

Feature

Professional Development: No Standing Still

It's now time to get out and learn

A wise person once said that you can't stand still, gravity will pull you down. An even wiser man, Walt Disney said "We keep moving forward, opening new doors and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths".

For most of us, it's hard to find the time to think, let alone time to attend a networking or professional development event. However, if we don't somehow find that time, we may be losing out- or losing ground. We're certainly not moving forward, personally or professionally. So why aren't we taking the time to develop ourselves and our careers? Let's look at some of the things we tell ourselves or we tell others.

I can't get away. I'm already two miles behind in my work.

We are all busy — too busy at work. We also like to think we're indispensable. But what would happen at work if we got sick or burnt out? How effective would we be if we stopped learning and lived inside the cocoon of our office or our department? Take a look in the mirror. Is that you? Now turn the argument around. How much better would you feel if you had a professional development day to yourself outside of the office? Wouldn't it be helpful to learn some new fresh ideas and problem-solving techniques from experts in your field? How great would it be to meet someone else who is in the same boat to talk to?

My budget won't allow it or my boss won't approve it.

Cost is an issue in these budget tightening times. There's no money for extras and it's frowned upon even to ask for something that looks personal. That's an argument we hear lots of times, often put forward by professional staff, not even their manager. We have grown used to cutting back on training and development when times are financially challenging because they are seen as discretionary spending. But every study done on the ROI of training and development shows that the company and the employee equally benefit when they invest in professional development. At times, it may even pay for you to bite the bullet and pay for the PD program yourself. Most of us can always use the extra PD/continuing education credits that come with attending for recertification purposes.

It's just a waste of time listening to other people talk. Some topics don't apply to my job.

It is a waste of time listening to the same people talk. That's what may happen when you stay in your own organization without getting out to PD and networking opportunities. After a while, you start to believe your own theories even if they have not proven to be the most effective. In addition, while you may think you don't have use for some of the information now or perhaps consider yourself an expert on that topic, you will always gain some new insights and may have use for that knowledge in a few months' time. Webcasts or video conferencing do not produce the same outcomes. It's also tedious spending time sitting and watching PowerPoint presentations from your desk with maybe a few questions at the end.

I won't know anyone there.

This may be true, but that's the whole point of going to a PD or training day. You meet new professionals who face the same day to day challenges that you do. You get to find out what systems and strategies have worked for other organizations and what hasn't worked so you can take that knowledge back with you to share with your colleagues. You actually connect in person with other members of your profession with whom you can chat and explore other ideas later.

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A commitment to professional development and continuous learning are two keys to success that mark most successful leaders in every field of endeavour. PD days like the ones offered by IPM provide an excellent opportunity for the exchange of information and sharing of ideas that is vital not only to your personal growth but to the growth of your organization as well. You get to spend the day with other members of your association and find out what's happening in their workplace, what they're doing about it and what you can bring back to your office.

Registration fees for IPM conferences are very affordable. Where else can you get four sessions and speakers, breakfast, lunch, coffee breaks and handout materials for \$139? And for every three people registered, a fourth person attends free of charge. The most important thing to keep in mind is that you need to get out and meet others in your field as well as continue to learn. Live in-person workshops and conferences enable you to become known and learn. Webcams don't do the same trick! Getting out and being seen has led to job offerings, getting news about employers in your region before it hits the media and discovering new tools and strategies before the rest of the world finds out. Can you really afford to pass on these opportunities?

In addition, it's been proven that while social interaction is good for your health, networking is good for your career. Even with all the online social networks available, there's nothing like face to face contact and conversation. Who is going to remember you solely through emails or posts, particularly when there are ideal venues where you can exchange ideas in person or learn a few things to take back to share with your colleagues?

Don't stand still. Get out and learn. Sign up for an IPM conference and start moving forward.

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