

Resolve to learn

Andrew Gibbons

Originally published in *People Management* January 2001.

Downloaded free from: www.andrewgibbons.co.uk

It's a new year – so how about making the most significant resolution possible – to genuinely manage your own learning and development. Okay, so it doesn't sound so exciting, but it is, really, and it's not so hard once you are in the groove, and as I was told to emphasise, it should be fun.

Come on now, you know, deep down, that you ought to be taking your professional development just a bit more seriously. You know too that you need some structure for this, a plan, and shock horror, of all things, a record of your learning. We know this is what the truly reflective practitioner should do, but there are so many other things to get on with aren't there?

Here are four big issues I believe will be of particular significance for managing our professional development during and beyond 2001:

1. It's *your* development – this may be obvious, but how many of us really do genuinely manage our learning? I have kept a handwritten learning log since 1987 – 1100 entries and counting, but that aside, however we do it, we of all professionals must take the lead, and show real commitment to our development. We must not be not lazy learners who equate development and learning with passive participation on training courses. No-one will show more interest in your development than you, so where in your list of top twenty life priorities is keeping your development up to date?

2. Competence is not a constant – Charles Handy writes wonderfully about the greater value of *learning* people over the *learned*, and that is worth a ponder. Our development is a dynamic, and not a static phenomena. Hardly earth shattering news, but are we putting enough effort into maintaining the currency of our learning? What good is the learning of ten years ago? What value will be what we know now in 2011? Our learning and development is a unique and specific journey, and only we can truly direct its path.

3. Now more than ever before – has the pace of change ever moved so fast? Have we ever had access to as much freely available, high quality learning as now, via for instance, but not exclusively, the world wide web? The meta competence has always the ability to learn, and this does *not* mean to acquire unused knowledge. If we abdicate responsibility for managing our development, by not doing what only we can do for ourselves, then for one thing, we will be less valuable to those with whom we want to work in the future – be warned!

4. Learning takes effort and skill – I have my own thoughts on the eight key learning skills, and Peter Honey's excellent online *learning series* helps clarify what skilled learners look like, but within this short piece, it's enough to stress that learning isn't as easy as it's sometimes made out to be; it requires support and commitment, and the ability to see seeking and taking advice as a strength, not a weakness. We abuse the word – 'you've got a lot to learn' is an insult for goodness sake!

So, how about a resolution for 2001? To make conscious efforts to make your professional development a deliberate, planned process rather than an accidental, haphazard one?

There is no shortage of material from which to learn – real work provides more than enough developmental experiences. As ever, it's about finding the time to note a few lines that capture the apparently insignificant, but so important incremental contributions to our professional development. How about a monthly record of what you are learning...go on, give it a go, it can be a wonderfully empowering experience – honest.

Yes, we really can learn something every day...so there are (rather more than) 365 waiting to be recorded by the end of the year!

Downloaded free from: www.andrewgibbons.co.uk