

Invest in YOU: Steps You Can Take to Claim Ownership of Your Career

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No matter where you are in your career journey, you are always the one in the driver's seat. For those early in their career, it can be overwhelming or intimidating to know where to start and what you have ownership over. Through my 20+ year career in Human Resources, I've worked with individuals at every level within an organization and I've found that those who take time to invest in themselves early on, advance more rapidly and find quicker alignment with their development goals.

This guide will explore tactical ways that you can invest in your development and move towards a career that you want. We will focus on the Four D's: Discussion, Donation, Development, and Decision and where and how you can incorporate them both in your personal and professional life.

Discussion: An easy place to start is by talking with others about how they grew their career. There are both informal and formal ways to go about doing this, including:

- **Networking:** This can be informal conversations with co-workers or through more formal networking events. In either situation, find opportunities to get curious and ask questions. Most people like to talk about themselves and impart their wisdom, often you just need to open the floodgates by saying "I'd love to hear about your career journey." You can then follow up with questions like "Where do you get industry information?" or "How do you stay on top of industry trends?"



As Adam Grant recently said, "A key to lifelong learning is to see everyone you meet as a potential teacher. Each interaction is a chance to question old assumptions and gain new perspectives. Collecting lessons from others is the fastest way to fill gaps in your experience."

- **Mentorship:** As with networking, mentorship can be informal or formal. Informal mentorship requires the mentee to seek out someone they know and respect and ask them to mentor. Mentorship programs are a way to connect with someone and form a deeper relationship and understanding of their career path and how they can support you in yours. The Security Industry Association (SIA) offers formal mentorship through the Talent, Inclusion, Mentorship, and Education (TIME) program.



A successful mentorship will have established guidelines and expectations, which will ensure commitment on both sides. It can be helpful to go into conversations with specific questions or problems that the mentee is looking to solve, this helps the mentor feel like they're providing support and guidance right away. Lastly, it's important to remember that mentors will change and evolve as you grow and develop.

- **Sponsorship:** A sponsor is someone within your organization who advocates for you in many settings, including behind closed doors. Sponsors are usually in a position of leadership, are not your direct manager, and require a deeper personal connection built on trust. Sponsors see the potential in the sponsee and are committed to seeing them succeed in their career. They can help the sponsee with career navigation and advancement opportunities by making introductions to important people both within the company and the industry.
- **Coaching:** While networking, mentorship, and sponsorship are free, coaching will require a financial investment and there are times in your career when making this investment makes sense. Coaching is a structured, goal-oriented process where an individual is focused on developing specific skills or wants to improve performance in a particular area. Working with a coach will hold you accountable through regular, structured meetings with clear expectations and progress tracking. Most often, the coaching will be time-based and will not be ongoing.

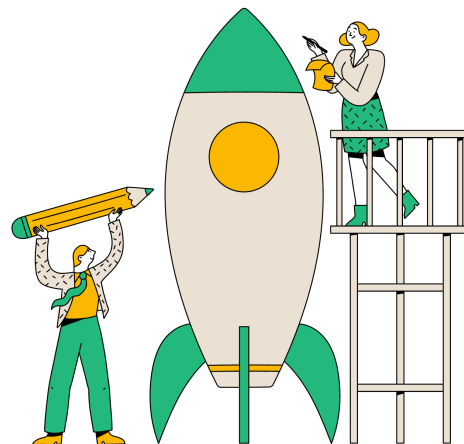
Donation: Donating your time is a great way to learn new skills and support the causes that you believe in.

- **Volunteer:** There are countless benefits to volunteering, including the opportunity to reinforce skills you're learning at work, develop new skills, broaden your network, and help you hone in on your talents. If you're considering volunteering to support your professional development, it's important to select an organization that aligns with your interests and passions. You are investing your time and offering your services to others and just because you're good at something, doesn't mean you should do it, especially if it doesn't align with your goals or values.

