

## **Life-long Learning**

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First you got your Bachelor's degree. Then you discovered it wouldn't get you to the career you really wanted. So you went back to school for that graduate degree, be it a Master's or PhD. You discovered you still didn't know everything you needed to know to be really successful at your new career. So you went on to a postdoctoral fellowship or research position to learn new techniques or discover new models for your research. However, everything keeps changing: techniques are continually improved, new discoveries are made, new research questions are raised. How do you keep up?

### **Self-skills**

It is all too easy to get caught up in today's or this week's activities and not have time or energy to think about keeping current with technology or new knowledge.

However, as a professional, it is imperative that you make the effort and time to do so as it can negatively impact your career if you do not. You need to stay current in your specific research area if you hope to have your future grant submissions funded. This means both in terms of the latest techniques and newest questions being asked in the field. You need to stay current with computer technology regardless of your field so that you are able to present your findings and data in the best possible way to your colleagues at seminars and meetings and teach effectively.

You also need to stay current not only for your sake but also for your employees and graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. You need to know how best to manage your lab or workgroup so that employees and trainees work together well and stay focused on their jobs. You need to keep informed about funding opportunities for training. You need to know what careers will be available to trainees, what skills they will need to have to succeed at their chosen careers, and the best ways for them to get those skills.

You need to remain confident that you are skilled at your chosen profession and will remain so in the future. If you maintain your learning skills, then as opportunities come to learn new skills you will have the self-assurance to know you can do so.

### **Continual Learning**

It is essential that we never stop learning. Lifelong education has to be a critical component of who you are as a professional if you are going to succeed no matter what field or career you choose.

Where do you go to acquire lifelong learning? The opportunities are everywhere.

## **Internet**

Where you are now is a good place to start – the Internet. There is a wealth of information on the internet, both free and for a fee. There are training courses, opportunities for receiving mentoring, journals with the latest research findings, and related sites like those for business that deal with personnel and other similar issues.

## **Professional Societies**

Professional societies are a great place to look for learning opportunities. Check out what they offer on their web sites. Many societies now offer specialized training opportunities, awards that enable you to be trained in new techniques, annual meetings or specialized conferences for the latest in research, and sessions at those meetings or conferences on new techniques or new ways to use old techniques plus career or training sessions.

For example, APS has online training courses for many valuable skills you will need (writing and reviewing for journals, writing and designing a poster, presentation skills). APS also offers a mentoring program through MentorNet that can match you with another experienced scientist you can go to with questions. We also have Research Career Enhancement Awards that enable you to train with an expert or attend a workshop on a new technique or research area you want to go into and Teaching Career Enhancement Awards that allow you to develop innovative and potentially widely applicable programs for teaching and learning physiology.

## **Your Local University/College**

Often your local college or university has offices or departments that offer classes or workshops on everything from personnel management, basic accounting, being a better teacher, getting a grant, hazardous materials training, computer classes, etc.

Your own department may have such courses or may have a mentoring program in which you can participate and learn from a more experienced person who knows the ropes and can offer advice as issues or opportunities come along. Remember, it never hurts to have different mentors for different areas of your career (teaching, research, writing, personnel management).

## **Independent Learning**

If your schedule doesn't permit you the luxury of attending a course or a workshop, then you need to be motivated and prepared to get the training necessary by yourself.

There is a huge variety of online courses through universities and community colleges geared toward professionals who can't attend classes in person. These allow you to still take the courses and have personalized instruction, just through the computer.

There are also self-paced courses available online that you can take at your own speed and work through as you have time. Of course there are also many books that you can find to teach yourself almost anything you could want to learn. By reading online reviews of various books you can find out quickly if they are worth spending the money and time on or not.

However, if this is your preferred way (or your only option) to stay up-to-date, then it is imperative that you have the discipline to set aside time in your schedule on a regular basis to work through the course or book and learn the material. Time management skills are an essential component of independent learning.

You also will need to know how you best incorporate new knowledge into your skill set in order to make full use of what you learned. Make sure to add that component into your independent learning, whether it is by then teaching that material to someone else, utilizing it in a current project, or just practicing it on a regular basis.

The world continues to change faster and faster with new technologies, new opportunities, and new challenges. It is up to you to make sure that you are ready, willing, and capable of utilizing whatever knowledge or skills are available to you. It is also up to you to learn about, embrace and implement changing methodology and techniques that can lead to new discoveries and better ways of performing your job in your chosen profession.