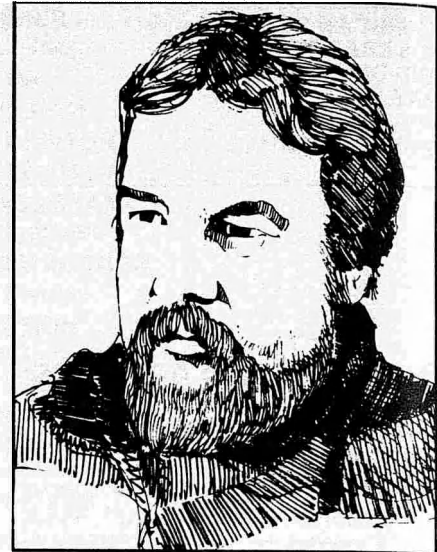


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BY MICHAEL H. COOK, Editor

"ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP: THE KEY TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT"



Today, the average adult probably spends a greater number of hours developing himself or herself "on the job" than at anything else. Thus, it is safe to assume that a major part of self-development is actually *job*-development.

One of the best ways to develop yourself at your job is to communicate with people having the same skills and expertise as you. Becoming an *active* member in one or more professional or trade associations (even in addition to ASTD) can introduce you to a network of sources and resources that can help you meet the changing responsibilities facing you on the job.

Confronted with a multitude of technological and societal changes, one must engage in a *lifelong*' program of professional development or face obsolescence! Professional and trade associations offer an inexpensive way to help you develop a program of continuing education to fit your career and life plans.

Most of these organizations offer a "return on investment," through professional development opportunities, worth far more than the price of yearly membership. Thus, more than ever before, people are turning to these associations for new ideas, and the acquisition of new skills and competencies required to meet these changes.

As stated before, joining one or more of these professional groups should be a part of your total career or professional development plan, just as should a self-assessment of your personal and

professional growth needs. You should have clearly-developed targets in the form of a long-range (five years) and a short-range (one year) plan.

Ask yourself: "How did I get where I am? Why am I where I am? Where do I want to be?" and, "How am I going to get there?" Also, "What skills and knowledge are important to my job? What are my outstanding abilities?" and, "What skills should I improve?" A number of inventories are available to assist you in developing these plans.^{1,2,3}

Lindon E. Saline, manager of Professional Development Operation for General Electric Co., says, "The immediate goal of career planning is to help you define specifically what is the *next* professional development action you should take to help you move toward whatever long-range goals you want to achieve."⁴

He also points out that technical and professional societies play an important role in professional development, especially in terms of providing conferences, seminars and publications.

"These societies should give major attention to helping those of us who have not perfected our 'learning-how-to-learn' skills. They can help us develop those skills so that, as we progress through life, we will perform more efficiently and minimize the pressures that force us toward technical obsolescence," says Saline.

Whether your career interests

range from education to religion to athletics, there is an association that fits your needs. How do you go about locating such a group?

In addition to communicating with colleagues, one of the quickest ways is to visit the nearest library and look through the *Encyclopedia of Associations* (Gale Research Co., Detroit, MI 48226). This valuable reference tool provides detailed information on more than 15,500 active organizations. A typical entry provides up to 17 points of information about the organization, including the name, address, phone number, chief executive, purpose and activities, publications, membership, and program schedule.

Contacting the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) is another alternative. This organization, the "association of associations," is located at 1575 I Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20005, and can provide you with the information you need.

Finally, don't forget to check your "junk" mail. Many of those publication and program notices you receive each day are distributed by associations or trade groups representing your profession.

After locating an organization you feel might offer development opportunities, contact the association's membership department . . . provide a description of your interests and background . . . and ask for complete membership details, including a list of publica-

tions, seminars and other services provided to members. Your decision to join should be based on your original self-assessment and job-development plans.

Your Best "Return on Investment"

Upon paying association membership dues, you must take on an obligation to volunteer or contribute to the organization . . . all in an attempt to gain the greatest return on your investment. "Don't volunteer for anything" might have been good advice in the Army, but when you pay your dues, plan to contribute!

John S. Jenness, director of Human Resource Planning and Development at Consolidated Edison Co., and past president of the American Society for Training and Development, cites the following ways to obtain that "best return" out of your association membership:⁵

1. When you have a job-related problem:

- Contact colleagues you have met at local or group meetings for their suggestions.

