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The Importance of Lifelong Learning

Along with hundreds of other proud graduates, Doreetha Daniels was awarded her associate's degree from the College of the Canyons. But Doreetha was hardly a "traditional" college student in comparison to most. And, because of that, her walk across the graduation stage was really more of a dance, set to the rhythm of thundering applause from everyone attending the ceremony.

Doreetha made history that day as the school's first-ever grad to earn a degree at the age of 99! In a press release following this momentous event, the nonagenarian reported that she went back to school for one reason...*to better herself*. Having dedicated six years to her coursework, her degree stands as a testament to Doreetha's unwavering commitment to lifelong learning.

What is Lifelong Learning?

Also known as continuous learning, lifelong learning (LLL) is the ***ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge*** for either personal or professional reasons. While few of us will seek a college degree in our nineties as Doreetha did, statistics show that increasing numbers of people are pursuing further education, training, or certification as mid-careerists. In addition, recent college grads understand that earning a degree by no means marks the end of knowledge and skills acquisition.

The positive impact of LLL reaches well beyond the individual learner. From an organizational perspective, learning is the foundation of operational excellence, continuous improvement, and innovation; and innovation and productivity increases strengthen our economy. Therefore, no matter if you're a long-tenured employee or entering the workforce for the very first time, employers seek workers who:

- have the knowledge, skills, and ability to the job well
- and are committed to continuous growth and development throughout their careers.

Some of us naturally engage in lifelong learning because we *want* to. It feeds our inquisitive nature and desire to "be better". Yet, it's undeniable that LLL is a necessity for each and every one of us. Continual learning is an economic imperative in order to compete in today's world of increasing globalization, rapidly-evolving technologies, and the shifting employment landscape.



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Ongoing developments in artificial intelligence, automation, and offshoring are reshaping how work is performed. To thrive in this rapidly evolving landscape, **individuals must commit to lifelong learning, continually update their skills, and stay current with emerging technologies.**

Certainly, LLL provides opportunities to enhance or expand your skill sets. But “skilling up to keep up” is not the only reason to engage in lifelong learning. There are many benefits that result from it, such as:

- **Employability:** In today’s work environment, it’s not uncommon for people to change jobs 10 to 15 times throughout their careers. Workers who grow their knowledge and skills in alignment with employer needs:
 - are better positioned to *keep* their jobs as the associated work tasks and requirements evolve and change over time
 - and are more likely to get promotions (and higher paychecks).
- **Increased confidence and adaptability:** The uncertainty of change might leave you wondering if you’re up to the challenge of learning new skills. Well, you are; you do it a lot already. For example, think back to last year (or last month, for that matter). Did you learn a new software program or video conferencing platform designed to improve productivity at work? After navigating the learning curve, using that software became second-nature to you, right?

So, while learning new things and stepping out of old routines may seem a bit daunting at first, continuous learning helps you gain confidence, increase self-esteem, and adapt more easily to changes. Through learning, you get a better sense of who you are, what you have to offer, and what you’re able to accomplish.

- **Practicality:** Due in large part to the Internet, we’re becoming a do-it-yourself (DIY) culture. Along with countless other advantages, technology has given us the ability to acquire knowledge on demand and learn how to do virtually *thousands* of things — anytime and anywhere!

Are you planning to make Thanksgiving dinner for your in-laws this year — but you’ve never cooked a turkey before? No worries. Learn how by watching any of the thousands of *YouTube* videos on the topic and dinner is served!

- **Social awareness and perspective:** To genuinely understand and empathize with others, increase social awareness, and foster strong interpersonal relationships, it’s



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important to seek out new perspectives. Enhancing the skills that positively impact emotional intelligence can bring even greater happiness and success, both personally and at work.

- **Life enrichment and improved health:** The capacity to learn is a cornerstone of motivation and human flourishing. Whether directed toward topics of personal interest or professional development, curiosity and learning can lead to a more fulfilling and multi-dimensional life. Furthermore, research studies on health show that an active and inquiring mind helps to prevent age-related memory loss and a decline in cognitive abilities.

Types of Lifelong Learning

Whether for personal or professional reasons, there are many good reasons to be a lifelong learner. From a professional perspective, **career gap analysis** is a useful tool to assess your learning needs and plan the actions you'll take to achieve your career goals.

There are many ways to engage in lifelong learning, depending on your goals and needs. Here are some examples:

- **Formal lifelong learning** occurs within an organized and structured context and is often part of a scheduled and monitored sequence of coursework *explicitly designed as learning*. It may lead to formal recognition in the form of degree (e.g., associate's, bachelor's, post-graduate) or a [professional certification](#).

Additionally, if earning a degree is your goal, you may be eligible to receive undergraduate credit for [prior learning](#) experiences.

(For more information: [CareerOneStop Certification Finder](#).)

- **Self-directed learning** allows you to have control over the pace and / or path of learning. Examples of this type of learning include:
 - [massive open online courses](#) (MOOCs), which provide free, large-scale, interactive participation and open web-based access to courses that build on the engagement of learners who self-organize their participation (aligned to their individual learning goals, prior knowledge and skill levels, and common interests). Some but not all of these courses provide college credit.



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- online learning platforms (such as [Linkedin Learning](#) and [coursera](#)) offer fee-based courses on business, technology skills, and other topics designed to help individuals achieve their personal and professional goals.
- **Professional learning** is usually tied to an occupational field or position and encompasses a broad array of learning methodologies such as:
 - professional development opportunities provided by an employer (including on-the-job training as well as skills acquisition learning experiences and workshops),
 - training, workshops, and conferences sponsored by [professional associations](#) (*for more information: [CareerOneStop Professional Association Finder](#)*),
 - experiential learning activities that expand your knowledge and / or provide opportunities to develop skills (e.g., volunteerism; new projects, cross-functional teams and task forces in the workplace; leadership roles in a professional association, etc.).
 - [TED Talks](#); [YouTube](#); [podcasts](#); journals, articles, books, and blogs associated with an occupational field.
 - networking with other professionals and mentors to stay informed about the trends impacting your occupational field and / industry.

Keep Learning

Perhaps intuitively, Doreetha Daniels knew that going back to school in her nineties “*to better herself*” was more about the life enrichment than earning a degree. When you make lifelong learning a habit, it becomes part of *who you are* and it leads to a happier, healthier, and more fulfilling life.