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The benefits of lifelong learning within communities

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Introduction:

Lifelong learning keeps the brain sharp and active, and that leads to a longer life than would otherwise be the case, all things being equal. Quality of life among all our citizens is now directly related to individual, community, societal and even economic well being.

Lifelong learning does not necessarily have to restrict itself to informal learning, however. It is best described as being voluntary with the purpose of achieving personal fulfilment. The means to achieve this could result in informal or formal education.

Lifelong learning is a form of self-initiated education that is focused on personal development. While there is no standardized definition of lifelong learning, it has generally been taken to refer to the learning that occurs outside of a formal educational institute, such as a school, university or corporate training.

BENEFITS OF LIFELONG LEARNING:

As we enter the new economy of the 21st century, named the Knowledge Society by management guru Peter Drucker, lifelong learning is more important to our individual lives, our community and our society than ever before. Feel free to use some or all of this article in promoting your lifelong learning program within your community, and within your organization. Please attribute it to LERN.

According to the Learning Resources Network (LERN), a leading association in lifelong learning, lifelong learning now has these multiple benefits for us all.

1. Professional Development:

With human capital now the critical factor in a prosperous work organization, and new information being created continuously, professional development is now a lifelong activity for those

in the workforce to gain new skill sets.

Professional development is especially critical for millennials (born 1980-1999) new to the workforce, who compose an average of 30% of those engaged in lifelong learning. Professional development is also essential in keeping skilled workers on one's community. And research shows that when one person is engaged in lifelong learning, the learning benefits actually extend to those who interact with that person.

A vocational and leisure classes are also directly related to career and job advancement, with many employers asking about hobbies and interests in job interviews.

2. Community and Society Benefits:

Quality of life in one's community and society is directly impacted by the extent to which people are engaged in lifelong learning people. Research shows that wages go up, the cost to society goes down, and that benefits everyone.

People involved in lifelong learning are also about 20% more inclined to support vital community organizations, such as recreation and parks departments, public schools, and higher education.

3. Mental health:

Maintaining and increasing one's mental health is now another recognized benefit of lifelong learning. Whether it be the nature deficit that many urban residents now face, the epidemic of anxiety that our younger people now experience, or the need for social interaction among single people, lifelong learning provided not only subject matter in enhancing one's mental health, but simply the experience of lifelong learning is beneficial to all concerned.

4. Longer Life:

The research on this is clear. Lifelong learning keeps the brain sharp and active, and that leads to a longer life than would otherwise be the case, all things being equal.

5. Personal Development:

Quality of life among all our citizens is now directly related to individual, community, societal and even economic wellbeing. People of all generations are actively engaged in lifelong learning for personal development reasons, with participation among Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z and the Silent Generation all equally represented based on their participation.

6. Changing Lives:

Lifelong learning literally changes lives, sometimes overnight. Parents report their autistic children change almost immediately after the parent takes a class on autism; teachers report in classes on new techniques used the day before; Rosa Parks did nonviolent training before she created history in the civil rights movement, to the benefit of all.

7. Knowledge Society:

Upwards of 15 million people a year in the United States and Canada are known to have taken an informal or formal lifelong learning class each year. The rewards of personal and professional development for our advanced societies only strengthens the need and desire of people for lifelong learning, adding to the benefits of personal development, mental health, longer life, changing lives and the next as yet undiscovered benefits of lifelong learning.

Key checklist for lifelong learning:

1. Voluntary
2. Self- motivated or self- initiated
3. Doesn't always require a cost
4. Often informal
5. Self- taught or instruction that is sought
6. Motivation is out of personal interest or personal development

How to adopt lifelong learning in your life?

1. Recognize your own personal interests and goals:

Lifelong learning is about you, not other people and what they want. Reflect on what you're passionate about and what you envision for your own future. If progressing your career is your personal interest, then there are ways to participate in self-directed learning to accomplish this goal. If learning history is your passion, there are likewise ways to explore this interest further.

2. Make a list of what you would like to learn or be able to do:

Once you've identified what motivates you, explore what it is about that particular interest or goal that you want to achieve. Returning to our example of someone having a passion for history, perhaps it is desired to simply expand knowledge on the history of Europe. Or perhaps the interest is so strong that going for a Ph.D. is a dream goal. Both of these are different levels of interest that entail different ways of learning.

3. Identify how you would like to get involved and the resources available:

Achieving our personal goals begins with figuring out how to get started. Researching and reading about the interest and goal can help to formulate how to go about learning it.

With our history example: the person who wants to simply learn more about a particular historical time period could discover books in the library catalogue, blogs, magazines and podcasts dedicated to the subject, or even museums and talks. The individual who wanted to achieve a Ph.D. in history as a personal goal could research university programs that could be done part-time or online, as well as the steps one would need to take to reach the doctorate level.

4. Structure the learning goal into your life:

Fitting a new learning goal into your busy life takes consideration and effort. If you don't make time and space for it, it won't happen. It can easily lead to discouragement or quitting the learning initiative altogether. Plan out how the requirements of the new learning initiative can fit into your life or what you need to do to make it fit. For example, if learning a new language is the learning goal, can you make time for one hour a day? Or does 15 minutes a day sound more realistic?

Understanding the time and space you can devote to the learning goal can help you to stick with the goal in the long-run.

5. Make a commitment:

Committing to your decision to engage in a new learning initiative is the final and most important step. If you have set realistic expectations and have the self-motivation to see it through, commit to it and avoid making excuses.

Importance of lifelong learning:

Whether pursuing personal interests and passions or chasing professional ambitions, lifelong learning can help us to achieve personal fulfilment and satisfaction.

It recognizes that human have a natural drive to explore, learn and grow and encourages us to improve our own quality of life and sense of self-worth by paying attention to the ideas and goals that inspire us.

Examples of lifelong learning:

Here are some of the types of lifelong learning initiatives that you can engage in:

Developing a new skill (e.g. sewing, cooking, programming, public speaking, etc.)

Self-taught study (e.g. learning a new language, researching a topic of interest, subscribing to a podcast, etc.)

Learning a new sport or activity (e.g. Joining martial arts, learning to ski, learning to exercise, etc.)

Learning to use a new technology (smart devices, new software applications, etc.)

Acquiring new knowledge (taking a self-interest course via online education or classroom-based course)

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