

# The Importance of Continuing Professional Education

BY JON GALLANT

All professional investigators (PIs) have interesting and unique stories about what led them into this dynamic profession. Frequently, one's past accomplishments and training have prepared them for a career in professional investigations. Whether a person is ex-law enforcement or has a background in investigative journalism, each has a different story.

While many PIs are certainly qualified for their positions from their past experiences, many lack an enthusiasm for continuing their professional development. This is a big mistake.

Henry Ford once said, "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young."

For a PI, there are few things worse than being viewed as a 'dinosaur' or someone whose time has passed them by.

Before we discuss how to continue to learn as a professional investigator, we must first define what Continuing Professional Education (CPE) is.

*Continuing Professional Education (CPE) is any educational activity which helps to maintain, develop or increase knowledge, problem-solving, technical skills or performance standards related to a person's professional life.*

While many professions require participation in continuing education to comply with laws or to remain licensed, this is not typically required of professional investigators. While some states and associations require it, most do not. This general lack of requirement is the main reason why it is neglected.

However, the lack of regulation regarding training should not be a reason to not continue to develop professionally. The opposite should be true. Regardless if it's required, the importance of continuing education is its ability to keep professionals updated with relevant training, information, skills and knowledge to

remain competent in their field. If an investigator invests in him or her self, through training and development, he or she will rise above the competition.

It's true that many PIs honed their skills in related fields. However, that experience was limited in its time and scope. At face value, past professional experience usually qualifies someone to become a licensed investigator. However, it is now more important to ask yourself if that past training and experience will be enough for next 10 or 20 years. With the rate at which technology and the business environment continues to change, it is highly unlikely.

There is a wide variety of options for investigators to continue their development. For this article I have divided continuing education opportunities into three categories: structured continuing education, passive continuing education, and related continuing education.

Structured Continuing Education is the traditional and most formal type of professional development. It can be any course, study guide or organized activity where professional knowledge can be gained from study materials or in a learning environment with other professionals or an instructor. Examples of Structured Continued Education are:

- Courses offered by professional organizations like the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners.
- National and state association conferences, seminars and workshops.
- In field or specialized training (i.e. Computer Forensics, interview classes)

Unfortunately, there are many reasons why people cannot or do not participate in Structured Continuing Education. Busy family lives often interfere, but the prospect of missing out on a paying job to attend a seminar or course can be difficult to justify.

When Structured Continued Education is not possible, the professional investigator can still continue to learn. This type of learning is Passive Continuing Education. This type of learning and



development is a casual, and maybe even fun, activity that furthers your professional knowledge. It may not be a formal activity, but you can still gain valuable knowledge that can be applied to your professional life. Some examples are:

- Self-study materials.
- Reading professional journals (i.e. *PI Magazine*).
- Setting Google alerts for articles that are relevant to professional investigations.
- Watching investigation news or closely following cases in the news closely.

Lastly, we can never forget that professional investigators are in a for-profit business. Honing business skills should be as important as improving investigative skills. This is why Related Continuing Education is also important. Examples of Related Continuing Education are:

- Online courses in Excel or QuickBooks.
- Reading books and materials on advertising, networking and promotion.
- Taking courses in marketing or accounting.
- Listening or watching videos on how to improve productivity.

Business and management skills can always be improved to increase personal effectiveness and the ability to succeed. Improving on your business and organizational skills will have a positive impact on your investigations.

So how do we improve our already valuable skill sets? The answer to that is to continue your professional development! A greater participation rate in continuing education will create a more informed group of professional investigators thus improving the profession as a whole. **PI**

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