



Lifelong Learning

by Brian W. Pascal

The great American industrialist Henry Ford once said that “Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.” That’s just one of the benefits of lifelong learning. We also now know from scientific research that a stimulated brain will allow us to continue to be vibrant, active and healthy even as Father (or Mother) Time keeps ticking along.



But in addition to helping us be happier and healthier by utilizing our brainpower, a continuous learning program can have real and tangible benefits in our current careers. That is true whether our learning is in the latest technology or new marketing strategies. People who are lifelong learners are also more adaptable to change, more open to new ideas and can more easily acquire new skills to meet the day-to-day challenges facing Canadian organizations and businesses.

In today’s tough economic times, which manager or HR professional wouldn’t want an employee like that?

Lifelong learning isn’t just about what we learn at a course or in a classroom setting far removed from the workplace. Most of us have learned far more about our work, our career and our profession through experience rather than our formal training. A university or college degree may give us the foundation, but it is the informal learning that has really allowed us to progress in our chosen profession.

Good employers know that training is not simply an expense but an exercise that can bring a range of benefits to the organization.

The good news for both employees and HR professionals is that there are now a myriad of options available for employees to continue to learn, many of which do not require any time away from work. A well rounded training program can offer learning opportunities for employees at every stage of their career, from orientation to pre-retirement. Some of the best training takes place within the workplace through committees, lateral transfers, job shadowing and mentoring programs.

In the Internet 2.0 era, employees can now engage in lifelong learning from their desktop at work or their laptop at home. Employees can learn through software tutorials, CD-ROMs, audio and video tapes. E-learning is a very cost effective way for an organization to keep their valued staff up to date on the latest trends and equip them to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Another way that many organizations encourage lifelong learning is by providing support to employees who develop their own training program. This might be paying tuition or course fees for employees who take evening classes or even an extended leave so that they can complete their MBA. It might also include paying their yearly membership fees to a professional organization that can provide employees with a professional designation and increase their ability to share and network with other professionals.

Good employers know that training is not simply an expense but an exercise that can bring a range of benefits to the organization. These benefits often include increased productivity, employee satisfaction, better retention rates and increased employee loyalty. Training is an investment in people that almost always pays off for both the individual and the organization.

Lifelong learning is just a long term version of that investment. Organizations that make continuous learning a priority will benefit from a workforce that continues to grow and employees who know they are valued and appreciated.

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