THE MODERN POLICE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Turning Potential Into Intentional Professional Growth

Employee development should be deliberate, individualized, and connected to meaningful performance.

This training resource helps law-enforcement supervisors create practical development plans that identify strengths, close performance and skill gaps, establish measurable goals, build future capability, and create shared accountability for professional growth.



Leadership Development Resource

Purpose and Learning Objectives

Developing employees is a core supervisory responsibility. Training alone does not create development, and an annual evaluation does not substitute for an ongoing plan. Effective development connects the employee's current performance, future goals, organizational needs, targeted experiences, feedback, and follow-through.

After completing this training, participants should be able to:

- Explain the purpose and value of an Employee Development Plan (EDP).
- Distinguish employee development from performance correction and formal discipline.
- Assess employee strengths, development needs, interests, and readiness.
- Create specific and measurable development goals tied to observable outcomes.
- Select appropriate developmental activities, assignments, coaching, mentoring, and training.
- Establish realistic timelines, checkpoints, and evidence of progress.
- Conduct development conversations that create employee ownership and supervisory accountability.
- Review and adjust development plans as performance, assignments, and organizational needs change.

> **Core Principle:** A development plan should not merely describe where an employee wants to go. It should identify what the employee will do next to become ready.

1. What Is an Employee Development Plan?

An Employee Development Plan is a structured agreement that identifies development priorities, specific goals, learning activities, resources, timelines, and follow-up. It provides a practical bridge between current capability and desired future performance.

A strong EDP should answer:

- Where is the employee now?
- What strengths should be maintained or expanded?
- What knowledge, skill, behavior, or experience should be developed?
- What does successful improvement or readiness look like?
- What actions will the employee take?
- What support will the supervisor or organization provide?
- When will progress be reviewed?
- What evidence will demonstrate progress?

Development is broader than promotion

Not every employee wants the same career path, and development should not be reduced to preparing everyone for supervision. Development may involve deeper technical expertise, instructor skills, investigations, community engagement, field training, specialty assignments, communication, decision-making, report writing, leadership, or greater effectiveness in a current role.

> **Development is not a reward reserved for top performers.** Every employee should understand how to improve, contribute, and grow within the realities of the organization.

2. Development, Performance Improvement, and Discipline

Supervisors should distinguish development from corrective processes. The same employee may need both development and accountability, but the purpose of each conversation should remain clear.

Process	Primary Purpose	Typical Focus
Development Plan	Build capability and prepare for stronger future performance.	Skills, knowledge, experiences, growth goals, readiness.
Coaching	Improve a specific behavior, skill, decision process, or performance pattern.	Practice, feedback, reflection, and application.
Performance Improvement	Correct performance that is below an established standard.	Defined gaps, required improvement, timelines, monitoring.
Discipline	Address misconduct or other matters requiring formal accountability.	Policy, due process, proportional consequences, documentation.

Clarity matters: Do not disguise a required performance correction as optional professional development. Employees should know whether the conversation is developmental, corrective, or both.

3. Start With an Honest Development Assessment

A useful development plan begins with a realistic picture of the employee. Supervisors should avoid building plans from assumptions, stereotypes, or a single recent event. Use performance history, direct observation, employee interests, feedback, organizational needs, and demonstrated behavior.

Assess four areas

Strengths

What does the employee consistently do well? Which strengths could be used more intentionally or at a higher level?

Development Needs

What knowledge, skill, behavior, judgment, communication, or experience would improve current or future performance?

Interests and Goals

What does the employee want to learn, accomplish, or explore? Which goals are realistic within available opportunities?

Organizational Needs

What capabilities will the team or agency need? Where can employee growth create operational value?

Questions for the development conversation

- What parts of your current assignment are you strongest in?
- What would you like to become better at over the next six to twelve months?
- What assignment or responsibility would stretch you in a productive way?
- What feedback have you received that you want to act on?
- What future role or capability interests you, and why?
- What support would help you make measurable progress?

4. Convert Development Needs Into Clear Goals

Vague goals produce vague development. 'Improve leadership' or 'get better at reports' may identify a direction, but they do not define what the employee will actually do or how progress will be recognized.

A useful goal should be:

- Specific enough to guide action.
- Observable or measurable enough to evaluate progress.
- Relevant to the employee's role, interests, or future responsibilities.
- Realistic within available time, resources, and opportunities.
- Time-bound with meaningful checkpoints.
- Supported by defined actions rather than dependent only on eventual selection or promotion.

Example

Too broad: “Become a better leader.”

Development goal: “Over the next 90 days, lead three shift briefings, facilitate one after-action discussion, and mentor a newer officer through two report reviews. Request supervisor feedback after each activity and identify two leadership behaviors to continue developing.”

Outcome goals vs. process goals

A promotion, specialty assignment, or instructor selection may be a desired outcome, but the employee does not fully control selection decisions. Development plans should therefore emphasize controllable actions: training, practice, assignments, feedback, demonstrated performance, preparation, and experience.

5. Choose the Right Development Activities

Development is strongest when employees apply learning. Classroom training can be valuable, but growth often requires experience, practice, feedback, and reflection.