- **Lead:** Consider volunteering as a chance to step into a leadership role. This is a space to develop your leadership skills and define what kind of leader you want to be. In addition to non-profits, you should also consider getting involved with industry organizations. In addition to RISE, SIA's Women in Security Forum provides opportunities to get involved with committees and potentially even lead one.
- **Share:** If there is a topic or skill that you are an expert on or passionate about, developing a presentation or writing an article are ways to build skills and share your expertise. Whether it's for use within your organization or to be shared at an industry event, you can use this as a chance to sharpen your writing or presentation skills.

Development: Commit to being a continuous learner and seek out opportunities to learn, grow, and challenge yourself. Remember that development happens through experiences, not only formal, structured learning.

- **Experience:** Job expansion, stretch assignments, job rotations, and projects are just a few experiences that can help you develop a new skill or deepen your knowledge. As you consider what you might raise your hand for, ask yourself "How will this support me in achieving my goals?" It's also ok to say "no" or to negotiate if you're approached about an opportunity that doesn't align with your development priorities. The clearer you are about what you're trying to achieve, the easier the answer is when you are evaluating the opportunity.



- **Read & Listen:** Industry publications, manufacturer newsletters, podcasts, and books can all support your commitment to learning. SIA members have access to a library of reports, guides, and articles. Don't like to read? Audiobooks and podcasts provide an easy way to consume information. Listening at 1.2 speed is the ideal speed, it's not so fast that you lose track, but it can shave off minutes or even hours of listening time. If English isn't your first language or the topic requires you to focus, slowing the speed might be a better option.
- **Instruction:** The opportunities to learn through formal instruction are almost limitless, conferences, webinars, training programs, and courses are available in-person and virtually and many of them are available for free or low-cost. If you're considering continuing education, ask your employer if they have a tuition reimbursement program. SIA offers certifications and courses and if your employer doesn't financially support training, applying for one of the many scholarships offered by SIA is a way to fund your learning. LinkedIn Learning is a great resource for learning a wide variety of topics. Did you know that if you have a public library card, you can likely access the courses for free?

Decision: Decide what you want to focus on right now. It can be easy to get overwhelmed and come up with a laundry list of things you want to accomplish. You'll be more successful and effective if you decide on one thing to concentrate on. Careers are a marathon, not a sprint. Balance short-term goals with long-term aspirations.

- **Share:** Once you've decided what you want to focus on, share this with your manager, peer, or friend. When deciding to share a goal or objective, it's important to be clear with the individual what you need from them. Do you want them to act as an accountability partner, who will help you stay on track, check in on you, and provide honest feedback or are you just looking for someone to vocalize your goals and aspirations to as a way to hold yourself accountable? At the very least, you should put pen to paper and write it down. Research has shown that people who write their goals have a better chance of accomplishing more than those who do not.
- **Check-In:** Determine a regular cadence that you want to check in on your progress. This can either be with yourself or your accountability partner if you've decided to have one. There are apps available that can help you track your goals, or you can keep it simple and set calendar reminders.

Remember that your goals and priorities may change or evolve, by taking the time to pause and check-in, you can ensure that you're staying on track and aligned with your career aspirations.

- **Celebrate & Evaluate:** Whether it's a small win or a huge accomplishment, taking a moment to celebrate helps keep the momentum going. After you've given yourself the pat on the back you deserve, take time to evaluate how it went. What went well? What were the challenges? What are your lessons learned? Use these to help inform your next area of focus.

None of the Four D's is better than the other, they each provide value and will have a positive impact on your career. If you're considering exploring one or more of these options, it's important to think about where you're at in your career and what would be the most impactful at this time.



No matter what you choose, it's important to track your progress. Keep notes or a journal of all your accomplishments, not only is it great to reflect on when you're feeling challenged or struggling, but it also will come in handy when you write your next self-evaluation or prepare for your next interview.

Now, let's take it a step further. Fill out the career development plan to create actionable steps to invest in **YOU**.