



Information Overload

Issue 44, April 2006

Welcome:

Welcome to the April edition of Information Overload. I hope that the disruption of Easter, Anzac Day and school holidays hasn't disrupted your workflow and productivity too greatly. But I do hope that you enjoyed the additional time off work to do those things that never seem to get done on a weekend.

I can feel a radio 2 link coming on!! For those of you who know BBC Radio 2, you will appreciate the humour in the next comment, but believe it or not – it wasn't intentional.

This month we look at Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (see I told you it was a "bad" link !). How do you find time to undertake CPD on top of your normal working and home life commitments? Or are you simply too busy "working" to undertake CPD?

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au> should any of the topics be of interest and use. For your information the April edition of the Registrant Resources edition looked at the most important document you will ever write: Your CV. If you have any suggestions or would like to see us cover any other topics, we would love to hear from you. Just send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au.

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In this Issue we will be looking at:

- The Work Treadmill;
- CPD, Networking, Mentoring
 - Networking
 - Mentoring: Emulation – the sincerest form of flattery
- Other things to consider in the CPD mix;
- A Thought to ponder.

The Work Treadmill

You know what I mean, you're working furiously day in, day out, but you don't seem to be getting anywhere. I'm not saying that you aren't getting through your work, just that the work never ends, and in most cases, the work doesn't change from day to day. It doesn't matter what day of the week or month it is, the days blur through an endless stream of "stuff" that you have to do.

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What happened to those big dreams and ambitions you had when you were growing up? If I were to hazard a guess, I would say they are sitting in the back of your mind somewhere, waiting for "when you have the time". Of course, some of those "plans" may not be directly related to work, but may be indirectly linked – if you had the money or the extra time for instance. Unfortunately for most of us, we are too busy trying to get through today to think much about tomorrow or next week, so how can we plan to continue our professional development if we are walking furiously on the work treadmill but getting nowhere. And I am sure there are a few people who would be nodding whilst reading this, except of course, they may be too busy to even open the document.

There may be some people who think they have "made it" when they obtain their first professional position, and may feel that they don't need to continue to study as hard. Whilst that's not a bad assumption to make, you are taking part in "on the job training" after all. However, the reason why CPD is so important is because there isn't any real concept of job security in today's employment market, and consequently qualifications and initial training have only limited value. In addition, changes are occurring within our industry, and unless you undertake additional "study" you may find yourself being overlooked for promotions and pay rises, or struggling to reach the selection phase of job applications should you wish to move on if you can only demonstrate that you have worked on a job for 20 years, doing the same thing day after day.

So how do you make sure that you are not left behind in the employment stakes?

CPD, Networking and Mentoring

Do you want to achieve promotion and advancement within your organisation? Or will you need to look elsewhere in the industry? Will you have the necessary skills to take over from the current incumbent, what about all those jobs that will be made available when the baby boomers decide to hang up their business suits? Do you know what the essential criteria of these positions are? Do you know where your own strengths and weaknesses lie?

There are a number of industry associations within the Australian Library, Records and Information Management Community, which have a CPD Scheme, however, not all of them are compulsory. The RMAA (Records Management Association of Australasia) CPD Scheme is compulsory for members and above, The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is based on an individual's personal decision to join the scheme. According to the 2005 ALIA Annual Report, only 7% of eligible members (Approx 300 people) were registered for the scheme.

Some things to consider - should CPD be compulsory for everyone? Or should an individual have the right to determine his/her own level of study and development?

Some people seem to be quite happy to do their own thing, they have clear goals and directions, they know what they want and they go anywhere and do anything in order to achieve it. Then there are people who drift aimlessly, occasionally going to events that appeal to them, rarely meeting people outside of working hours to talk about the profession they find themselves in. And there are those people who feel that maybe there has to be a better way, why go it alone when there are hundreds of professionals who have been there and done that, and can guide them along the better paths towards their goals.

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Networking:

First things first, networking is not just a social event that occurs after you have listened to a speaker drone on about some thing or other, with a chance to catch up with friends and colleagues whilst grabbing your share of the food and drink that is on offer.

In its simplest form - Networking is an opportunity to learn from as many people as you can in the time that is available to you. Now I don't mean, that it is a chance to have a good gossip and listen to muckraking and rumours, and if you do find yourself in a group of people intent on doing just that, make your excuses and find someone else to talk to. Networking should be an honest exchange of ideas and opportunities of mutual benefit. So whilst Networking is an opportunity to learn from other people, remember that others will want to learn from you, so be prepared to speak as well as listen.

How many events have you been to where you see the same faces every time? The same people have spent the time organising events (and no I am not just talking about CPD Committees), rather you will find the same people on the various committees – why? Is it because they think that if they didn't, then no-one else would bother? Or is it because they feel they have something worth sharing with the community and are willing to give up their time and (in some cases money) in order to be there. I am sure it is a combination of many things, not least of which – the two mentioned above.

Why bother with networking events if you are going to meet the same people every time? Well, networking is a form of CPD. You are there to learn, the difference with a networking event is that you get to learn from many different people in a very short space of time.