- Check your association's "membership directory" for members sharing your specific skills and expertise, jotting down names, addresses and phone numbers for future reference.

- Look through the indexes of back volumes of association publications for articles relating to your specific problem areas. Most associations offer back issues for sale or will provide you with reprints of specific articles at nominal or no cost.

- Contact the editor or communications director to find out if other unpublished articles fitting your needs are in the files. Many times, just what you are looking for can be found in the "reject" or "for future publication" file. In most cases, the editor will be glad to furnish you with the author's name and address.

- Communicate regularly with the group's educational services director and/or research staff for suggestions on either the topic itself or for names of others who might be able to help you with your problems.

- Don't forget the cocktail hour

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How to manage change before change starts managing your organization

Mushrooming technology, a changing business environment, and rising employee expectations catch many companies painfully ill-prepared to adapt. Change overtakes and overwhelms them. As a result, they struggle into the future



dragging their people along, prodding them with authority and structure when what really motivates them is influence and cooperation.

Managing change is the subject of Pepperdine University's Master of Science Degree in Organization Development program (MSOD).

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The MSOD program blends a broad, academic perspective of how and why organizations change and adapt, or fail to do so, with practical knowledge that you can apply at once, solving change problems within your own company. In fact, participants focus their on-going master's project on a specific company or client problem.

The key is behavior — mainly, yours

Back at your office, the most persuasive argument for doing things differently won't be in your OD notebook. It'll be *you*, serving as example. While you will delve deeply into change theory and the contemporary techniques for implementing it, you also will delve into your individual strengths and weaknesses as an agent of change. That's why you will spend a good deal of time in skill practice sessions, where you get colleague and faculty feedback.

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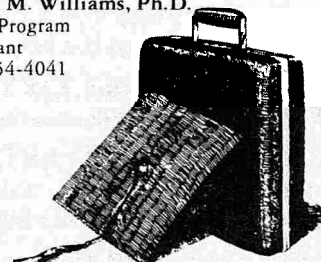
The MSOD program is 18 months long and requires minimum time away from work. The first year, you attend six in-residence sessions, one every other month. The first is two weeks, the rest are one week. The final six months you spend back home working on your master's project.

The start date is August 2

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before your local meeting! Many ideas are exchanged and problems solved during this time for informal interface.

- Check your mail as well as the association's publications for program listings of future conferences, institutes, chapter/local meetings, and workshops to see if your specific problem will be covered. If you are unable to attend a program that fits your needs, locate a participant and ask him or her to share notes and ideas with you after the session.

2. Before attending a local or chapter meeting:

- Plan in advance to discuss or bring up topics that focus on *your* specific needs or problem areas.

- Make a date with a colleague to discuss the program before, at, or after the meeting.

- Anticipate how you can apply the speaker's topic to problems within your own organization.

- Anticipate questions other attendees might raise about *your* programs and activities so you are able to make a real contribution to the meeting.

- Consider beforehand how the meeting can add to your self-development/job-development.

- Plan to volunteer for an assignment to give the meeting a "boost in the arm" as well as to focus a project or program on *your* specific needs.

3. If you are contacted by another member for advice on a particular problem:

- Make sure you call him or her back with the promised data as soon as possible. Remember how pleased you were to obtain such information on a similar occasion?

- Don't talk "down your nose" to him or her just because the problem is so simple that any "real" professional should know the answer.

4. When a local or national association officer asks you to serve on a program or committee:

- Jump at the chance! Recognize this as an opportunity for *individual* growth — one which could lead to managerial responsibilities, within the association, that are quite different from those open to you within your own organization.

5. If there isn't an active chapter or group within your vicinity — start one:

- Contact the membership department of chapter services folks at your association's headquarters. They can supply you with information on how to start a local chapter or group.

- Contact colleagues in your vicinity to meet informally for lunch or after work to discuss mutual problems. Many local groups have been formed by such volunteers. Gradually invite more and more colleagues.

- Try to get a local group or chapter in another part of your state to volunteer to help your small group form a "satellite" until you gather enough strength to become independent.

- If all of the above fail, call the president of the nearest chapter and volunteer.

Remember . . . make a self-assessment. Ask yourself where association membership fits into your individual goals and growth plans. Don't join just because your company is willing to pay your dues and meeting costs, or because it looks good on your resume! Think about what greater benefit you could obtain from association membership by volunteering for a more active role. Don't "short change" yourself . . . you get back exactly what you put in!

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