

When and how to ask your boss for professional development

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In an increasingly complex and competitive professional world, it can sometimes feel impossible to keep up with the market. New technologies, and even entirely new business sectors, arise constantly, so professionals who continue to **build their knowledge** can gain a competitive edge over those who do not.

[Pew Research Center reports](#) that those who pursue lifelong learning reap benefits not only in career enhancement but also in social and personal pursuits. They build their **interpersonal networks** and open up opportunities for community involvement, for example.

With the advantages of professional development extending well beyond your resumé, it's time to embrace your inner scholar. Here's what you need to know.

How to know when it's time to grow

While the right time for professional development and education is highly individualized, there are some common signs anyone can pick up on.

When your industry gets disrupted

Big shifts in technology can disrupt industries and create noticeable demand for new skills.

For example, the [shift from on-premise software to software-as-a-service \(SaaS\) technologies in the early 2000s](#) not only created demand for IT people who understood the new paradigm but also for workers in many fields who were

ready to adopt cloud-based software in lieu of common desktop applications that had dominated the workplace through the 1990s.

Since that time, the **pace of technological change** has only increased, with SaaS solutions flooding the market in just about every field of business. While many of these solutions merely move a worker's interface from a desktop app to a browser window, the trend has consistently moved in the direction of converging previously distinct capabilities or workflows into unified applications. Examples of this are customer relationship management (CRM) software, like Salesforce, and marketing automation software, such as Marketo.

[From 2011 to 2013, Salesforce acquired several technologies](#) to integrate marketing automation into its CRM platform, creating Salesforce Marketing Cloud. This happened at the same time [Oracle and Adobe were making similar moves](#).

Big changes like that can **impact several fields at once**, particularly when big companies in the industry are caught up in the wave. In this case, IT, data management, marketing and sales professionals in a wide variety of roles across many industries adapted to capitalize on the wave of change in the revenue-tech industry.

Another example is the rise of [Agile methodologies in project management](#). Originally a tech-industry trend in 2001, Agile project management caught on in countless industries over the past 20 years and has largely **displaced the older waterfall model** of project management, yielding benefits in time-to-market for projects that can be managed in the iterative fashion Agile prescribes. Browsing job listings for project management roles today, you'll scarcely find a position that doesn't call for Agile skills.

When you're falling behind or at a standstill

Seeing big changes in your industry is one sign that upskilling is a good idea. Another is cognitive dissonance, or that uncomfortable feeling you get when you realize **your reality doesn't align with your expectations** or experience.

If you're constantly hearing buzzwords pointing to new ways of working or new technologies, none of which you fully understand, that can indicate an opportunity to catch up with or get ahead of a trend. And sometimes the signs are even more obvious, such as seeing your department **create a new position** that's exciting to you.

Personally, I think the best sign that it's time for professional development is even simpler: If I'm not **actively developing a skill** at the moment, it's probably time to start or to pick up something I've been neglecting for a while.

That can be anything from **practicing a foreign language** on my phone, to taking a [certificate course](#) or enrolling in a graduate program, to **practicing guitar** in my home office. In fact, I've been doing all of these things over the past few months and have generally kept up the learning habit for most of my adult life, which I believe has made all the difference in enhancing my career and enriching my experience of the world.

Getting company sponsorship

Whether and how you ask your boss to pay for professional development depends on several major factors, including whether your company already has a professional development program or similar [education reimbursement benefit](#).

Many companies offer formal programs to [sponsor employee development](#), with clear policies that make the process of securing funds relatively straightforward. Some companies require the education to be relevant to your job, while others allow for study or training in any field of your choosing. Still others, such as Cigna, have their own **internal training for leadership development** in key areas of the business.

If you're fortunate enough to work in a company that proactively sponsors employee development with these kinds of programs, familiarize yourself with the offerings and requirements and proceed accordingly.

Plenty of companies, however, do not have formal training and education sponsorship benefits in place, and this situation requires a more nuanced approach to secure sponsorship. You'll need to do research on your own and be prepared to **make a business case** to your manager or HR department (likely both) to win financial support. Along the way, you'll need to be aware of the personal biases, needs and interests of your organization's leadership to make a strong case.

How to make a business case for professional development

Over years of leading teams in scrappy startup and scale-up companies, I've had conversations about upskilling many times, and the outcome has always depended on the strength of the business case. Here are some important questions you will need to be prepared to answer along the way:

How does this training or industry certification benefit the company?

Point to industry trends, **potential revenue or cost-saving opportunities** or open positions that require the skill, and credibly account for the return on investment the company gets out of it.

Be aware that **employee retention** (e.g., keeping you happily on the team) is a benefit to the business, as is the opportunity to **promote from within** rather than hire from outside. [Hiring new employees costs thousands of dollars each time](#), and you should include that fact in your business case.

Can you develop the same skill without incurring these costs? Is there a free or cheaper option?

In a budget-conscious business, you can expect management to look for **cost-effective ways to solve problems and add capabilities**. You may want the formal certificate or degree from a well-known institution, but your boss may press for learning the skills you need in some cheaper way. It's important to have a clear sense of which skills you're looking to develop and research the most cost-effective way of attaining them.

How long will it take to get value from the training?

In a business environment with [high employee turnover](#), funding lengthy employee training programs can feel risky to employers. Managers want to know that if they pay for your education, you'll stick around long enough for it to benefit the company.

Be prepared to parse the details of the **skills your training will impart** with each course, and when the company will see the benefits. Read through course descriptions and include these details in your business case, along with a timeline.

What commitment will you make to the company?

In exchange for funding your education, some employers will want a written agreement that if you leave the company within a certain period, you'll **pay them back some of the costs**.

If your company will cover all of your education costs, it's time to celebrate and then get to work. If not, you should explore options to **fund the remaining cost**. Depending on the cost of the program, that can mean cutting back on monthly expenses to include tuition in your budget, asking family for assistance or securing scholarships or [student loans](#).

Is upskilling worth it?

In the end, you have to be realistic about the impact a professional development program will have on your **work-life balance**. Any rigorous educational endeavor is going to require a chunk of your time on a consistent basis, and you'll need to balance your other commitments accordingly. If you're lucky, your boss may tolerate you spending a small portion of your work time on professional development, but this is by no means the norm.

To mitigate that impact, you can look for a program like those offered at University of Phoenix, which were designed to accommodate adult learners who have other commitments in their lives. (Hello, family, work and friends!)

No matter what kind of program you choose, take the time to **check in with your manager, co-workers, family and friends**, and be clear about how you're going to balance your commitments. Proactively making adjustments to incorporate your professional development time into your life in a healthy way will help you to avoid burnout or missed expectations.

Upskilling at University of Phoenix

UOPX answers the demand for lifelong learning and upskilling in a variety of ways, from degree programs to individual courses to certificates to professional development.

Degree programs: UOPX does more than offer associate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs in fields like IT, healthcare and business. It also ensures students are prepared for today's workplace by aligning its courses with [career-relevant skills](#).

Certificates: Not a degree but more than a course, certificate options at UOPX can often be completed in nine months or less while honing skills in business, education, technology and healthcare.

Individual courses: Not ready to take on an entire degree program? No problem. Upskill strategically by taking individual courses in subjects you can put to work for you today. UOPX students can choose from more than 600 online options!

Professional development: Self-paced, online and non-credit, professional development courses at UOPX home in on real-world skills students can use today. Choose from courses or tracks depending on whether you want to upskill quickly or in some cases prepare to sit for an industry certification.

For the complete article, please visit: <https://www.phoenix.edu/blog/when-to-ask-for-professional-development.html>