

# Reading: personal development

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So what are you reading at the moment? Do you have more than one item on the go at any one time, or do you prefer to finish one item before starting the next? If you are anything like me, you probably have a mixture of half-read books (that you will finish one day), and a book that you simply cannot put down. I have lost track of how many times I have stayed up into the early hours because I simply have to finish reading a book I started that morning. I have to admit that on every one of those occasions, the book was a work of fiction, and I have to admire the skill of the author to draw me in to the story, so much so that I have to keep on reading, long past the time when I should have been sleeping.

So why is it that I can spend several hours reading something that has little perceived value (except perhaps escapism) but find it difficult to read a work of non-fiction in the same manner? Is it simply the skill (or lack thereof) of the author(s) to make the subject interesting enough so that you cannot put the material down, or is it that we simply have had enough of 'work stuff' that we don't want to spend our free time doing more of the same.

I do have a confession to make. At the beginning of 2004 I made a conscious decision to stop reading works of fiction, and to concentrate on all those other sections in my local public library that I had rarely ventured into. Since then I have read biographies, travellers tales, management texts, language books, books on spirituality and personal development. You may be wondering why I gave up 'fic-

tion' as part of my reading diet; surely there is a benefit to reading fiction. Well of course there is, but as a working mother, I simply do not have the time to read absolutely everything that I want to read, so something had to go.

Whilst none of the books that I have chosen since then I can claim to be part of my professional growth curve, they have all given me something just as valuable — personal development, and an opportunity to broaden my outlook and horizons. When was the last time you ventured beyond your comfort reading zone, and into the wild and uncharted territory of the non-fiction sections of your local library? As we move into the New Year, and we start to think about setting new years goals and resolutions, why not promise yourself to read something a little more challenging on a daily or weekly basis. Who knows, it might just reveal new interests and passions you never thought you could have.


## Reading: professional development

Of course, as professionals we should also consider reading the kind of material that enhances our understanding and knowledge of the profession that we have chosen. It is important that we do not stop studying as soon as we graduate from the realms of academia and move into the university of life.

Unfortunately some people think that once they have finished formal studying there is no need to keep up-to-date with current thinking, software enhancements and developments. Imagine if you decide to take a year off between graduating and finding a job. You pack your bags and go and circle the globe, having a wild and wonderful party for the entire twelve months. During that time you do not pick up anything more tiring than the local flight and hotel guides, and your language translator. But whilst you are away of course, the software vendors have issued new versions of the programs that you had limited experience with before you left, and because you opted to go away rather than getting a job that would cement the theoretical knowledge that you had, when you get back and start to answer job advertisements, your lack of current experience precludes you from getting a foot on the corporate ladder. This scenario is not as far fetched as it sounds. As a working mother with two periods of maternity leave, I have had to play 'catch up' not once but twice.

So is on-the-job study and training as valuable as the theoretical foundations that have just been laid? Arguably the answer is, of course. Of course it is important to be able to balance the theory with the real world. Every organisation is unique, and has a slightly different way of doing things. Every person who makes up the team of people that you work with brings a slightly different perspective and skill to the mix, all of which can be learning opportunities — if you are open to them. It is important to remember that all things of value can be taken for granted with the passing of time. A degree you earned five, ten or twenty years ago, is a nice piece of paper to have on your wall. But it is the work and the skills you have gained since that point that makes the difference to the job you have today, and the money that you earn.

Continuing professional development (CPD) should be exactly that — continuous. Continuous activity says a lot about your commitment to your own self worth and knowledge, to the organisation that you work for, as well as to your colleagues. Why is it then that some people assume



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CPD is something that is done in isolation? They assume that by going to a conference, or onto a training course they are fulfilling the terms of what continuing professional development means. In reality this is simply not the case.

There are some people who do not see the importance of reading in the scheme of continuing professional development. How many of you read the industry magazines that pass your desk on the way to the shelf? How many of you make the excuse that you do not have the time because you have far more important things to do? How many of you take the time to seek out people with skills that you do not have in order to learn from them? Mentoring should not be something that only new graduates do. We should all consider mentoring as an important part of the CPD mix. For those reading this with a lot of industry experience, have you offered to mentor anyone recently? In some cultures, passing on information, skills and knowledge is still done through word of mouth. We have many forums that we can use to pass on information, or to ask questions.

Never be afraid to admit that you do not know something. Never be afraid to ask questions, never be afraid to ask for clarification if you did not get the point the first time. Always make a point of reading something that challenges you. Don't just read the easy stuff, easy is OK for a while, but sooner or later you are going to have to supplement your mental 'chocolate' fix for the healthier options, especially if you want to improve your position on the corporate ladder that we call success.

#### ALIA CPD scheme

As you may have gathered by now, I am a firm believer in the importance of reading as a way of enhancing personal and professional skill sets, and it is pleasing to note that

ALIA also recommends reading as an important part of career development. The *Professional reading* category in ALIA's CPD scheme allows ALIA CPD scheme members to receive one point per hour and up to ten points per year, which is a third of the minimum annual requirement. Articles from library journals, the business and financial press and monographs, in print format or electronic documents, are all regarded as *Professional reading* materials in the scheme.

ALIA has developed a *Career development kit* to assist you to plan and broaden your knowledge and skills for professional life. The kit is designed to:

- analyse your professional development needs;
- set objectives for meeting those needs;
- gain input to your development from line managers, colleagues, mentors and training professionals;
- build and maintain a comprehensive record of your knowledge skills and experience; and
- determine professional development priorities for the future.

Access to ALIA's CPD scheme and the *Career development kit* is a benefit of ALIA membership.

*Lorraine is the marketing and training co-ordinator for Information Enterprises Australia Pty Ltd (IEA), an ALIA CPD training partner in Western Australia. For more information about IEA records management and personal development courses please refer to the ALIA website <http://alia.org.au/education/cpd/services.html>, e-mail [cpd@alia.org.au](mailto:cpd@alia.org.au) or ph 02 6215 8258.*



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## "From the Corkboard to the Camcord"

...in this issue



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