



A U.S. Army Specialist attending the Basic Leader Course at the Noncommissioned Officer Academy Hawaii begins his Self-Assessment using Project Athena's online resources. (Photo by Sgt. Christopher Thompson, Noncommissioned Officer Academy Hawaii)

Project Athena in Action

Coaching and the IDP (Part 2)

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In this final article in the Project Athena series, we will examine in detail the Common Individual Development Plan (IDP). This is the backbone of Project Athena. The IDP gives Soldiers a guide and timeline to achieve their goals and a way to track career progression. This article will cover how to fill out the Goals, Insight, and Immediate Action areas, as well as give tips for a smooth coaching session.

Common Individual Development Plan

The [Common Individual Development Plan](#) (IDP) ("Personal Assessment Coaching Guide," 2020.) is a powerful tool for any Soldier as they seek to manage the personal and professional challenges of the contemporary operating environment. The IDP is the actionable document produced by an effective coaching session and serves as a guide for a Soldier to accomplish their personal and professional goals. The

form itself is self-explanatory but there are some key variables to remember.

How to Complete the IDP

When approaching the IDP and the coaching session, the Soldier and coach should focus on the acronym: SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Based. When approaching goals and plans, this acronym gives Soldiers a concrete direction to go in with actionable steps to take in an attainable time period.

Short- and Long-Term Goals

The goals and insight areas can be filled out in any order, but it is recommended that a Soldier start with the short- or long-term goals. Much like the Army Design Methodology process (2015) it is best to start with the desired end state (goals). After the Soldier determines what they want to accomplish, it is important to under-

Individual Development Plan (IDP) Form Instructions		
(1) Leader's Name: self-explanatory		
(2) Short-Term Goals (Personal/Professional, 0-1 Year): Each goal should meet SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Specific) criteria using 12-months to frame each goal. Short term goals should have set completion dates or linkages to long term goals with established/agreed upon pathways to completion.		(3) Long-Term Goals (Personal/Professional: 1-4 Years): Each goal should meet SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Specific) criteria using 12-48 months to frame each goal. Long-term goals could be a continuation of a short-term goal, build upon the foundations of short-term goals, or be entirely independent new goals.
(4) Self-Assessment: Physical Fitness (ACFT ____/APFT ____): Input data generated from the latest fitness assessment along with other common Army fitness metrics (ACFT, 20KM, HPDT...etc.) Self-Assessed Strengths: Leader summarizes select strengths most dominant in their cognitive and non-cognitive domains. Self-Assessed Developmental Needs: Leader summarizes select weaknesses most dominant in their cognitive and non-cognitive domains.	(5) Cognitive; Critical Thinking: Leader may use verbiage directly from a Project Athena feedback and from course performance report(s), as they relate, to communicate the most dominant sustains and improves. When in PME, the instructor and student can discuss the accuracies of these conclusions and agree upon a way forward. Communications (Reading; Writing: Verbal) Leader may use verbiage directly from a Project Athena feedback and from course performance report(s), as they relate, to communicate the most dominant sustains and improves. When in PME the instructor and student can discuss the accuracies of these conclusions and agree upon a way forward. Technical & Tactical Knowledge (Warfighting): While in PME, the leader should use instructor feedback and graded course materials (MOS-based testing, exercises, and other evaluations) as Warfighting metrics to determine sustains and improves in technical and tactical fundamentals.	(6) Leadership: Competencies: Self-Awareness Leader may use verbiage directly from their LDR18C, LDR360, or feedback received throughout their PME experience to determine most dominant sustains and improves. While in PME the instructor and student can discuss these areas and a way forward.
(7) Immediate Actions (Next 90 Days): Each goal should meet SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Specific) criteria using 90-days to frame each criteria. Every goal represents a change the leader seeks to make in their behavior and actions in the near-term. These may be tied to accomplishing one of the leader's short- or long-term goal(s) identified above. Leaders should consider identifying a realistic and achievable number of goals by considering their course workload (PMF) or assigned duties (operational force) and additional requirements.		

Figure 1: IDP with instructions for each field and where to find applicable information. Personal observations can also be used if the Leader elects not to share their assessment feedback.

stand where they currently are in the process. This is where the assessment feedback is used with the coach's knowledge and direct Soldier observations. Once the Soldier and coach have determined the desired end state, they can see where the Soldier is and where they want to be. Then an actionable plan can be created.

Insight Areas

Blocks 4, 5, and 6 are the Project Athena insight areas and are informed by the assessment results; however, these blocks can be completed without the Project Athena feedback if a Soldier declines to share their results. Without the Project Athena results, it will require more detailed questions from the coach or using prior knowledge an operational leader might already know about their Soldier.

Immediate Actions

The immediate actions or 90-day action plan is vital to inspire action to accomplish the created objectives. By using objectives to reinforce strengths and address developmental needs, goals can be accomplished incrementally. This creates a small victories approach to the larger

overall leader development. It also prevents Soldiers from being overwhelmed by a large long-term goal by having smaller subset goals/actions to complete.

Tips to Complete the IDP

One effective technique to complete an IDP is to use a blank copy to take notes during the discussion phase. However, it is important to not let notetaking take away from the discussion. Maximum attention must be given to the Soldier to ensure active listening and effective questioning take place.

Another effective technique is to have the Soldier take their own notes on a blank IDP during the session. This ensures the coach is not distracted during the session and the Soldier can focus on self-reflection and critical thinking.

Regardless of the technique for notetaking, the important thing is the IDP is completed and reviewed periodically to provide continuous motivation and support to the Soldier. When a coaching session is conducted effectively, the IDP will almost write itself. It is then the coach's responsibility to ensure strengths, developmental needs,



Brig. Gen. Charles Masaracchia, Mission Command Center of Excellence director, briefs officers and noncommissioned officers about Project Athena Feb. 17, 2022, at the 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment's battalion classroom. (Photo by Alexandra Shea, Fort Jackson Public Affairs Office)

and a plan of action is agreed upon with the Soldier before the session is concluded. Leader development is a primary responsibility for every NCO and coaching Soldiers is an excellent way to ensure leader development is happening throughout the Army.

Conclusion

Project Athena is a modern assessment tool that promotes self-reflection, critical thinking, and forward growth in Soldiers. It should absolutely be used at every level and often. It ensures Soldiers are constantly checking in with their developmental progress and lets them know they are supported by their units and chain of command. The Army needs leaders. And Project Athena makes it possible for today's Soldiers to become the leaders of tomorrow. ■

To read the previous articles in the Project Athena series check out the links below:

[Project Athena in NCO PME](#)

[Project Athena in Action](#)

[Coaching and the IDP \(Part 1\)](#)

References

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