

Learning – A Community Enterprise

By Dr. Carolyn Mathews- UCCI

Why is learning important?

Learning is the basis of a successful life. From the day we are born we are learning. In fact research shows that the rate of learning is greatest at 3 years of age when brain development is at its maximum. From then on it is learning all the way. We learn to walk and talk, we learn to read. Some of us learn to listen and many of us learn to swim, ride a bike and cook. Most of us associate learning with school where we were exposed to formal learning but, alongside formal learning, much informal learning takes place. Learning to text, to blog and to chat on the internet are significant informal learning activities that consume young people today.

In the contemporary world of work there is an increasing emphasis on learning. We need basic knowledge to engage in our work whether we are talking about the most basic forms of work or the most complex professions; However, learning doesn't stop there. In order to improve our work or progress in our careers, we need to continue to learn.

Who needs to learn?

We all need to learn. A commitment to learning is a commitment to bettering yourself, to continuing your intellectual growth and to being part of a community that values learning. A commitment to learning is a commitment to increasing the social capital of a community as well as increasing your skills in order to do your job. We learn values through good or bad life experiences. For instance, we learn to treat people fairly or not; we learn to discriminate or not and we learn a range of social and life skills along the way.

Learning about your work and learning through your work.

Learning that is related to your work is very different to school learning which can be somewhat abstract and may not appear to be relevant at the time. And maybe relevance is not the intention of school learning. Much of what we do at school is what I call 'mental gymnastics' preparing us for the 'Olympics of life'. But once we are working, learning is different. There is a focus and a reason. The event is specific and the training path is clear. On-the-job learning is an aspect of learning that can be both formal and informal. We learn as we work and we learn about our work through specific learning programs.

Here in Cayman there are significant opportunities for people to engage in learning once they enter the workforce. An ideal starting point is to identify a direction for a future career. This is not always so straight forward, as finding a direction can be confusing. There are many stories of young people who have been inspired by a teacher or other person of influence to engage in

a career direction before even thinking of it in terms of a career. Following your interest, instinct or dream can often be a good starting point for a career.

What opportunities are there for learning in Cayman?

The University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI) recognizes that every person needs an opportunity to learn. A range of programs are offered supporting young people through Certificate, Associate and Bachelor programs. In addition, UCCI recognizes that all professionals need to engage in continuing professional learning, not just to maintain currency in their knowledge but to be champions in their field.

One of the newest and most exciting programs offered at UCCI is the Masters Degree in Human Resource Management. This program makes a significant commitment to learning through an emphasis on students understanding the significant role that learning plays in assisting an organization to meet its strategic goals. Learning at the organizational level is a complex and dynamic activity that requires careful planning, implementation and analysis of effectiveness within the context of the goals of the organization. Students who complete this Masters Degree will work within their organizations, as part of an HR role, planning learning programs for all members in the organization. For instance, such learning programs will ensure that the organization's security personnel are offered opportunities to continue to learn in their field. The same will be for its reception staff who will continually update on interpersonal and customer communication skills. IT staff always require a significant commitment to even retain their skills; it is essential that professional staff maintain currency and so it continues. There is research evidence to demonstrate that people who are supported to continually learn have raised morale and increased loyalty to their organization. Every person, in every organization or enterprise, however big or small, needs a positive attitude toward learning and opportunities to continue to learn. This is fundamental to the success of every organization.

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Dr Mathews teaches in the Masters Degree in Human Resource Management at UCCI and offers a consultancy service to business and industry in organizational learning.