9000 accredited and needs more properly trained staff. He agrees to discuss with the training manager about Laura getting some time off once a week to go to college, and to pay her fees.
You may only just have become a team leader and not be thinking about promotion just yet. However, it is important to have some idea how you want to progress in your career. You might want to move further up the management ladder or develop your technical knowledge and skills - or both. You may have career goals that involve a complete change of direction. You may want to get into a completely new type of job or organisation.

It’s worth thinking about how long you will be working. Someone completing compulsory schooling at 16 today can expect to have at least 50 years working life in front of them, probably more! Now think back over the last 50 years and see how things have changed. In the late 1950s over ¾ million men worked in coal mining, today it’s a few thousand. Nobody worked in call centres in the 1950s, today over one million people do. Then a (very) few people worked with computers, today most people do, at least part of the time.

When you look at the future of your career you need to think that you may well change the kind of work you do, and the industry in which you work, several times during your lifetime. You can’t say what kind of career you will have over the long term, but you can think about the next few years and what you would like to be doing.

- Developing your management role may mean taking responsibility for more people. It may also mean doing less of the technical work, to spend more time planning, controlling and monitoring work.

- Developing your technical role may mean acquiring more qualifications, becoming more of a specialist, or working in a different part of the organisation.

- A complete change of job or organisation may mean developing a personal hobby or interest, or a voluntary or charitable activity, into a new career.

Whatever your personal career goals, you need to be clear what they are if you are to take responsibility for developing yourself in ways that will help you achieve them. Think about where you see your career heading and then complete the exercise on the next page.
Taking responsibility for your own development

Exercise

Think about these three areas for development and promotion (your team leader role, your technical role or a complete change of job or industry). How would you like to progress from your current role? (There may be more than one possibility.)

What might you need to do to develop your knowledge and skills in order to be able to progress into any of the jobs you have identified?

Check your ‘promotability’

If your career development depends on being promoted within your current employer, then you need to think carefully about what you must do to be promoted.

- **Find out what is important** to your manager and to the organisation and think what you have to do meet these requirements.

- **Accept responsibility.** Work with your team to solve problems before asking your manager for help. Look out for ways to improve the way your team works and the products and services you produce, and suggest these to your manager.
Taking responsibility for your own development

- **Don't be distracted** at work. Don't let others draw you into activities that aren't work-related at times when you should be working, and don’t ignore team members who aren’t working when they should be.

- **Review how well you are doing.** There's more about how to do this in *Assessing your own performance*.

All these actions will encourage your manager to have confidence in you. Does your manager let you work independently and make decisions? If so, your manager probably trusts your abilities. Such confidence is a good sign that you are promotable.

The following case study shows how Constance keeps track of her promotability.

**Case Study**

Constance leads a team of ten people in the Bristol depot of a national parcels carrier. She would like to be promoted to shift manager. She thinks she does a good job and gets along well with the other people in the depot. Her last written performance appraisal rated her highly. Her depot manager has asked Constance to stand in for the shift manager for two weeks while he's on holiday. The manager is showing that he has confidence in Constance by asking her to take on this responsibility.

**Developing yourself**

Like Constance, you should check the signs of your promotability. Find out about the opportunities to learn and develop that are available in your organisation and outside. Monitor your progress. Then plan to make your next career step.

You have already made a commitment to developing yourself by following this course, using *Building Success 2*. *Building Success 2* is a form of **flexible learning**. Flexible learning means that you can choose when and where to learn, at your own pace. This may suit you better but does require commitment on your part. You must plan your learning and monitor your progress so that you keep to your schedule. Some people find flexible learning difficult, and prefer more formal types of programme.

Flexible learning doesn’t always come in paper form. It is also possible *(Continued on page 7)*
to use e-learning. This involves using interactive programmes on computers. Interactive means that you can respond to questions on screen or make decisions which affect how the programme operates. Interactive programmes can simulate the job and respond to the person using them. However, because they rely on computers, you need access to the hardware and that can limit where and when you use them.

There are many education and training programmes available which can teach you new skills and knowledge, and improve your career prospects. Some may last a few hours, others may take a year or more. Your employer may run courses in-house. This means that the courses are run just for the people who work in your organisation. This means that they can be designed specifically to meet your development needs and the way your organisation works.

In-house training courses may be put on in the place where you work, but they can also be run at a hotel, training centre or college. Open courses are also run in these places. An open course is open to people from a whole range of different employers. You can learn how other people work and different organisations’ ways of doing things. But you may find that the course doesn’t deal with the specific things that you want to learn about.

Using training and development programmes is a valuable way to improve your career prospects. But you will get the best from training if you combine it with other methods, such as coaching, mentoring, job shadowing, job exchange and job placements.