Method	Examples
Training	Courses, workshops, certifications, webinars, policy study, technical instruction.
Stretch Assignments	Lead a briefing, coordinate a small project, prepare a presentation, assist with planning, conduct a review.
Coaching	Targeted practice and feedback from a supervisor on a defined behavior or skill.
Mentoring	Broader career perspective, organizational insight, reflection, and professional guidance.
Observation	Shadow another unit, attend meetings, observe interviews, boards, briefings, or command processes.
Teaching	Prepare roll-call training, mentor a newer employee, instruct a topic, or facilitate a tabletop exercise.
Self-Directed Learning	Reading, structured reflection, case review, policy analysis, professional writing, or guided study.

Development principle: Give employees opportunities that are challenging enough to create growth but supported enough to create learning rather than avoidable failure.

6. Shared Responsibility: Employee, Supervisor, and Organization

A development plan works best when responsibility is shared but not blurred. The employee must own the effort. The supervisor creates clarity, access, feedback, and accountability. The organization determines which resources and opportunities are realistically available.

Employee	Supervisor	Organization
Own goals and actions. Prepare for meetings. Seek feedback. Complete agreed activities. Apply learning. Track progress.	Clarify expectations. Provide candid feedback. Create opportunities. Remove reasonable barriers. Monitor progress. Recognize growth.	Provide relevant resources. Maintain fair access. Clarify requirements. Support succession and capability needs. Align development with mission.

Avoid creating false promises

Development opportunities should not be presented as guarantees of promotion, specialty assignment, or selection. Supervisors can help employees become more capable and competitive while remaining clear that future selections may depend on processes and factors outside the development plan.

Good development creates readiness, not entitlement.

7. Review, Feedback, and Accountability

An EDP that is written once and never revisited becomes paperwork rather than development. Establish review points when the plan is created.

At each review, discuss:

- What actions were completed?
- What did the employee learn or demonstrate?
- What feedback was received?
- What evidence shows improvement or increased readiness?
- What barriers affected progress?
- Does the goal remain relevant?
- What should be continued, changed, added, or closed?
- What is the next developmental action?

Measure evidence, not activity alone

Completing a course is an activity. Development is demonstrated when the employee can apply what was learned. Supervisors should look for changes in behavior, quality, judgment, communication, confidence, reliability, technical performance, or ability to handle greater responsibility.

> **Follow-through creates credibility.** If supervisors ask employees to create development goals, they should revisit those goals and provide meaningful feedback.

8. Tabletop Exercise: The Ambitious Officer

Scenario: An officer with four years of experience tells you they want to become a sergeant as soon as possible. The officer is proactive and confident, but report quality is inconsistent, feedback sometimes produces defensiveness, and the officer has limited experience mentoring others. The officer asks you to recommend them for the next promotional process.

Discussion Questions

- How would you acknowledge the employee's ambition without making a promise?
- Which strengths should be reinforced?
- Which development gaps should be discussed directly?
- What measurable goals could be included in a six-month development plan?
- What assignments or experiences could build supervisory readiness?
- How should defensiveness to feedback be addressed?
- What evidence would demonstrate meaningful progress?
- When should the plan be reviewed?

Facilitator Considerations

The supervisor should support ambition while providing candid information about readiness. A useful plan could combine report-quality goals, structured feedback, mentoring or training responsibilities, scenario practice, leadership opportunities, and regular checkpoints. The plan should build capability rather than imply that completion guarantees promotion.

9. Employee Development Plan Worksheet

Use this worksheet to build an individualized plan with the employee.

Employee's current strengths:

Development priority or capability to strengthen:

Why this development matters:

Specific development goal:

Actions and learning activities:

Resources, support, or opportunities needed:

Evidence that will demonstrate progress:

Target date and review checkpoints:

10. 30-60-90 Day Development Plan

For short-cycle goals, use a 30-60-90 day structure to create momentum and visible checkpoints.

DAYS 1-30 - DEFINE AND PREPARE

Clarify the goal, establish the baseline, gather resources, identify opportunities, and begin the first learning activities.

DAYS 31-60 - PRACTICE AND APPLY

Use the skill or behavior in real assignments, seek feedback, and adjust based on observed performance.

DAYS 61-90 - DEMONSTRATE AND SUSTAIN

Demonstrate the capability more independently, evaluate evidence of progress, and determine the next development step.

11. Supervisor Development Practices Self-Assessment

Mark the response that best describes your current practice: **Rarely / Sometimes / Usually / Consistently**.

Statement	R	S	U	C
I discuss development with employees outside formal evaluation periods.	■	■	■	■
I can identify specific strengths for each employee I supervise.	■	■	■	■
I provide candid information about development gaps.	■	■	■	■
I help employees create goals that are specific and actionable.	■	■	■	■
I provide developmental opportunities in addition to recommending courses.	■	■	■	■
I distinguish development from performance correction and discipline.	■	■	■	■
I avoid promising promotions or assignments I cannot guarantee.	■	■	■	■
I follow up on development goals at agreed checkpoints.	■	■	■	■
I look for evidence that learning is being applied on the job.	■	■	■	■
I consider organizational needs when helping employees plan development.	■	■	■	■

One development practice I will improve as a supervisor:

12. Personal Application Plan

Identify how you will strengthen employee development within your team.

One employee whose strengths I should develop more intentionally:

One employee development conversation I need to schedule:

One stretch assignment or learning opportunity I can create:

One development goal I need to make more measurable:

One follow-up practice I will begin using:

How I will know employee development is improving team capability:

Final Principle: Developing people is not separate from operational leadership. Every skill strengthened, weakness addressed, future leader prepared, and employee retained through meaningful growth increases the capability of the team.