

# From Road Map to GPS: Enhancing Training ROI by Bringing Individual Development Plans to Life

*A White Paper by National Seminars Training*





## From Road Map to GPS: Enhancing Training ROI by Bringing Individual Development Plans to Life

What do paper clips, Scotch tape, and Individual Development Plans (IDPs) have in common? They all have a tendency to get lost in some desk drawer. However, when an IDP is created only to be put away in some desk drawer with a Chinese take-out menu and dried-up highlighter, an organization is leaving some serious money on the table and may see some of its best talent walk out the door.

A recent Manpower survey revealed that one of the highest priorities for workers in determining whether they will stay with their current employer is opportunity for advancement.<sup>1</sup> By engaging employees in meaningful conversation about the next stage of their careers, you can help keep them working for you instead of your competition.

An IDP is the centerpiece of those conversations and is an essential tool for engagement, development, and enhancing return on training investment – but only if it’s woven into the fabric of dialogue between the individual and manager as a “living document.” Training directors must recognize the value of the IDPs and emphasize their profile if they expect to maximize training ROI. Put another way, *it’s time for the IDP to be a GPS on the dashboard instead of a road map folded up in the glove box.* This white paper will show you how. Specifically, this white paper will explore:

**Individual Development Plans** (IDPs) can create tremendous value for an individual, department, and organization as a whole. Too frequently, however, they are created and filed away. Instead of delivering value, they become a waste of resources.

By transforming the IDP into a living document that guides both work and development activity, organizations can unlock tremendous value including:

- Better utilization of training resources
- Higher employee retention
- More accurate targeting of development activity
- Enhanced alignment of development activity with business objectives
- Greater clarity of proficiencies to be developed
- Enhanced awareness of on-the-job development opportunities
- Increased application of learned skills

By keeping a few simple best practices in mind, organizations can realize these and other benefits from the IDP process. This white paper will show you how.

- Why IDPs as they are currently executed are not meeting their potential to deliver performance improvement and create employee engagement
- What are the significant advantages that can be realized in your organization by transforming the IDP into a “living document” to guide a continuing development conversation
- Best practices that you as training director can use to bring IDPs to life in your organization, significantly enhancing your return on training investment

<sup>1</sup> [www.prweb.com/releases/2011/10/prweb8904628.htm](http://www.prweb.com/releases/2011/10/prweb8904628.htm)

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## Planning for Performance or Playing Charades?

Development experts Beverly Kaye and Julie Winkle Giulioni noted in a recent column, “In too many environments, the IDP has lost its heart. Managers who survive the extensive and complex process often feel like they’ve done their career development for the year.”<sup>2</sup>

The IDP process has become a dreaded once-a-year chore. It’s an exercise of filling out forms and checking boxes. The performance objectives are all too often nonspecific and crafted to sound good. Feedback is equally generic and canned. The necessary forms are signed off on and submitted with a wink and a nod with the sentiment that “We all realize that this is pointless and stupid but HR makes us do it anyway.”

*“We all realize that this is pointless and stupid but HR makes us do it anyway.”*

### This is a lose-lose proposition for

**everyone involved.** Individuals lose the opportunity to develop in their skill set, enhance their satisfaction in their current position, and advance in the organization. The manager loses out on the opportunity to keep key talent engaged and to improve the performance of his or her department. The organization loses out on the considerable investment in creating the IDP system, productivity while creating the IDP, and the chance to re-recruit its talent.

### Rediscovering the Value of the IDP Process

National Seminars Training has identified the IDP creation process as one of the key *Elements of Execution* in its **Complete Learning Center**

model.<sup>3</sup> This means that a best-practice IDP creation process is an essential tool for an organization to generate a maximum return on its training and development investment. An IDP allows the other elements of the learning program to be accurately directed and put into a relevant context for the learner.

IDPs can be completely individualized or utilize preexisting learning templates. There is an ever-expanding variety of courses and certification programs available from technical programs to certification for first-time managers, front-desk managers, and administrative assistants. Best-practice organizations are creating their own unique IDPs for their specific skill proficiency requirements.

### LEGACY IDP CREATION PROCESS

- ✓ *Reset password from last time you went into IDP system 12 months ago*
- ✓ *Log into HR system*
- ✓ *Review performance goals from last year*
- ✓ *Provide generic feedback on last year’s goals*
- ✓ *Set generic performance goals for coming year*
- ✓ *Check some boxes on a form*
- ✓ *Submit to HR*
- ✓ *Forget it until next year!*

<sup>2</sup> Beverly Kaye and Julie Winkle Giulioni. “IDP: Individual Development Plan or Impediment to Dialogue and Process?” *People & Strategy*. 35-3(2012).

