

Are you a Dynamo, a Cruiser, or a Loser?

Andrew Gibbons

David Maister suggests that in terms of our commitment to professional development, we fall broadly into three categories. That you have got as far as finding and reading this, I would put you in the first or second of these...

The Dynamo

These are professionals that deserve the description, they consciously and actively reflect upon and record their learning, and as a consequence, are more up to date, well informed, and professionally capable than those that fall into the categories below. These professionals know that their development is a unique and individual journey, spurning training as a primary source of learning, preferring to take responsibility for this, and genuinely driving their own growth – for very little if any outlay.

The Cruiser

Very often no less potentially competent than the dynamos, cruisers have far less will to make efforts to maintain their professional credibility. They may do some, low level, low effort activities, they may ironically spend more money on expensive training events that result in little or no application of learning. The motivated may with considerable effort turn into dynamos, many more slide slowly into the doomed loser group.

The Loser

It's a powerful and derogatory term, and I believe well deserved by those who call themselves professional, yet consider this status is purely a lifelong award for passing exams decades ago. Don't expect losers to open a professional body journal, or to find the will to capture and record their learning. Losers are disinterested in their professional development to the point of this being an unfamiliar, and totally unwelcome thought. They are losers because maybe over quite a long time, they will lose out to those who impress more with their professionalism and command of current practice. Losers will not get the roles or work that others gain and deserve.

Three types time

David Maister also breaks our time into three types, and it is the mix of this that to a degree influences which of the above is a function of our activity.

Income time is time spent on fee or salary earning client work. The vast majority of us need to do a lot of this to earn sufficient to fuel whatever lifestyle we can achieve, and it is hard for many I know to avoid this sucking in too many hours – it's not just the 'doing' for many of us, it's the finding of work and preparation that draws in the hours like water down a plug hole.

Investment time is Maister's second type, and this herein lies the relevance to the above analysis. Unless we find sufficient investment time we will fail to find the hours needed to keep on top of our practice, to read what needs to be read, to reflect and plan specific actions that will make us better professionals. It's too easy to get into a regressive pattern that leaves little time to develop our professional competencies. In the above terminology, it's too easy to cruise, then lose.

The final time type is individual time – this is time not dedicated to work issues at all, but to ourselves, and to those with whom we know we should spend many more hours. This is recharge time, family time, and hours spent that can never be recovered doing the truly important things.

It is my strong belief that too many of us spend too little time on time types two and three, and, that as a result, this makes us far less able to deliver when stuck in type one...and that what we lose as a result can extend well beyond our professional competence.

So, or so what?

Well, the losers won't be bothered enough to read this, and if they did, they would, 'yes but', preferring to be lazy, frankly undeserving 'professionals'. If you are a cruiser (and I understand this word has at least one other meaning), beware, as you may be running out of time, so it could be a good idea to be more active in support of your professional development. As for dynamos, no need to fear there, they tend to create their own energy, and little will dent this.

Does this matter? Well the dynamos will do what they do from intrinsic, personal interest and require no external motivation. The cruisers and losers will bumble along, with very little if any concern of pressure from their professional bodies to at the very least, enforce their own published standards. As a result, unregulated, the quality of professional practice will continue to vary significantly, the differentiation favouring those that take professional development seriously. I do wish professional bodies got more of a balance between the quality of membership and financially driven quantity.

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