

# Adult learning: Do you know what you want to be when you 'grow up'?



INFORMATION ENTERPRISES  
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First of all, let me start by saying that in my opinion adult learning is not simply 'continuing professional development' *per se*, nor is it just a course of study that you undertake at some point after you have left school because you didn't do very well the first time around. Adult learning is a decision that you make to undertake some formal training that has a set of pre-determined outcomes. These outcomes should take you to where you feel you want or ought to be. Whilst this may involve enrolling in a formal course at school, college or university, it is not always necessary to do so.

People who have reached a certain level of maturity tend to know what they want to achieve through their learning experiences. Adult learners already have a wealth of experience to apply to career development and further or continuing education, and tend to be more motivated when it comes to making choices with regards to their career. Of course, continuing education is expensive. So it would make sense to know what you want to get out of the experience before you start.

However, in order to know where you want to be and what you should be studying you will need to have a clear understanding of where you are now. This can be achieved by a simple inventory of yourself and your CV. What skills do you say that you have? What skills do you know that you have? If you are not sure where your personal strengths and weaknesses lie, then enlist the help of family, friends and current/former work colleagues. Ask them to give you five examples of something you are really good at and, if you are brave enough, five things you could improve. Emphasise that you would like this in relation to your professional life.

The final part of the personal inventory is to determine what skills or knowledge you need to have in order to do the job that you want. The answer to this question can be found in the many job descriptions that litter the employment section of the online job boards, newspapers and organisational websites. So that is the first place you should look once you have decided what you want to be when you 'grow up'.

Determine the position/job that you want. Review the selection criteria, and then determine the gaps you need to fill in order to reach the selection stage of the employment process. Sounds simple doesn't it? The way you achieve these aims and ambitions is to undertake some form of adult learning or continuing educational program.

Ambitions can be realised through the formal educational system. However, depending on the position that you would like to have, may be achievable by other means. On the job learning, voluntary work, mentoring and networking might provide the additional skills and knowledge required. Perhaps your choice of study is not be related to your current profession. In examining your skills and abilities, dreams and ambitions, you may decide


that your chosen field of study relates more to personal development than professional. Or indeed to a field entirely unrelated to the one that you are in now.

When undertaking your personal inventory, you may be able to take into consideration RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) status for work or study undertaken in other areas. Take care – this can be just as costly as re-doing the units you require. Of course, the additional study may act as a refresher for you, if you can spare the time.

And that brings me to the final point I would like to make with regards to continuing education and other forms of adult learning. It is a time-consuming process, and this is easily overlooked when you begin any course of study. If you are already working full-time, and have a home and family to look after, do you have the time to undertake the training? What you might think will only take a few months may in fact take considerably longer, it all depends on how much time you can spare, and how motivated you are. So why not choose the area or skill that you think is the most important as the field of study to undertake first and foremost. Know what you want to achieve and you will find ways to get there.

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