

10 Tips for Optimizing the Return on Professional Development

October 19, 2016 | Amit Mirig



To get the most out of your limited professional development (PD) and training budget, consider these 10 tips:

SELECTING THE EVENTS

1. Talk with your supervisor to ensure the trainings you identify align with your individual and departmental goals. Make sure that PD is a recurring item in your supervisory discussions.
2. Rather than go to the same meeting every year, vary the events you attend. Trainings that have clearly stated outcomes and focus on practical information will give you more return on your investment.
3. Can you attend with a colleague? Attending with a team can help you build momentum on your priority initiatives.

AT THE EVENT

4. While at the conference, be an active participant in your own learning: Rather than passively attending the sessions, ask questions and share experiences and lessons learned from your own institution. Participants at a conference can often learn as much from each other as from the speakers. Also, be intentional about networking with your peers, developing relationships outside the meeting room.
5. Before leaving the conference, identify your next steps. What are 1-2 actions you can commit to? Make sure to identify steps that are neither too big nor too small. For example, "changing the culture of my division" is too big and complex of a goal. Conversely, simply "sharing information with peers" may be too small of a goal, as that step will probably not be enough to initiate progress. Look for realistic steps that can make a real and measurable difference. Identify a "thought partner" to work with, and create a plan of action together. In your plan, include:
 - How much time will you need to complete these steps?
 - What resources will you need?
 - What could go wrong?
 - Which allies on campus can be helpful to you? If you're both willing, schedule a phone call with your thought partner in the next 2-4 weeks to check in on your progress.

ON THE WAY HOME

6. Use the plane or train ride home to prepare an informal presentation or some informal remarks to distill the most critical ideas from the event and their implications. Review, separately, both *immediate actions you can take* and *ideas to consider over the long term*.

BACK ON CAMPUS

7. Share your informal remarks with your supervisor to gather his/her input and ideas, and then prepare a formal presentation to share your most important ideas with your colleagues.
8. Beyond just a formal presentation, save your conference workbook and other resources from the event, and share these with your colleagues. You could share some reading or an instructional video that you found especially useful.
9. Carve out one hour in the week after the event to review all the business cards you collected and the attendee list from the event. Who should you stay in contact with? Similarly, stay connected with the speakers at the event who resonated with you. Saying thank you or sharing a resource is a great way to ensure the connection stays alive.
10. Build momentum immediately around your action steps or the new skills you learned at the event. Improve those new skills by practicing; don't let yourself lose them in the midst of a return to your day-to-day tasks.

We hope these tips will prove useful at your conferences this year! Learn more about how some institutions are leveraging professional development in our report, *The State of Professional Development in Higher Education*. [Read the full report here.](#)

Check out an AI Conference

AI conferences are unique because they are informed by our research on professional development and are designed to facilitate the kind of planning and action discussed in this article. Play the video below to hear from our participants.



[Take a Look at Our Upcoming Conferences](#)

Training

[Conferences](#)

[Webcasts](#)

[Campus Workshops](#)

[Digital Recordings](#)

[Articles & Reports](#)

[Books](#)

[Assessments](#)

Library

[Articles and Reports](#)

[Our Insights](#)

[Books](#)

[Sign Up for Our Publications](#)

About

[Vision](#)

[Case Studies](#)

[Careers](#)

[Sponsorship](#)

[Meet the Team](#)

Contact

Academic Impressions
4601 DTC Blvd., Suite 800
Denver, CO 80237