

Lifelong Learning: Let's Start at the Beginning

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We often look at Lifelong Learning in hindsight; meaning, someone experienced and well versed retrospectively explains their journey. We rarely hear the vantage point of someone that stands at the very beginning of their journey. We do not explore the simple, meaningful hints that build great habits and opportunity. Thus, I offer my experience of trial and error as a way to fill that void.

Seek out peers then a mentor. We often find ourselves caught up in finding someone with “the answers” that we overlook the simplest quest: finding those to ask questions.

Building a peer network will help you make connections across experience, institution type, and location. That network can relate to similar circumstances that you are currently facing and even provide insights for things to come a couple months or years down the line. Most important, a peer network is the perfect environment for collaboration, opinions and ideas. It is less intimidating to brainstorm with those also searching for their direction in this field. Thus, you grow as a community, continuously pushing one another to examine situations from a variety of perspectives.

Mentorship. Although we are pushed to make mentorship connections early on – it does not mean that they are instantaneous. I have learned to be patient. Mentorship should occur honestly and grow through connections that you make by simply carrying out conversations. I personally make time to meet with professionals at neighboring campuses and schedule phone calls with those a bit more removed. A monthly refresher or change of perspective can be valuable for your problem solving.

Seek volunteer roles. I have learned that you cannot feasibly attend every conference, plan every retreat, or present on every topic. However, there is an equally valuable opportunity in volunteering. Volunteering in different fields or disciplines creates enough dissonance to force you to learn competencies. Professional development does not always start with a PowerPoint and student development does not always happen with “your students.”

Read intentionally. There will never be “enough time,” so do not make that excuse. Make a commitment to not hinder yourself from refining your craft. I, personally, have dedicated 15 or 20 minutes a day to read a chapter of a book to start and end my day.

By creating this space, I have a chance to reflect on my progress, explore competencies, and readjust my approaches to situations. I have recently begun to read books centered on social justice issues to assess my limitations in knowledge. By simply making time, I am arming myself with enough material to have uncomfortable conversations across difference and thus becoming a better professional and human being.

Embarking on a journey of lifelong learning requires a commitment to creating healthy habits to foster knowledge from the start. Although our days may turn reactionary and

our evenings exhausting, we must not neglect the work at hand: We all have to be better, because we took the oath that we would be.