

# YOUR CAREER

## Trainer, Educate Thyself!

Who better?

By Annabelle Reitman

*This article is the second in a two-part series on trainers' self-development. See "Trainer, Assess Thyself!" (Your Career, July).*

Given the ongoing economic uncertainty, rapidly changing workplace, and continual flux of the training and HRD functions, commitment to continued professional education is crucial to success. Lifelong learning isn't an option but a necessity: Your knowledge base must expand to remain current and marketable. Skills, competencies, and strate-

gies need periodic updating to

- keep current with innovations
- encourage creative thinking
- keep problem-solving skills sharp
- add credentials to your résumé
- expand your employment options.

For professional education activities to be most effective, you must think carefully about your selection of subject matter; structure (degree, certificate, or informal activity); site; and delivery method. Give serious thought to why

you want to engage in a particular learning activity and how much energy, time, and money you're willing to invest for the desired results.

No matter what your chosen learning activity is, you should always have a clear idea of what you hope to gain by participating. Will it be worth your effort? What will it cost in energy, time, and money?

## Pre-planning education

Before you can make any decisions about your continuing education activities, you need to know what professional practices and competencies are presently—and will continue to be—in demand. That means you must keep up with what's happening in training and HRD. Do you regularly review ASTD's Webpage or other professional sites? Do you read the latest books and articles in the field and scan general business magazines?

Think about the present and future regarding your career and professional goals; interests, values, and priorities; personal or family lifestyle and its impact on your work life and learning pursuits.

 Your Career, July T+D, for help with this introspective process.

You have a wide range of professional education choices. At various points in your career, different learning options—or a combination—are more suitable for your needs, based on your career and professional development goals, budget flexibility, work requirements, and personal or family situation. Assessing what the best learning strategy for you is at any given time is good career management.

Professional development activities can be divided into two basic categories: on-site and off-site.

**Employer-sponsored on-site activities.** Have you considered registering for an on-site class or taking advantage of the resources in your company's career center? On-site professional development offerings are particularly good ways to acquire transferable and adaptive skills in areas

such as communication, computer technology, and teamwork—and are convenient and accessible. Which of the following learning options are available at your company and fulfill one or more of your professional needs?

- classroom training conducted by internal or external consultants
- self-directed, computer-assisted learning (software, CD-ROMs)
- self-directed online learning (asynchronous Web-based)
- facilitated online learning (synchronous Web-based or virtual classroom)
- videoconferencing.

Advantages of participating in on-site learning activities are that no time is spent traveling to another location, there is no cost to you, and there's no extra time commitment because learning takes place during work hours.

**Off-site learning activities.** Whether you're an internal specialist, an external consultant, or in the process of making a career change into the learning and development field, nonemployer education and training programs offer numerous subjects and delivery methods.

But think carefully before joining a certificate or degree-granting program that requires a long-term commitment, comes with a high price tag, or may interfere with your work or personal life. If you're an internal specialist, ask your company whether tuition or registration fees are reimbursed. If you work long hours or are juggling multiple home responsibilities, you'll need to be disciplined and motivated, but you'll have the convenience of learning at your own pace and own schedule. Look at self-directed approaches such as online learning.

Examples of off-site options are

- educational programs offered through academic institutions, professional associations, or vendors, including degree- and certificate-granting programs and professional continuing education courses
- stand-alone events—one-time train-

## Web-Based Resources

### General Education/ Training Information

- [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)  
Career Onestop  
(professional education options)
- [www.amanet.org/selfstudy](http://www.amanet.org/selfstudy)  
American Management Association  
(self-study courses)
- [www.collegenet.com](http://www.collegenet.com)  
(college and graduate school database)
- [www.gradschools.com](http://www.gradschools.com)  
(graduate school and long-distance learning links)
- [www.monsterlearning.com](http://www.monsterlearning.com)  
(online and offline courses and conferences database)
- [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)  
(Peterson's education guides)
- [www.seminarinformation.com](http://www.seminarinformation.com)  
(seminar search engine)

### Online/Long-Distance Learning Information

- [www.capellauniversity.edu](http://www.capellauniversity.edu)  
(accredited online university)
- [www.clms.le.ac.uk](http://www.clms.le.ac.uk)  
University of Leicester, UK
- [www.csun.colostate.edu](http://www.csun.colostate.edu)  
Colorado State University  
Division of Educational Outreach
- [www.detc.org](http://www.detc.org)  
Distance Education and Training Council
- [www.ed-x.com](http://www.ed-x.com)  
Distance Learning Channel
- [www.fielding.edu](http://www.fielding.edu)  
Fielding Graduate Institute
- [www.jonesinternational.edu](http://www.jonesinternational.edu)  
Jones International University
- [www.phoenix.edu](http://www.phoenix.edu)  
University of Phoenix
- [www.uwex.edu](http://www.uwex.edu)  
University of Wisconsin-Extension

Don't forget to review the Websites of your local academic institutions for their on-campus and online offerings.

ing activities, such as conferences, workshops, and association chapter meetings

- self-directed learning, including e-learning courses taken at home.

Advantages of learning outside of the workplace include

- more-flexible scheduling
- more offerings
- availability of degree- and certificate-granting programs
- ability to earn continuing education units (CEUs)
- individualized programs
- opportunities to network and meet new colleagues.

### Basic elements

To create an effective and realistic learning plan, consider six questions:

1. Why do you want to learn? Consider your *reasons*—for example, you want more challenging assignments, are planning a shift to external consulting, or are moving into a new role.
2. What is to be learned? Consider your *subject matter*—for example, facilitation, surveying, or coaching.
3. Will learning be structured and formal? Consider *accreditation*. All degree-granting programs should be accredited; distance education programs are also.
4. How will learning be delivered? Consider *method*—for example, online, in a classroom, or via software.
5. Where will you learn? Consider *site*—for example, at your workplace, at a vendor's office, or on a campus.
6. When will you learn? Consider *time-frame*—for example, start in six months, complete in two years.

Make professional development a priority for achieving continual productivity, career progress, and awareness of new developments and technologies. It may be challenging to fit learning into your schedule, but the variety of options should ensure that you can find a time and place that are good for you and will help you stay on the cutting edge.

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This article was adapted from Career Moves: Take Charge of Your Training Career NOW! by Annabelle Reitman and Caitlin Williams.

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