<sup>3</sup> NationalSeminarsTraining.com/completelearningcenter

These learning paths or IDPs chart out a course of development for an individual, and then measure progress on a regular and continuing basis. They are “living documents” to guide the conversation and activity around an individual’s development.

*Consistently only 30% of our training program participants state that they attend our training programs as part of a formal IDP.*

Despite their importance, our own customer data suggests that the penetration of these types of “living” IDPs and learning paths across organizations is fairly low. Consistently only 30% of our training program participants state that they attend our training programs as part of a formal IDP.

Organizations utilizing formal IDPs can enjoy significant benefits in terms of increased performance, reduced turnover, and higher employee engagement, all of which lead to better results for the organization. For example, as a result of its IDP program utilizing learning path and certification programs, Jiffy Lube has seen consistent reduction in turnover over several years with a drop of more than 50% in some markets.<sup>4</sup> This makes a significant difference in an industry where 100% annual turnover is common.

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“Living” IDPs will also increase your employees’ utilization of the learning resources that you have made available by preselecting training programs for each employee. One of the paradoxes of providing a wide range of choices is that it can make it more likely that an individual chooses nothing.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, an IDP or learning path can help the individual concentrate on the specific training objectives that will most contribute to his or her development and growth, thereby eliminating the challenge of having to choose from a huge range of development options.

Finally, an effective IDP puts the individual’s day-to-day development activities into context by helping the employee regard their current position as an important opportunity for developing and practicing key skills that will prepare them for the next stage of their career. This brings greater meaning to their current job duties and increases engagement levels.

### **Best Practices to Breathe Life Back Into the IDP**

Perhaps the most critical change that organizations can make in their approach to IDPs is how they think about them. Organizations need a new paradigm. To illustrate this, consider for a moment the difference between a road map (remember those?) and a GPS system.



<sup>4</sup> T+D, October 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Iyengar, Sheena S. and Mark R. Lepper. “When Choice Is Demotivating: Can One Desire Too Much of a Good Thing?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79-6 (2000): 995-1006.

While both are intended to help you get to your destination, a road map stays folded in the glove box until called upon; a GPS stays right on the dashboard. A GPS calculates the best route to the desired destination based off the current location. A map just provides a representation of a given terrain and is disassociated from the user. When the user goes off route or selects a new destination, or if there is traffic, construction, or another change in the route itself, a GPS recalculates a new route. The map just sits there. Navigating with a GPS is a conversation – similarly, the IDP needs to be a conversation.

With that model in mind, let's take a look at how the IDP conversation should optimally progress.

### 01: Decide on a Destination

*The conversation regarding individual development must center on a clear assessment of the needs of the organization.*

The conversation regarding individual development must center on a clear assessment of the needs of the organization. Specifically, identify the core skill and knowledge proficiencies that an individual must develop in order to enhance his or her contribution to the enterprise both over the short and long term.

This IDP conversation is a chance to examine any changes in the current job function and duties as well as to highlight any new departmental or organizational initiatives that might create new demands on that individual's position.

*This conversation should result in a distinct and comprehensive picture of the knowledge and skill requirements for the individual to succeed in both the current position and in the next stage of his or her career.*

It's also a time to explore potential next steps in the individual's career. This could be as simple as getting through a probationary period for a new hire or as involved as taking on a new management position. This conversation should result in a distinct and comprehensive picture of the knowledge and skill requirements for the individual to succeed in both the current position and in the next stage of his or her career – this skill and knowledge set is the destination of the IDP journey.

### 02: Determine Your Current Location

Next, it is necessary to determine where the individual stands in terms of the proficiency requirements outlined in the first part of the IDP conversation. A variety of approaches exist for determining where the individual stands today in terms of skills and competencies. Some are more quantitative and some methods are more qualitative. Below are a few common qualitative and quantitative methods that can be employed in this process.

Qualitative Methods	Quantitative Methods
Specific performance challenges identified by individual, manager, or teammates	Assessment testing
Comparison of individual's performance to specific job description or high-performing individuals in a given position	Performance metrics: sales targets, expense targets, customer service ratings, defect ratings

*If the IDP is truly a living document, then both the individual and the manager will have a clear real-time view of where the individual stands in terms of his or her performance and skill profile ...*

Important to note is that the exercise of determining the current location should for the most part be very streamlined in future IDP conversations. If the IDP is truly a living document, then both the individual and the manager will have a clear view of where the individual stands in terms of his or her performance and skill profile at any point in time.

