

For the Love of Learning

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“There are few things more pathetic than those who have lost their curiosity and sense of adventure, and who no longer care to learn.” – Gordon B. Hinckley in *Way to Be: 9 Roles for Living the Good Life*.

To be curious and to want to know more. To be open to the fact that you can learn something new in every situation. To seek opportunities to expand your ways of thinking. To simply want to know more about a particular topic or subject area. To challenge your current frame and context of the world. To know more to be able to do more. These are all possible reasons why professionals choose to engage in lifelong learning through formal education opportunities.

Personally, I love to be in the classroom. The opportunity to sit and be in the presence of a content expert is so powerful. The opportunity to learn from someone for whom their area of study allows them to share intimate knowledge of the topic and assist students in their application of that knowledge is so valuable. The experience of working with other learners to master a concept while seeking potential application can be invigorating. Lifelong learning can take many forms, both formal and informal; however, my path has focused on formal in-class learning over the last fifteen years.

Many people have asked me why I continue to take classes, and the answer is simple: my desire to learn has never faltered. In order to continue to challenge myself and those around me, I must be equipped with new and innovate approaches to our work. The world of higher education and fraternity and sorority life is an ever changing and dynamic environment. To assume that knowledge we received more than a decade or two ago is still relevant is, in my opinion, a narrow perspective. As professionals, we must continue to build our knowledge base and challenge ourselves to think differently to create new and innovative resources.

For many higher education professionals, the opportunity to enroll in classes at their institution is part of the benefits package. To be a lifelong learner does not require one to enroll in a full time program or have a desire to complete an additional degree. Lifelong learning is simply the act of engaging your curiosity in some form of education, and to enroll in a course is an excellent option. Some lifelong learners are interested in a specific skill, such as learning a new language or participating in the performing arts. Maybe a photography class or a world religions course would peak your interest and allow you to engage in a new and meaningful way. Would it be possible for you to take that class you always wanted to take during your undergraduate or graduate program, but did not have the time in your schedule?

Another option may be to enroll in a program of study and commit to a full curriculum in an area of interest. After completing three degrees in education, I decided to enroll in a Master of Business Administration program. My most significant takeaway from this program has been the absolute relevance of the MBA curriculum to higher education and fraternity/sorority management. Ethics, financial management, data analysis, cultural competence, organizational behavior, and so many other content areas have direct application to our work. Higher education is big business. Fraternity and sorority is big business. While we are all educators at our core, we

must also recognize the need to understand the dynamics that influence decisions within the context of big business. Each and every class has offered a new perspective for me to think about our work differently, to challenge our “universal truths,” and add new possibilities to the conversation regarding solutions.

The decision to enroll in a course or a new program of study is not one that should be taken lightly. There are both time and financial commitment to consider. While the course may be free via a tuition remission benefit, there will most likely be a textbook or other related course items that need to be purchased. In addition, adjusting your schedule to allow time to attend class and complete the required course assignments must also be considered. However, the return on this financial and time investment will be well worth it when you find yourself bringing new ideas and concepts to the daily conversations in your office and with your colleagues. Applying something you have learned in class to your professional work can bring high levels of satisfaction, and reinforces the reason you chose to take the course in the first place.

To be a lifelong learner is to engage your mind in the generation of new ideas. Consider the possibilities for our work if more professionals would re-enter the classroom as a student and learn new philosophies, skills, and approaches. How could our work be better informed by the best practices of social work or law? Would we think about solutions differently using best practices from engineering management or religious studies? What could be possible if we used literature from a sports administration program or a health care leadership program?

There is much to be gained by engaging in learning outside of the curriculum of higher education or non-profit management, and our profession would be enhanced a great deal if we had more professionals engaged in lifelong learning through the classroom. Make an active choice to take advantage of the benefits offered to you as a higher education professional and enroll a class. Choose to audit the course if you wish, but just start. Lifelong learning is not a spectator sport; choose to engage and benefit from all that in-class learning could bring to your work and to your life.

“Those people who develop the ability to continuously acquire new and better forms of knowledge, that they can apply to their work and to their lives, will be the movers and shakers in our society for the indefinite future.” – Brian Tracy