If you think that Networking is all about “who you know” then I would suggest that you are mistaken. Yes, who you know is important, but what is more valuable in the long run is “who knows you”.

Word of mouth is still the most powerful marketing tool there is, or ever will be. Use it wisely and people will do business with you, or refer business to you, endorse you and your products, open business and job opportunities that you had not even dreamt of – once they get to know you. However, just as positive recommendations can open up new opportunities, so negative comments, gossip and people talking about you and what you get up to will harm you and your chances to get on in your chosen industry.

Do not abuse your hosts' hospitality, drink too much, eat all the food, speak too loudly, dominate every conversation, or stick like a limpet to the guest speaker. If your one aim is to have a “good time” and meet with friends and have a drink, I would suggest that you go to another venue because you will learn little or nothing of value and importance.

Take the opportunity to meet with as many different people as you can, ask lots of questions and be willing to listen, whilst the person who you were speaking to may not have any jobs on offer, he or she may know of someone who has. If you have business cards it is worth remembering to take some with you. Don't be afraid to hand them out, or ask your fellow attendees for theirs.

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Mentoring: Emulation – the sincerest form of flattery!

Who do you look to when you need assistance with your professional development? Who looks to you to assist them with theirs?

Types of Organisational Mentoring:

Apprenticeships – can be classed as anyone starting out on a particular career path. They offer “students” the opportunity to learn the theoretical knowledge whilst applying this to their working life.

New-hire mentoring – including on the job specific training, having someone “buddy” the new person so they can learn the ropes.

High-potential mentoring – especially useful when you are looking to groom new leaders.

Unfortunately not all organisations support this kind of practice, and new graduates, along with anyone else who is interested in gaining support and knowledge from their peers are left to find their own routes. Whilst some organisations (for instance the West Australian library community has a graduate mentoring program) other industries may not be so fortunate. As we have mentioned previously, the people who organise and attend networking events, are the same kinds of people (often it is the same people) who will also be willing to mentor the “next generation”.

But who are the mentors?

According to the dictionary that sits on my desk – **a mentor** is a “wise or trusted advisor or guide” They can offer you careers advice and general guidance, but you will still have to go away and find out your own answers and write your own submissions for example. For most people I would suggest that mentoring is something that you do when you are just starting out on your career path. However, I feel that it should not stop as soon as you have your foot on the corporate ladder. You may change mentors, after all your needs will change over time. You may also consider sharing your own information as mentoring can and should be a two way street, for example, new graduates have knowledge of current thinking and research, whereas the person in the workforce has a real world perspective, and may not have had the time to undertake in depth research.

A **business coach** on the other hand is a person who gives you the techniques, and shows you what to do. They will correct you and ask you to re-work where necessary.

The third kind of “mentor” is **a sponsor** – these are people who can offer outside assistance because they can see the benefit of doing so, at some point down the track. They know that if they give you the right kind of information, and you work on the skills and knowledge that you need, they may be able to utilise you at a later date.

Other things to consider in the CPD mix:

List servs:

Take part in the discussions on the list servs. Whilst lurking in the background may afford you lots of opportunities to learn what is going on in the industry, be willing to share your opinion (politely of course) and to ask questions of the community at large. Most of the people who are regular contributors don't bite at what we may think are silly questions. But as a matter of interest, some lists – for example the RMAA listserv (Records Management Association of Australasia – <http://www.rmaa.com.au>) does have an archive of questions and

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postings, so you may like to have a flick through there first rather than ask a question that has already been answered.

What Are You Reading?

Your current reading material is a good indication of how serious you are about Continuing Professional Development. Did you know that the last half dozen books that you have read is also a good indication of where you will be headed in the next 12 months?

However, it is worth noting that professional texts and personal development material is not something you do for entertainment. Reading is all very well, but you also need to apply what you are learning in order to benefit from the material. A case of the blindingly obvious perhaps, but how many of you finish one book and immediately start reading the next? Unless you are simply after an overview of a particular topic, I would hazard a guess that you have missed one or two important points and it is well worth going back over and re-reading the material again, making notes and applying what you have learnt. Do you read a book on speaking a new language without actually saying any of the words out loud, or engaging in a conversation – of course not. So why would you expect to know the subject matter of any book (especially professional type texts) simply by reading them.

For those people who spend a great deal of time researching topics for clients in a work situation then the situation can be deemed to be slightly different, as you are reading and analysing all the time. You may be forgiven for wanting to read the less challenging stuff when you get home. However, your choice of reading material should be stimulated by your goals. If you don't have any idea of what you want out of life, then chances are you won't know what books you should be reading either.

We hope you have a great week.

A Thought to Ponder:

“It is the greatest nuisance that knowledge can only be acquired by hard work”

W Somerset Maugham (1874 – 1965)

English Writer

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at training@iea.com.au. Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues' friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au with “subscribe newsletter” in the subject line.

If you have any suggestions as to what should be included in future editions, then please send an email to training@iea.com.au. If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, please send an email to training@iea.com.au with “unsubscribe newsletter” in the subject line.

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