

LIFELONG LEARNING—It's the only way to remain competitive in the job market | by Margaret Butler, CMA, CPA

The business world keeps changing. New processes and technologies are being developed every day. Companies continue to downsize, outsource, subcontract, or merge. Jobs are eliminated or significantly changed. How do we in the fields

of accounting, finance, and information management keep ourselves from being displaced as these changes occur? The answer lies in keeping our knowledge and skills razor sharp through a commitment to *lifelong learning*.

With the increasing demands of work, family, and other obligations, however, we often find it difficult to devote time to the ongoing development of our professional competence. We need a variety of means that allow us to fit professional development into our busy schedules at the times and places we choose.

IMA members have ready access to learning opportunities at discounted rates through the IMA Lifelong Learning Center (LLC), which can be accessed via the IMA website (www.imanet.org). Financial professionals can choose from thousands of publications, self-study courses, and seminars in a variety of formats, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, worldwide. Members may search for information by title, topic, format, location, CPE/non-CPE, or price.

In addition to the individual items offered through the LLC, IMA members may subscribe to SmartPros Advantage, which allows them to choose from more than 250 courses in auditing, accounting, finance, tax, reporting, and soft-skills categories—all for one flat, discounted fee. To keep up-to-date on fast-moving changes in the field, we may subscribe, at a member-discounted rate, to the Financial Management Network (FMN), which provides four segments each month in streaming media—video,

audio, and text—plus access to archived segments, with content provided by top industry experts.

IMA recently launched its *IMA Online Newsletter*, which is published twice a month, to provide members up-to-date information on accounting, finance, and other relevant topics, as well as timely updates on IMA-related issues. Members also can enhance their knowledge by reading thought-provoking articles in *Strategic Finance* magazine or *Management Accounting Quarterly*.

For those who prefer the live seminar or conference format, IMA's Annual Conference and Exposition held in June each year provides financial professionals the opportunity to earn more than 30 hours of continuing education credit. During the coming year, IMA plans to co-sponsor a series of four conferences, and

IMA's Professional Development group continues to develop and maintain courses on timely and relevant topics. IMA chapters and councils also offer a variety of educational meetings, seminars, and conferences to provide professional development for members at the local or regional level.

The goal of the IMA is to provide learning opportunities for members at the times and places and in the formats that best suit our changing needs. The rest is up to us. If we are to keep our knowledge and skills honed to meet the demands of an ever-changing marketplace, we must each make a commitment to *lifelong learning*. ■

You can contact Margaret at mbutler@imanet.org.



MARGARET BUTLER