



Professional Development is Good Stewardship **by Catherine Gates**

“And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” —Luke 2:52

Professional Development is God’s Way

Our work matters a great deal to God. Most of us spend roughly 30 percent of our lives at work. Work is a significant means of worshipping God and bringing Him glory. Even Jesus had to learn, grow, and be intentional about gaining wisdom for his assignment. Jesus gives us the ultimate example of how we are to approach our work assignments through a commitment to growth in leadership and influence.

Most of us want to pursue professional development. According to a study of 27,000 employees by McKinsey, roughly 80 percent of women want to grow so they can be promoted to the next level. Unfortunately, DDI’s Leadership Transitions Report showed that women were 12 percent less likely than men to receive leadership skills training and 15 percent less likely to be assessed to gain insights into their strengths and development gaps as leaders.

If you’ve ever found that the leadership development you crave seems out of reach, you’re not alone. Yet, companies benefit significantly when the women on their teams grow. The fact is companies with more women in leadership often experience increased productivity, employee engagement, and success than companies with no women in leadership. Here are just a few statistics:

- Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25 percent more likely to have above-average profitability than those in the bottom quartileⁱ.
- Inclusive teams made better decisions 87 percent of the time, and gender-diverse teams delivered 60 percent better resultsⁱⁱ.
- Companies with more diverse leadership teams report 19 percent higher revenue from innovation compared to less diverse companiesⁱⁱⁱ.

Our organizations succeed when *everyone* grows through engaging in professional development.

God has blessed each one of us with gifts and skills to accomplish His purposes and bring Him glory through our work. It’s our responsibility to develop those gifts so we can reach more of our God-given potential and excel in whatever work He has called us to do.

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” — 1 Peter 4:10



DISCUSS

1. How do you view professional development—as a bonus, or a necessity to steward your skills and be your best?
2. What can you do to gain access to professional development resources that could make a difference for your career advancement?

Confidence grows as you stretch

Even when we understand the importance of growth, fear or self-doubt can hold us back. An HP study showed women are likely to wait to apply for a new position until they have close to 100 percent of the qualifications. Men were happy to apply if they met 60 percent of the job requirements. While this study represents a limited group of people, it's important to be aware of the tendency we may have as women.

So, what can we do? Pushing ourselves outside of our comfort zone to pursue stretch assignments is an excellent way to grow. The key is to lean into God for His help while also asking for help from others, such as mentors.

After I moved to Northwest Arkansas, I needed to find a job quickly. I met the CEO of a training and development company and one of his partners. I loved what their company was about and could see myself joining the team. They were hiring for Instructional Designers. While I never held that title, and I didn't have a bachelor's degree—two of the key requirements—I shared my years of experience in writing training materials. I was confident I could do the job. At first, they wouldn't even interview me. Two weeks after they turned me away, they invited me in, and I signed papers to work as a contractor. After two months, they hired me as a full-time employee.

I didn't have all of the knowledge I would need, but I had a strong foundation and a willingness to learn. God opened that door for me and I leaned on Him to equip me to do the work with excellence. I also had the support of coworkers. God used that position to hone my writing skills for what came next—developing and distributing Bible studies on faith and work.

*"Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance."
— Proverbs 1:5*

DISCUSS

3. What opportunities have you been hesitant to pursue that could help you achieve a new level in your career?
4. What steps can you take now to pursue those opportunities and who can support you?



Resources you can use now

Your growth is not just about you, but benefits those around you and the organization. Your output is always someone else's input—whether it's documentation, financial analysis, how you interact with your coworkers, or even the level of joy and passion you bring to work. The more intentional you are about your own growth, the greater influence you will have through your leadership, as a role model, mentor, and an encouragement to others to reach their potential.

Ultimately, as Christians we are all ambassadors for Christ in our workplace. Our work is a form of worship to God and is to be done for His glory. When we do, we point others to Christ before we ever speak his name.

There are a variety of resources you can turn to depending on where you are in your professional journey and what you need the most.