### **03: Provide Guidance for Each Segment of the Journey**

A GPS unit will clarify each next step of a trip: “Turn left on 55th Street and continue for 1.4 miles.” That next step won’t get the individual to the final destination, but it gets the individual closer and breaks down the overall development process into bite-sized chunks that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and tied to a specific time horizon.

*... it’s valuable to get some quick wins in the development process.*

Additionally, it’s valuable to get some quick wins in the development process. The individual can enhance his or her performance immediately by pursuing specific proficiency targets. These could range anywhere from a specific sales call quota to demonstrating a specific newly learned skill in the workplace a certain number of times or reducing an error rate. These wins build momentum and a positive energy around the development conversation.

*... the IDP should specifically identify what the knowledge and skills are to be gained from the training session, how those skills will be applied and practiced after the training session, and how the application will be measured.*

If a development objective includes a formal training session, the IDP should specifically identify what the knowledge and skills are to be gained from the training session, how those skills will be applied and practiced after the training session, and how that application will be measured. This will generate greater ROI for training efforts since the training will be targeted toward a specific proficiency need and a plan will be in place for application of the learning.

Each completed segment of the development journey is a victory and can be celebrated. Early wins build momentum and contribute to immediate enhanced performance plus increased job satisfaction. All of this will keep the individual on target with his or her longer-term development objectives while increasing the individual’s contribution to the organization.

### **04: Keep the IDP on the Desk, Not in It**

Just as a GPS belongs on the dashboard, so does an IDP. It should serve as a context for continuous conversations between the individual and the direct manager. Both regular and informal meetings between individual and manager should include discussions on development and refer to the specific short-term and longer-term development objectives outlined in the IDP.

*The effort should be made to discuss how specific work assignments fit into the overall development plan.*

The effort should be made to discuss how specific work assignments fit into the overall development plan. Recognition for progress can be given and feedforward can be exchanged about how the individual can apply the skills he or she develops. Perhaps more than any other, this discipline of fixing the IDP on the agenda of manager/employee conversations breathes life into the IDP document and will allow the individual, manager, and organization to experience continued and measurable performance improvement.

## 05: Provide Notice if a Turn Is Coming Up

GPSs include a “lane assist” feature that will alert a driver if he or she needs to start getting into a specific lane in order to get to the destination. This provides appropriate lead time to allow the driver to shift to the appropriate lane and make the turn.

Similarly, in the course of the IDP conversation, there will be specific opportunities, milestones, and time-specific targets that should be identified and prepared for ahead of time. More obvious milestones include those dictated by a calendar (quarter, fiscal year, sales period, etc.).

GPS units can also be programmed to suggest roadside attractions, such as historical and cultural sites to enhance the journey. Likewise, the IDP conversation should highlight opportunities that arise to enhance the development journey. These might include special work assignments, such as organizing a company event, leading a special project, or presenting at an industry conference.

## 06: Provide Course Correction

If a driver veers off course, a particular stretch of highway is under construction, or there’s an adjustment in the desired destination, a GPS will quickly reconfigure the best course to take to get the driver heading in the right direction toward his or her destination. In modern organizations, similar changes are happening all the time, but they can’t be captured by the IDP if it’s filed away. These changes could include turnover in a key position, a new strategic initiative, the restructuring of a department, and so on. As these shifts occur, they should be included in the IDP conversation beginning with how those shifts impact the needs of the organization and then, how they change proficiency requirements for the employee.

## The Bottom Line: Quit Leaving Money on the Table

Let’s not forget where we started: many organizations are sinking time and money into an individual development planning process that is essentially a charade, a caricature of what the process really should be – a framework for continuing and regular conversation between an individual and manager to enhance the engagement of the individual within the organization and increase his or her contribution to the organization’s objectives.

Everyone involved in the process deserves better and by doing the IDP process better, organizations will see their training ROI improve. The best part about it is that for most organizations, there should be no additional costs. How to proceed in transforming the IDP process depends on the organization, but the starting point is to get educated about why it’s so important and discuss it at various levels of the organization. Businesses are already sinking costs into IDP creation – isn’t it time they get some value out of it?

