CAREER**DEVELOPMENT**

Your Future Self Will Thank You: Prioritize Your Own Career Now

The real challenge is how we respond

■ By Kim M. Catania

How often do you say something like this

in a week: "I'm so busy — there's no way I can fit THAT in…"? I must say it a hundred times! We are all so busy — our calendars are booked with work and life events back-to-back — it can be overwhelming, to say the least.

So, how do we weave in and prioritize our own career development, without dropping the ball on our "other" tasks?

First, as professionals, we understand that continuous learning and development

Managing Your To-Do Items

Identifying crucial tasks for career development helps you focus your energy there and separate the urgent from the merely important. Not sure how? Look into methods like:

- **The Eisenhower Matrix,** similar to Stephen Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People."
- **MoSCoW Method:** Classify as "musthave," "should-have," "could-have" and "won't-have" to prioritize essential tasks.

(L&D) is not optional; it is essential. By investing in ourselves, we not only increase our value to current employers, but position ourselves for future career advancements.

This has fueled a surge in individuals trying to find ways to invest in their own career growth while simultaneously championing the creation of robust training programs within their organizations. It is driven by the necessity to retain top talent, cultivate future leaders and maintain a competitive edge in a constantly evolving market.

- **ABC Method:** Assign grades (A, B, C) to tasks based on their importance, prioritizing "A" tasks.
- **Pareto Principle (80/20 Rule):** Identify the 20% of tasks that generate 80% of the results and prioritize those.
- **"Eat the Frog":** Tackle the most challenging or daunting task first to gain momentum.

Who Are You?

Now, let's figure out what type of person you are. Are you a "to-do list maker" or a "calendar-blocker?" Whichever you choose to do, be sure to carve time out and put yourself on your list and your calendar. In fact, put yourself first! Part of this includes setting clear goals, managing distractions (like scrolling social media) and ensuring work-life balance to avoid burnout.

Effective time management for career development involves strategically planning and prioritizing your time to focus on activities that directly contribute to your professional growth.

Have you explored easily available options that may assist you? Look into Google Calendar, Microsoft Outlook, Todoist (which focuses on task organization), Fantastical Calendar, Calendly (for easy scheduling with others), Toggl Track (for time tracking), TimeTree, Any.do, Trello, Evernote and Clockify.

Time Tips

To manage your time effectively for your career development, here are some strategic tips that will really help:

- **Set goals:** Clearly define your career aspirations, set both short-term (over the next few months or year) and long-term goals (three to five years) to guide your time allocation.
- **Time-based prioritization:** Block time on your calendar, then allocate specific time slots for dedicated activities like learning new skills, networking and professional development courses. How? Identify the most important tasks related to your career development, then focus your energy on those first, differentiating between urgent and important activities. See the sidebar article for some tips on this.
- **Manage distractions:** Step away from your email and put your phone face down and away from you to minimize interruptions, to manage your notifications and to set boundaries.
- **Assess yourself:** Regularly evaluate your progress toward your career goals, be flexible and adjust your time allocation as needed. Check in with peers or a mentor to ensure you are on a productive path forward.
- **Delegate and engage AI:** Identify if you have tasks that can be delegated to others to free up your time for your higher-priority career development activities. Use artificial intelligence (AI) where appropriate for tasks that are repetitive, simple or

time-consuming. Look into tools like Microsoft Co-Pilot, LinkedIn Premium, Motion, Taskade, ClickUp, Todoist, Wrike, Asana and Timehero — all AI tools that can simplify your "day to day."

Developing Yourself

You have carved time out for yourself, now, how will you pursue your development and growth? To effectively shape your career trajectory, seek diverse learning experiences that may include:

- **Formal education:** Pursue advanced degrees (MBAs, specialized master's), certifications (i.e., executive coaching, project management, instructional design) and participate in executive education programs (live or online).
- **Skill-based training:** Focus on honing in-demand skills through targeted workshops or webinars, online courses and boot camps. The range extends from technical skills (storylines, AI, coding) to power skills like communication, facilitation or negotiation.
- **Experiential learning:** Seek opportunities within your organization for stretch assignments, cross-functional projects and rotations to broaden experience and expand your perspective.
- **Networking and communities:** Join professional organizations, attend industry conferences and participate in communities to strategically expand your network and learn from peers/experts.
- **Leadership development:** If your organization does not have programs like this, perhaps you can try to push for this critical learning journey. Topics in leadership development programs are designed to enhance leadership skills, regardless of your title or role, and boost your level of engagement, covering topics like emotional intelligence, strategic thinking, impactful communication, agility, change management and cross-functional collaboration.
- **Mentorship and coaching:** Find a mentor, not the person to whom you report, preferably in another department or company. If you are able, work to establish programs within your organization to connect experienced team members with emerging talent, to provide guidance, support and career development. This is critical for your organization to retain top talent — including you!

Mix It Up

Next, embrace a blended approach to learning by leveraging the multitude of modalities available to create a flexible experience. Consider online learning platforms where you have adaptability and accessibility of online courses, webinars and virtual simulations. Do not forget to weave in live in-person training, to leverage key benefits of face-to-face interactions, group discussions and networking events.

Also include microlearning, where you consume self-directed bite-sized learning content for nudges, just-in-time learning and knowledge reinforcement. Sites to find microlearning for career development offer short, focused learning modules on various career-related topics, often with mobile accessibility and engaging formats to facilitate quick learning.

The Benefits for the Future

This is a powerful trend. From a strategic perspective, as you prioritize your development and gain valuable skills, competence and career opportunities, you will become acutely aware of the need to cultivate a learning-centric culture within your organization.

Take the lead and spearhead development and implementation of L&D programs tailored to the organization's specific needs, so your organization benefits from a more engaged, productive and future-ready workforce. This dynamic approach is crucial as the world continues to change, shaping leaders and organizations for future success. ■

Kim M. Catania is principal, Catania Communications. Email her at **kim@cataniacommunications.com** or connect through **linkedin.com/in/kim-m-catania-1312196**.