- **Coaching** is a form of one-to-one training that takes place in the workplace and helps you practice your skills under the supervision of an expert.

- **Mentoring** means that you have a specialist or more senior person who watches over your performance to whom you can go to for advice and guidance.

- **Job shadowing** means spending some time with someone doing a particular job, watching and perhaps helping them in their role.

- **Job exchange** and **job placements** involve you actually doing the job of someone while they do yours (exchange) or while they are away or not in post.

You also need to be willing to seek and accept feedback, to enable you to monitor your performance and check your learning.
This session has emphasised that you must accept responsibility for your own performance, your learning and your career development. Using a Personal Development Plan (or PDP) can play an important part in doing this. Even when you have finished this Team leader programme, you can continue to manage your learning and improve your performance. A PDP can help you do this, helping you to identify what you need to learn, plan how you are going to do it and check that you have learnt it and used what you have learnt in your job.

The BS2 session Using a personal development plan has a PDP which will help you take responsibility for your own development; alternatively you may have been given a format by the organisation delivering this programme. The BS2 PDP uses a fairly common format. It asks you to:

- **Identify where you are at the moment**, through a personal assessment and identification of what you can and can’t do to develop yourself (the personal SWOT you did earlier in this session and the self-assessment in Assessing your own performance can be used to complete this section).

- **Identify where you want to be**. This means identifying your personal and career goals for the next few years, like you did in the exercise on page 5.

- **Identify how you get there**. This includes taking up opportunities for training and experience in particular tasks. It also involves you in thinking about what you need to do in developing your own performance at work.

When thinking about how you get there it is useful to set yourself development goals for the short term (say, the next three months), the medium term (up to one year ahead), and the longer term (up to five years ahead). These will change from being very specific (in the short term) to being more general (in the longer term). For example:

- Ask to go on a coaching course (short term)
- Seek an opportunity to work with the company training team (medium term)
- Become a qualified trainer (longer term)

Whatever, your personal development goals, only you can do what it takes to achieve them. That’s why you have to take responsibility for your own development.
Complete the following exercises. Refer back to the session if necessary.

A. What do the letters SWOT stand for?

S___________ W___________
O___________ T___________

B. List two things you can do to give your manager confidence in you.
1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________

C. List two things you can do to help you achieve your personal career goals.
1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________

D. Circle the letter in front of the correct statement.

If you need additional training or education for a higher level position, you should:

a. give up on any chance of promotion.
b. ask your employer if they would provide training or pay part of your costs.
c. ask your employer if they would give you leave of absence.

E. Look at these personal career goals of a team leader in a DIY retailer. Mark each one as S (short term), M (medium term) or L (long term).

_____ Work for a charity as a fund-raiser.
_____ Learn about financial management.
_____ Have some work experience in the finance department.
Making Connections

Answer the questions following each case.

Case A

Christopher works as an administrative assistant for a charity. He is organised and careful. He often helps with fund-raising tasks. For example, Christopher keeps records of donations and writes thank-you letters to the people who make them. He helps Elaine, who is in charge of special events, with their organisation and financial records. When Elaine takes a job at another organisation, Christopher thinks he has a good chance of getting her job. He is shocked when his boss, Alex, appoints someone else. When Christopher asks Alex to explain his decision, Alex says that Christopher does not have the "people" skills to plan special events.

- What could Christopher do to improve his promotability?

Case B

Leila leads a team assembling electronic equipment. She would like to move up to become a shift supervisor. She does careful work. Her last performance appraisal stated that she was conscientious but did not do enough to encourage innovation and improvement.

- What could Leila do to improve her chances of being promoted to the job she wants?
How well do you use the skills in this session? Think about what you have done on the job in the last month that might make you more promotable.

- What else might you do?
- Have you ever thought you were perfect for a job or task but didn’t get it?
- Why do you think you didn’t get it? How could you have helped yourself get it?

1. Read the list of skills. Tick the boxes to show your strengths and weaknesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>strengths &lt;-&gt; weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![ ] identifying your own strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>![ ] ![ ] ![ ] ![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![ ] identifying opportunities and threats</td>
<td>![ ] ![ ] ![ ] ![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![ ] working to get the skills you need for the job</td>
<td>![ ] ![ ] ![ ] ![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![ ] improving your performance in your job</td>
<td>![ ] ![ ] ![ ] ![ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![ ] checking on your own promotability</td>
<td>![ ] ![ ] ![ ] ![ ]</td>
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2. Do you want to improve any of these skills?

3. How do you plan to improve the skills you listed in question 2? (You might want to discuss this with your line manager or your tutor/mentor/coach.)