## Appendix A: The Complete Learning Center Model

While an effective training program will be anchored with a dynamic IDP system, it can't end there. The training director needs to take a big-picture view, recognize the other tools in the toolbox, and analyze how to best apply each tool for optimal training program results. That's where the *Complete Learning Center* model comes in.

Whether it's declining revenues, increasing complexity, or changes in work-force demographics, organizations face unprecedented challenges in work-force development. Powerful new technology promises solutions, but how do you pick the right approach, and can you even afford it? On top of it all, attention from the executive suite is higher than ever.

It's easy to fall into "flavor of the month" thinking either in terms of a specific challenge or a solution. But in doing so, you lose sight of the big picture and risk committing to a strategy that may be ineffective, narrowly focused, or inflexible, thereby costing your organization time, money, and the frustration of unmet expectations.

This also leaves you vulnerable. By focusing in a reactive manner on putting out the most pressing fire, you can't respond to the challenge that may be coming in from the side, nor plan with how to deal with ones that are coming in the future.

Consider this quote from CLO Jeffrey Vargas: "In this business you have to be both focused and flexible. There are no absolutes in the learning world; at any time funding profiles can change or mission priorities may be enhanced, so your success is based, in part, on your ability to adapt to change."<sup>6</sup>

This necessity of adapting to change is what drives the need for a new model for keeping your training program in proper balance so that you anticipate changes, respond to them, and deliver the needed training results for your organization. The *Complete Learning Center* model was developed in order to help you find and maintain that critical balance in your training strategy.

The model incorporates best practices of training program managers as observed by organizational research, industry journals, proprietary surveys, and our 30 years of experience in working with clients across all industries.

By employing a new model for training and development, the *Complete Learning Center*, you can position your organization to generate opportunity out of the current challenges you face and be well-positioned to respond to future shifts in demographics, technology, and municipal initiatives. Furthermore, the *Complete Learning Center* model can help you identify multiple areas for improvement and enhancement in your training program, allowing you to harvest low-hanging fruit while planting seeds for tomorrow.

### The Complete Learning Center Model



**For more information on the Complete Learning Center Model – please visit [NationalSeminarsTraining.com/completelearningcenter](http://NationalSeminarsTraining.com/completelearningcenter).**

<sup>6</sup> T+D, February 2012.

**About Us**

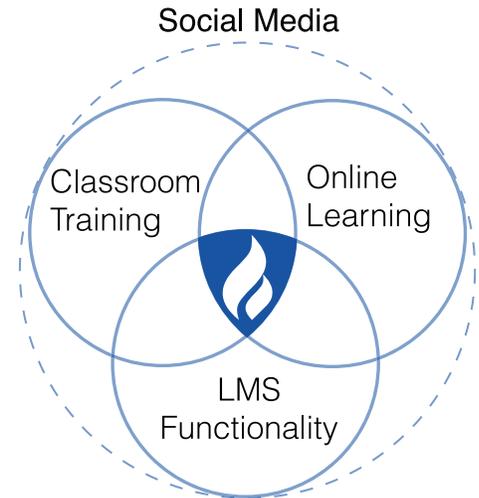
For more than 30 years, National Seminars has been one of the nation’s leading providers of employee training and development solutions to companies and organizations across North America. Our focus is on providing interactive, skill-building learning solutions for businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies to close knowledge gaps and address specific performance challenges – for performance improvement that lasts.

The experience and versatility of our staff enables us to help clients in a variety of industry sectors including:

- Corporate administration
- Manufacturing
- Federal, state, and local government
- Insurance
- Construction
- Financial services and banking
- Higher education
- Health care
- Retail
- Not-for-profit

Our mission is to provide the results-producing training you need, when and where you need it, that is cost-effective to you and your organization. In the past year alone, we’ve provided more than 6,000 seminars ... 300 webinars ... more than 2,500 on-site training days ... and more than 75,000 All-Access Training Passes.

Our offering of Classroom Training, Online Learning, LMS Functionality, and Social Media solutions allows us to provide *Complete Learning Center* solutions for our partners, including the following:



**For more information on the Complete Learning Center Model – please visit [NationalSeminarsTraining.com/completelearningcenter](http://NationalSeminarsTraining.com/completelearningcenter).**

To speak to one our training consultants about how you can build a *Complete Learning Center* for your organization, please call **1-800-344-4613**, or visit **[www.NationalSeminarsTraining.com](http://www.NationalSeminarsTraining.com)**.