

Title: Why should your members record their CPD? A look into one man's lifetime of learning

Teaser: *PARN speaks to Andrew Gibbons, a man who boasts a 23 year (and 1 million word!) learning log, to find answers to the ever elusive question – Why should I record my learning?*

How the journey began...

When Andrew Gibbons started his career in management development, he was an eager but admittedly under-prepared 21 year old: *“I wasn't long in my first job before I realised that I didn't actually know much at all. My academic degree had some relevance to my work, but not enough – I knew I needed to learn a lot, and at an accelerated pace.”*

To tackle this knowledge and skill gap, Andrew's mentor encouraged him to start reading, and questioning the people he worked with, tapping into the knowledge and experience of those around him; most importantly, he urged Andrew to write it all down.

One million words later, Andrew feels recording his learning has become a fluid and natural process: *“With enough practice, you develop the ability to coherently access learning and identify the actions you will take as a result”.*

“People ask me why I write things down, but it's really human nature to forget things. Keeping an A4, hardcopy record is admittedly low tech, but for me it feels authentic, as if I'm truly accessing my thoughts and finding a real connection.”

The benefits of reflection

Andrew feels that recording his learning has helped him to write more concisely and made him more confident in summarising complex issues – a skill he has been able to transfer into the workplace. On a personal level, he is pleased simply to have captured things that would have otherwise been lost; he notes that there are specific instances which have made a large impact on his career and had he not reflected on his previous experiences and learning, he would have perhaps made a worse decision.

Andrew feels that recording and reflecting on learning are always important, no matter what career stage you are in. In fact, Andrew believes it's really “all about reflection”, and that even a simple thought can become a valuable learning experience when reflected and acted on. For young professionals, he emphasises that the cost of driving your own learning is really no more than a binder and plastic folders.

“People find me unusual and eccentric, but I shouldn't be! I'm disappointed that there are not more people out there who can show their learning journey, who have something they can point to and say ‘Here's how I've developed in 23 years’”.

The challenges of reflection

For Andrew, the main challenge is motivation; *“too many people start a learning log and then find themselves thinking ‘what's the point?’. The key is that motivation has to be from within.”*

The challenges, however, are not simply personal. Andrew views the current “hurry up and get it done” work environment as incompatible with reflection: *“To rush looks like work, to think doesn’t. If we encouraged employees to stop and think about what they’re doing, perhaps they’d be more effective.”*

When asked how he has managed to keep recording throughout the years, Andrew replies, *“Part of it is feeling that I’m on a journey and to cease would be disappointing”*. Andrew also notes that after 23 years he is far more skilled at seeing and drawing value from learning experiences; *“I am never without inspiration or new experiences to reflect on. 23 years ago I was just sitting there and waiting for learning to happen; now I’m able to go out and find it for myself.”*

Advice for those starting the journey

For those just starting out, Andrew forewarns, *“Don’t expect too much too soon, be satisfied that you’re keeping a record at all! 50 words are more valuable than the 300 words you didn’t get around to. And don’t worry about what other people will think – this is a tool for your learning, no one else’s!”*

Andrew admits that it is easier to convince young professionals of the benefits of reflecting on learning as they can see how it fits into their aspirations, but he also emphasises that the people who find the idea of a learning log the most challenging are exactly the people who would benefit from it the most. *“Being a professional means much more than simply passing an exam. It means you are prepared to take that extra step and effort to do more. Simply being a member of a professional body is not enough, you need to be active and show that you are truly a reflective practitioner.”*

While the concept of learning hasn’t fundamentally changed in his 23 years, Andrew draws attention to the ease in which learning can now be captured (and even shared) through online technologies.

The challenge for professional bodies

Andrew recognises a tension in professional bodies between pushing members to record their CPD and needing to keep these individuals as members. *“I think the best way forward is to move away from the stick approach – we need to give people incentives to learn and be creative about the ‘carrots’ we dangle. Perhaps look at offering a financial incentive such as a reduction in membership or course fees, even something as simple as a book token. Professional bodies could hold a directory that highlights those professionals that have completed their CPD records; this could offer a way for employees to differentiate between new recruits.”*

Questions for reflection:

1. Why do professional bodies use the carrot or the stick approach? What are the benefits and disadvantages of each?
2. What creative incentives could encourage participation and reflection on CPD?
3. How can we motivate professionals to take responsibility for their own development?

Discuss the questions above on PARNPeople’s CPD Spotlight group

<http://www.parnpeople.com/groups>.

More at Andrew Gibbons’ website: www.andrewgibbons.co.uk