

Keeping a learning log for CPD - the first 28 years are the hardest

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In February of 1987 I wrote my first learning log entry. I had never heard of CPD, it wasn't really on the agenda then, I simply wanted a truly self-driven and managed process for reflecting upon, and recording my professional development, and for nearly two years my wisest and most learned friend had been gently nagging me to give it a go, since graduating from the IPM as it was then, professional scheme.

So there it was, an A4 sheet with a couple of hundred words under headings of 'significant experience', 'what happened?', 'conclusions', 'actions', and crucially, to put plans into action, 'when?'. Three months went by before number two was completed, within which I debated with myself the merits and likelihood of finding the motivation and will to keep this worthy, yet apparently surprisingly difficult simple thing going.

Twenty seven years and nine months on from number two, I have this week completed still in handwritten format, number 1268 – my log of getting close to a million words now sits in four rather full lever arch files, and is but one tangible means by which I seek to find and note the experiences that incrementally build into a generation's worth of learning and professional development.

Oh the loneliness of the long distance learning logger. It has been a long and, to be honest rather odd journey. It's not been easy either, as I am by personality and preferences, a disorganised, non diary writing person, with a learning and work style totally unsuited to the painful business of sitting in front of a blank sheet of paper and filling it with these days with close to 800 words setting out my take on what I am learning, and what I can learn from real life events.

Am I, to steal from a well known TV funny, the only learning logger in the village?

This has now become a habit I feel I can't break. I did take over a year off, when frankly, it felt like a pain, and a pointless task that nobody was really pushing me to do, and I had plenty of other calls on my time to keep it going at the expense of things that more obviously paid the bills.

Then, peculiarly, I found myself back at it – and although I write entries less often than I did, I still get fifty or so done in a year, and reflect in far more depth than I did say during the John Major years.

How do I find the time for this? Well my answer is 'I don't watch Emmerdale' – a bit facetious, but the point is that no entry takes me longer than twenty minutes, and how many of us are so busy doing whatever it is we busy ourselves with not to be able to find twenty minutes three or four times a month?

This raises another issue. Since a long term, tangible record of professional development takes only three quarters of an hour or so a fortnight, why am I so ridiculously alone in this when there are so many millions of professional members of professional bodies that without exception encourage or require each post-qualification member to do this simple yet apparently impossibly difficult task?

Truth is, and I feel I have a credible position from which to say this, it's not difficult at all. Truth is, the absence of others in any numbers that are doing what I do, reflecting upon, and crucially *recording* everyday learning suggest a woeful lack of desire to make the minimal effort needed to provide evidence of genuinely driving our professional development.

So why is this? Well for me it's not all down to the overloaded individual professional. After all, typically exams were revised for, and taken often a long time ago, and too many professional bodies don't prod, incentivise or threaten sufficiently to even comply with codes of CPD practice that rightly expect evidence of vocational development for the post-qualification decades.

It's not all down to professional bodies either, after all, there are limits to the pressure they can put on their membership without risking a stampede of ex-members saving their subs and taking umbridge at being asked to do what I do and have done for all those years.

So far as I feel others should follow my eccentric lead, for me the way forward is to build the good habits of reflecting on professional practice pre-qualification, and create an environment in which yet-to-become professionals gain momentum before they pass exams that they then continue beyond that watershed. That said, I am no missionary, I will just keep on with this process because I know that has helped to plan, track, and reward my unique and personal professional learning journey.

Might you feel just the slightest pang of guilt at not finding a few minutes for this next time you watch Emmerdale?

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