- **Leadership books** can be an excellent way to keep up-to-date on the latest thinking in leadership, team building, strategic planning, etc.
- **Podcasts and digital resources** are great for learning on the go or while you're engaged in activities that don't require a lot of thought.
- **Online courses**, available from a variety of sources on almost any topic you might need.
- **Volunteer roles** that provide opportunities to practice leadership, such as volunteering for your 4word Community Group or a company employee resource group (ERG).
- **Mentors** provide one-on-one connection with a seasoned leader who has been where you are and reached goals you want to achieve. These people provide a role model, wisdom, and support for navigating your career and life.
- **Professional coaches** provide one-on-one support for achieving specific goals through a structured approach that challenges you and holds you accountable to specific actions designed to facilitate growth.
- **Leadership peer groups** provide training in a group setting where you learn from the curriculum as well as one another. These are safe spaces where you can be transparent about your experiences, fears, and dreams, and where you can process challenges so that you can see them from new perspectives and handle them with greater confidence.

Because our mission is to help women reach their God-given potential with confidence, 4word provides resources in each of these areas that are available to you when and as you need them. **Take a look at the list at the end of this guide.** You can visit 4wordwomen.org/programs to learn more.



DISCUSS

5. How is God calling you to use your influence in your organization?
6. What resources can help you grow in that area?
7. What next step will you take to be intentional about your professional development and by when?

Growth maximizes your influence

Women have the capacity to positively influence the culture of their teams and organizations. The more we grow in our leadership, the more influence we have. God has placed you where you are for a purpose.

*“And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”
—Esther 4:14b*



Catherine Gates is 4word Vice President Programs and Partnership. She is a speaker, writer, and leader in the faith and work movement. Catherine is passionate about helping women achieve more of their God-given potential with confidence by integrating faith into every area of life. Her diverse and circuitous career journey ranges from software consulting to project management, from marketing and sales and leadership training, to nonprofit leadership. She has been helping people integrate their faith and work since 2013.

Catherine is the author of *The Confidence Cornerstone: A Woman's Guide to Fearless Leadership*. She has contributed to several faith-and-work Bible studies, numerous YouVersion reading plans, and books from other authors including the iWork4Him and sheWorks4Him publications. Catherine is on the steering committee for the National Faith & Work Association (NFWA.org) and holds a bachelor's degree in Christian Leadership.

4word is a global community of Christian women in the workplace. Our mission is to help women in the workplace reach their God-given potential with confidence.

Why 4word?

At 4word, we know you want to reach your God-given potential so you can have a Kingdom impact on your workplace and the world. To do that, you need resources for professional and spiritual growth—and a community of like-minded women to cheer you on! The problem is your time is limited, and meaningful connections are hard to find. This can leave you feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and isolated on your life's journey.



We believe you shouldn't have to navigate work, life and faith on your own because God designed you for community. You are worthy to be surrounded by loving and supportive women who "get you."

We understand you face unique challenges as a Christian woman in the workplace, which is why we create easy-access opportunities for leadership development, spiritual growth, and connections to influential women around the globe.

Our Simple Empowerment Plan:

- **Connect to a community:** We offer virtual and in-person Community Groups specifically designed for working women – and we also have special groups for executive women.
- **Access relevant content:** 4word's podcast, blog, and our Community Group Discussion Guides are specifically geared to women in the workplace to help thrive on your journey.
- **Get matched with a mentor:** Through 4word's Mentor Program, we connect you with the right fit from our pool of over 200 highly experienced mentors for a transformational mentoring experience.
- **Join a 4word Collaboratory:** Accelerate your leadership growth through a **safe, guided program** where women like you—ambitious, faith-driven, and called—come together to grow as leaders and tackle real-world workplace challenges through the lens of Scripture and collaboration.
- **Executive cohorts and EW4C:** Women at the executive level have their own unique needs. 4word's executive cohorts and EW4C forums provide a curated space for these leaders to grow spiritually and professionally alongside like-minded peers.

ⁱ McKinsey & Company. "Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters" (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters>

ⁱⁱ Cloverpop. "Research Shows That More Diverse Teams Make Better Decisions" (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.cloverpop.com/blog/research-shows-diversity-inclusion-better-decision-making-at-work>

ⁱⁱⁱ Boston Consulting Group. "How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation" (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2018/how-diverse-leadership-teams-boost-innovation>