



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Consultants and Employees Have Many Options for Skills Training

Twenty years ago, you might have planned on working for the same company your entire career. If the company wanted to move you around, they would provide the training you needed to be successful. If you didn't move, you basically stayed in the same skill set for years. In today's business environment, this is naïve and dangerous. It is still possible to utilize one set of skills for years at a time. However, you are no longer immune to job turbulence and layoffs. If you stay with the same skill sets for years, and then get laid off, you may well end up in a position where your skills are no longer relevant in the marketplace.

Many companies do not see the need to spend money on training that the employee will not be utilizing on his/her current job. If you have been using the same skill set for many years and feel you are being technologically left behind, you need to take personal responsibility for keeping your knowledge up-to-date through training. Unfortunately, the high price of training classes can be a deterrent for people seeking to sharpen their skills.

The good news here is that there are, in fact, many alternatives to traditional standup training classes. Whether you are a consultant or an employee, you should be creative in where you look for learning opportunities. Some examples of non-classroom based training are as follows.

The Internet

You should start any search on the internet. You might be surprised how many free resources are there. You will find free tutorials, discussion groups, training material, articles, expert columns, etc. If you want to be a better project manager, you will find hundreds of resources, templates and columns. If you are interested in new programming languages, there are websites that provide sample code, questions and answers, tips and techniques, etc. With the Internet, you can almost always follow the mantra "seek and you shall find."

Webinars

This is a slight twist on the Internet. Many companies sponsor free seminars on the web – webinars. These are usually an hour or two in length, and include a live presentation and some opportunity for questions. In many cases they are sponsored by vendors, but the content is still very valuable in exchange for the short sales pitch you will receive.

Computer-based training / CD's / tapes

This is another area of training that you will find on the Internet, and in this case you may actually have to pay a fee. However, instead of paying \$1500, the price may be only a couple hundred dollars or less. These classes can vary in terms of value and quality, but your out-of-pocket investment is a lot lower as well.

Books



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This is learning the old fashioned way. Any subject worth learning is usually one that has a number of books available. The advantage of a book is that you get a vast amount of information for a relatively small price. You may not find a resource on the Internet that provides hundreds of pages of detailed information like you will find in a book. Of course, you still have to invest the time to read the book once you buy it.

Magazines

There are many project management and technical magazines available. In most cases, they are available for free. These will provide articles and columns of interest. Many programming magazines, for instance, spend some time each month laying out and describing interesting sections of code to help you learn how it works.

Mentors

Depending on the subject area, you may be able to locate a coach or mentor. These are people that you can go out to lunch with and talk to about subjects of interest. For instance, if you want to learn more about project management, you can read columns and do other self-directed training. Then, you can supplement this information with question and answer or advice lunches with an experience project manager.

Hands-on opportunities

Of course, the best way to learn new skills is to be able to apply them in the course of your job. Again, you may be able to apply some creativity. If you are a team member, for instance, perhaps you can leverage your project management training into an opportunity to manage small projects. You may also be able to apply the new skills in your personal life through volunteer projects with your church or schools. The key is to be creative in looking for ways to convert “book skills” into on-the-job experience.

Summary

You now have some insight into ways you can increase your skill set without going to formal, stand-up classes. There are other opportunities to build skills that cost little or nothing. Employees and consultants need to take personal responsibility for their careers, including ensuring that they stay reasonably well versed in new technology. You may find that your company taps you on the shoulder and asks you to learn new skills and take a new position. However, you can't count on that happening. Everyone needs to understand that training is not an event. Training is a mind-set. You don't plan ahead to take two new classes next year. You need to build learning events into your job on an ongoing basis. Be inquisitive, keep up on where the marketplace is going, read books and magazines, and find websites that have information in the areas of interest to you. There are no guarantees, but lifetime learners (employees and consultants) will always have an advantage in the job marketplace of the future.