Besides increasing the collective knowledge and professionalism of your team, investing in professional development has other far-reaching benefits. It can increase employee engagement and job satisfaction, improve productivity (happy employees are productive employees), increase retention and internal promotion, and even help you attract more qualified candidates.

If you're running an overly lean machine, where employees feel perpetually overworked and out of balance, your attempts to introduce professional development initiatives could backfire. Employees may feel like you're just adding one more task to an already endless list.

Your job as a manager is to make sure each team member has a reasonable workload, with room built in for personal learning and growth. Without complete visibility into who is working on what, who is hitting deadlines and who is perpetually behind, this task is all but impossible.

If you'd like to transform your management style, try the following professional development ideas with your team.

1. Make Sure You're Staffed Appropriately

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2. Invite Input

Make professional development a line item in your budget, and communicate this to your team. Ask them to seek out and present opportunities that they would be truly interested in and that would also further them in their careers, so you're not the only one determining how that budget gets spent. If employees have a say in the type of training they get, they'll be more invested in following through.

3. Send Staff to Conferences

Send team members to conferences, user conferences and other in-person events that allow them to learn from thought leaders and other industry professionals alike. Have processes in place that make it possible for individuals to cover for each other, so they're not spending their days in breakout sessions and their evenings checking work email.

Three of the eight habits are at least partially related to professional development:

- Be a good coach
- Express interest in employees’ success and well-being
- Help your employees with career development
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH THE MICROFINANCE ASSOCIATION

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4. Seek Out Online Opportunities

Virtual conferences, webinars, online classes, there’s no shortage of professional development opportunities you can take advantage of without ever leaving the office.

5. Cross-train/Offer Job Shadowing

Assign team members who have different but complementary skill sets to work together on certain projects, and maybe even switch up their roles, so they can learn from each other in an organic setting. Or go the more formal route and set aside certain days where individuals can shadow colleagues, so they can gain a better understanding of different roles and the organization as a whole.

6. Host Guest Speakers

If your professional development budget is small, rather than sending employees away to build their expertise, bring the expertise in-house. Invite knowledgeable guest speakers—perhaps from client companies, vendors, suppliers and other corporate partners—who can address your team in an intimate setting, answer questions, provide new perspectives on the industry, and mingle over dinner or drinks.

7. Reimburse Membership Costs

Empower employees to choose professional organizations, subscriptions, and other memberships that offer networking and learning opportunities, and allow them to reimburse the cost.

8. Use your professional development Budget

It is important that you use your professional development budget in the most efficient manner. The Microfinance Association can offer you residential training packages in the following countries:

- United Kingdom
- United States of America
- Ghana
- Singapore
- Dubai
- Kenya
- Malaysia
- Pakistan

Even if your budgets are restricted, we can come up with a tailor made solution that fits the needs of your institution.

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