



A Commitment to Continuous Learning

We IMA® members are dedicated to learning as much as we can for as long as we can, and this helps our organizations as well as ourselves.

As accounting professionals, we seek to maintain and expand our knowledge and skills base because we know it's important for career progression and job enrichment. At the same time, continuing education is an important component of retaining our professional certifications. Beyond the world of professional certification, expanding our knowledge is important for us personally. During our careers, we've all met individuals who know something about many different things, and I'll bet we've found them to be the most interesting people. This trait also makes them more versatile in conversations and the social interactions that are such an integral part of the business world.

There are many avenues to continuous learning. For instance, at one company where I worked, our accounting department had a "Word of the Day." This came about because of a conversation I had with one of my controllers. A word I had used was new to her and others in the department, so I defined it.

From then on, when we came across other new words, they became the "Word of the Day." (The accounting staff gave me one last "Word of the Day" when I retired. I came to the office on my final day to find the word "retire" on the wall behind my desk chair, and various definitions of the word were decorating the rest of the wall.)

Of course, the traditional avenue for learning something new is to take a class in that field. Studying something new broadens your knowledge about other disciplines—particularly nontechnical subjects—and keeps the mind nimble. We all know the value of daily exercise; think of this kind of learning as exercise for the mind.

Continuous learning on a personal level means being a sponge—absorbing as much as you can about as many things as you can. Knowledge is empowering because the more you can converse about many subjects, the more comfortable you'll be in business and social settings. And many business situations involve social settings. Consider, for example, a conversation with a customer who's interested in sports (this tends to be a universally safe

subject). Maybe you aren't a sports fan, but if you've scanned the headlines and the first paragraphs of the major sports stories, you have enough to know what the subject is, make a comment, or ask a question. The devotees of the subject will take it from there. Or art: Suppose you have a meeting with a potential client who likes art. If you're aware that a new exhibit is coming to your local art museum, and you know the nature of the exhibit, the dates, and the artist(s), you can take part in a conversation with this potential client. Open the subject, and someone else will take it from there. The important point is knowing something about many things but being careful not to imply knowledge or expertise that you don't possess.

Continuing Professional Education (CPE) works the same way. You need to stay current in your field, but you also need to keep abreast of new subject areas, so read a number of business publications to learn about current business topics. When it comes to CPE, remember that not all education sessions are equal. Choose to spend your time on subjects that you need in your area of

continued on page 61

Perspectives

continued from page 6

expertise, but also allocate time for subjects that are emerging or that you may not know much about. You can determine how much you know and how much more you need to learn to have a working knowledge of that subject. Above all, spend your time on CPE opportunities wisely: Choose what will cement your current area of expertise or expand your knowledge vs. what will simply get you credit.

You can help others achieve their goals of continuous learning by working with your IMA chapter to present the best possible programs. You can:

- ◆ Be active in funneling ideas for good topics and interesting presenters to committee members or chapter leaders who are responsible for the content.
- ◆ Suggest people who are creative, who can choose appealing topics, and who can locate good speakers to fill program committee slots.
- ◆ Join or chair the program committee, and work to find great topics and speakers.
- ◆ Help publicize and promote programs for maximum member benefit.

Continuing education and continuous learning combine to make a better professional and a more interesting person. Professionally, you want to deal with people who possess the right expertise. You also want to deal with people who are just more interesting.

I welcome your comments at wknese@imanet.org. **SF**