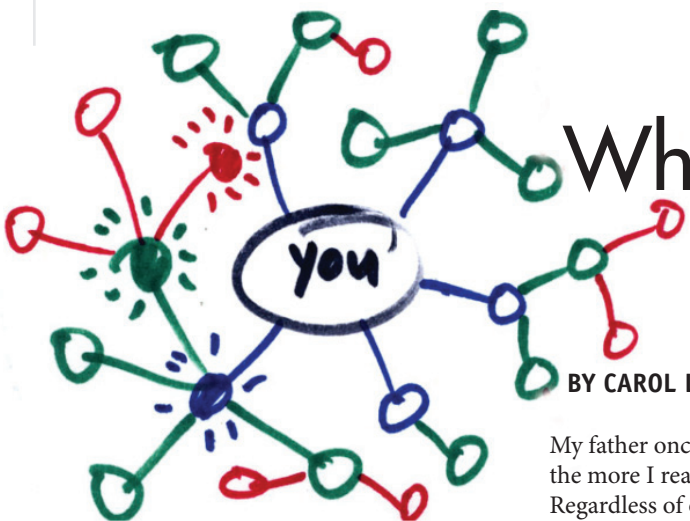


What Did I **Learn** Today?



BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

My father once told me, “The older I get, the more I realize how much I don’t know.” Regardless of our age or position in an organization, there is always something more we can learn. Learning something new is like driving with the top down on a bright spring day. It refreshes our minds, stimulates our thinking, adjusts our outlook and gives us a fresh perspective. Honestly, with all these benefits, what’s stopping us from making more of an effort for conscious learning?

The reality is, if we don’t make ongoing learning a priority, then in essence, we’re falling behind and may even be considered out of touch. So what are some ways to make a commitment to lifelong learning, professional development, even lessons from our day-to-day experiences?

Consider the following tips for building your own learning plan:

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY: One of my pet peeves in school was book reports. The task was too big and too boring. So I’d check out a book from the library that I didn’t think my teacher was familiar with. I’d read the first and last chapters, then make up everything in the middle. I even managed to get an “A” for my “hard work.” So what did I learn from this? Only that I was clever. But clever really doesn’t cut it. The sad truth is that no one will ever care as much about my professional development as I will. The responsibility for learning belongs to ME. It belongs to YOU.

CREATE A LEARNING FOCUS: If I’m alert and open-minded to receiving new information, I know that I will gain something that will help me on my next project or with an owner. Ask yourself, “What do I want or need to learn today?” In our fast-paced, task-oriented work life, we can easily miss the daily tidbits that we are exposed to. We could all benefit from slowing a bit and taking advantage of our everyday experiences.

“Robbers may break into your home and steal your things, but no one can steal what you’ve learned.”

Anonymous

TIE YOUR FOCUS TO A POWERFUL WHY:

Get into the habit of asking, “Why do I want to learn? What value will I gain? Is it for personal satisfaction, pleasure or positioning for the next promotion?” It’s important to tie your focus to things that matter deeply to you. How often do we actually learn from our day-to-day experiences? Think about it. Because not learning from them means the same lessons keep coming back into our lives until we finally get it. Now how productive is that?

CONNECT THE DOTS: Now it’s time to connect everything you read, experience and observe to your learning goal. With your goal in clear view, ask yourself, “How does this experience, situation, conversation or magazine article relate to what I need to learn?” This exercise will help you to assemble all the different pieces and bring clarity to your overall learning goals.

DEVOTE TIME: The real test is determining where your focused-learning task stands on your list of priorities. If you have the “I will get to it tomorrow” attitude, you may not accomplish your goals. Just remember the old adage, “If it’s meant to be, it’s up to me.”

GET HELP: Have you ever thought about getting a mentor or coach? You can enrich your learning experience by partnering with someone who can provide you with guidance, encouragement and support through the process. Going solo on important issues like professional development and career growth is not always the best approach. Never be too timid to ask for advice or direction.

TAKE ACTION: All of your ideas for learning may be great ones, but if they sit in your head or journal, then that is all they are - ideas. Put feet to your focus and get moving! Want to be smarter? Take action!

Don’t diminish the importance of personal experience. Remember that your own world is your classroom. And every day, you could be learning something new. ✪



Owner of Cornerstone Management Skills, Carol is an internationally-recognized author and lecturer on conflict management, interpersonal skills and success strategies. She has nearly 20 years experience in the right of way profession and is a Master Instructor for IRWA courses. ©2013 Carol L. Brooks All Rights Reserved. For more information, visit www.cornerstonemanagementskills.com