



HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

LEARNING YOUR LIVING

Times have changed. It's not that long ago that many people stayed in the same job or at least the same career from the time they entered the workforce until they retired. Today, the experts tell us that the lifelong career is a thing of the past. In fact, the typical North American can expect to make eight job changes and have as many as five different careers during his or her working life.

Some will have change forced upon them by downsizing, mergers, and restructuring, as well as by new technology. Others will have it thrust upon them by stress and burnout. And still others will seek career changes because they want something more challenging.

Whatever the reasons for job or career changes, it's obvious that we are going to have to learn new skills, and expand our fields of knowledge. No longer is the education we had when we entered the workforce going to sustain us until we retire. In other words, we are all going to have to become lifelong learners to keep up with the changing times. And for many of us this will mean taking three giant steps.

THREE GIANT STEPS!

The first step is to take responsibility for our own learning. Consider these statistics: For every dollar spent by Canadian business and industry on training, the US spends twice as much, Japan five times, and Germany eight times as much. In fact, only 31 percent of Canadian firms provide formal training for their employees. Obviously, we can't depend on our employers to upgrade our skills or teach us new talents so that we can stay employed or get a better job. It's up to us to invest in our own future. And many Canadians are doing just that. In fact, more than 4.8 million adults are enrolled in continuing education and training courses.

The second step is to develop a more positive attitude toward learning. Indeed, we must do even more than that. We must become enthusiastic about learning!

Have you ever thought about the benefits of learning? In his book *The Lifelong Learner*, author and educator Ronald Gross says: "Lifelong learning means self-directed growth. It means understanding yourself and the world. It means acquiring new skills and powers - the only true wealth which you can never lose. It means investment in yourself." He goes on to say, "To become a lifelong learner - or a better lifelong learner - is to become more alive."

Perhaps, one of the less obvious benefits of learning is that it boosts our self-confidence. And this applies to leisure activities as well as work-related skills. Who among us has not felt a sense of achievement when we've mastered that tennis serve or completed our first oil painting or cooked a gourmet dinner? Author Charles Brightbill puts it this way: "To be able to say 'I made it' or 'I mastered it' is to engage the personality."

When it comes to our working lives, one of the most important benefits of lifelong learning is that it provides us with more choices. In other words, the more skills we have, the more marketable we are, and the more able we are to take advantage of the positive aspects of change.

There is yet another giant step we must take toward lifelong learning. This third step is learning how to learn. And it is especially important and perhaps difficult for those of us who have been out of school for many years. Try asking yourself these questions: How do I learn my best? Enrolled in a small or large class? Can I learn on my own? What did I like and dislike about courses I have taken?

We must brush up on basic skills such as taking notes, reading a textbook, and studying. What's more, we must find out how to manage our time so that we can juggle the triple responsibilities that many of us have - a home, a job, and school.

Now it's time to look at some of the countless learning opportunities that are around us, and provide some ideas for tapping into them.

TAPPING INTO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES!

GET A DIPLOMA OR DEGREE FROM A COMMUNITY COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OR PRIVATE INSTITUTION

If you want to increase your chances of winning at the education game, decide what you need before you enroll in a course. In other words, take a closer look at your career goals. Ask yourself the following questions: What are my career goals? Do I need a diploma or degree to reach these goals? How does this course or program relate to my goals?

JOIN A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

You can grow professionally by participating in educational programs, seminars and workshops offered by an association.

What's more, you'll have the opportunity to stay abreast of new trends in your particular field.

LEARN FROM OTHERS

Not long ago, Nancy was promoted to supervisor of a new department within a small company. She felt that she needed some practical advice on running her department - and she needed it now. This enterprising young woman phoned three companies and spoke with the supervisors who hold similar positions to hers. All three agreed to meet with her and share their expertise. And one of these women has kept in touch with her and acted as her mentor.

SHARE YOUR LEARNING

In these days of economic restraint, companies are sending one employee to seminars and workshops instead of the usual three or four. When Carolyn, an executive assistant, returned from a two-day workshop, she put together a short presentation. The reason: so she could share some of the information from the workshop with the junior assistants within the organization. She also offered to share her notes and handouts with those who were interested.

FORM A LEARNING GROUP

If your company doesn't have a training department, perhaps management would allow employees to present lunchtime seminars. There are excellent training videos available on a wide range of topics, and many of them include a leader's guide. What's more, it's not necessary for your company to buy the videos because most of them can be rented. You and your co-workers could brown-bag-it once a week and improve your skills at the same time.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF INFORMATION ON AUDIOCASSETTES

There is a wealth of information available on audiocassettes. George is a busy executive who often complained about not having time to read. Recently, he found that audiocassettes help him fight the lack of time. For George, commuting and travelling time is now learning time. He points out that tapes are often condensed versions of books and this means that they zero in on important points. George says that he could never skim through a full-length book and select key points in the 60 minutes it takes to listen to one cassette.

MAKE SEMINARS WORK FOR YOU

Find out as much as you can about a seminar before you register. Who is the seminar leader? What are his or her qualifications? What is the size of the class? In some cases, such as computer training, it's important to know whether it's a lecture of hands-on-training. Once you're at the seminar, be interested. Take notes, ask questions, and enter into discussions. When you get back to work, be sure to put some of the information into action. Keep in mind: "Whenever one acquires knowledge but does not practice it, is like one who ploughs a field but does not sow it."

TRADE INFORMATION

If you're one of the professional people who are so busy working that you can't find time to keep up with the new trends in your field, try trading information. Suggest that you and two or three colleagues in your organization share the reading of professional journals and papers. Then, get together on a regular basis and discuss what you've learned. Of course, each person will have to do his or her share of the reading for this suggestion to work.

BE WELL INFORMED

Read everything you can about the organization that employs you - annual reports, advertising brochures, and newsletters. Read newspapers and magazines to keep up with the new trends in the business world. Be on the lookout for new nonfiction books on topics you want to learn more about.

Finally, be aware not only is lifelong learning important to each of us as individuals, but it is also important to our country. An editorial in the Charlottetown Evening Patriot said it best: "For most of our history, Canadians have prospered by relying upon the resources beneath our feet...in the information age, we will all need to rely on the resources between our ears."

Lifelong learning allows us to keep up with the world around us. No longer do we expect to remain in a single job or career for our entire working life. We must be willing to learn new skills, flexible enough to change direction mid-stream, and able to accept and establish new goals. To some people, this reality is frightening, and can make things seem very uncertain.

But, this uncertainty can become your opportunity. If you feel your skills are lagging behind those of co-workers, or if you wish to change the direction of your career, please talk things over with an EAP counsellor. With a counsellor's guidance, you can explore the best ways to update presently needed skills. We can help you to decide on what you need to learn if you are looking to move up from your present position.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

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