

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION – OPPORTUNITIES 2008

Talkin' about my education

Top picks to study next year: emissions trading, R&D credits and tax changes and KiwiSaver

Stephen Nicholas

In addition to looking after the books, accountants today have myriad responsibilities that often have little to do with what they were taught as undergrads.

Professionals in my line of work have obligations to continue education above and beyond the minimum number of training hours the New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants requires members to complete each year to retain their membership.

In my view, these mandated requirements actually target the lowest common denominator. We all need more.

If we are serious about keeping abreast of the changes around us, let alone improving our skills, then career-long learning isn't a dispensable choice.

I'd suggest there are a number of ways of achieving such an experi-

ence over the coming year.

First is the option of looking to take relevant courses that provide intense bursts of information. The risk with such programmes, of course, is that one goes back to the workplace and doesn't use all those great ideas or information.

I can admit to having a good number of course-folders that never saw the light of day since the time I took a particular course.

Workshops that have followups

So, I now prefer to attend programmes that have at least a portion of their time spent in a workshop situation, which allows a simple but realistic study to be worked through.

In addition, the best courses from a learning perspective have been those that have several follow-ups with the same participants to share victories and encourage where the results have not been so forthcoming.

Every organisation has a team meeting or something to that effect. This is one opportunity to speed-learn for the whole team.

Each member has the responsibility to raise and explain either a new piece of information or an innovation.

This creates a ripple effect from the knowledge gain and allows the group to assess, challenge and adopt new ideas.

But this requires leadership; it is easy to allow a tall-poppy slasher to wreck the professional festivities.

Another easy and effective option is to formally debrief each assignment or significant process. Again, this creates the need for learning-focused leadership.

Then there's also the option of taking a postgraduate course. This has the ability to open new career paths, stimulate new approaches and expand your network.

The major advantage of completing an academic programme after working for a few years is the ability to mesh the learning with the real world.

All of those suggestions take place in structured learning environments.

You don't need structure

But there are unstructured environments too, from simple habits like reading business publications and websites (or using RSS to notify you of areas of interest), networking through professional and social circles, and training or mentoring someone who can provide the best gains when your



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"pupil" asks the hard questions.

Another executive education area that is not popular in New Zealand but has growing usage in Europe, is



HERE ARE MY PICKS FOR AREAS REQUIRING PARTICULAR STUDY IN 2008:

- Emissions measurement and trading.
- Research and development credits, and getting into the finer detail once the legislation has been passed (especially relevant to those with IT-related businesses or clients).
- Keeping up with tax changes and KiwiSaver issues as they evolve. Tax is a perennial learning obligation, but it should not be at the expense of learning how to maximise business outcomes

Good luck. Just remember: if you do not learn at least one new thing each day, you probably haven't been looking or listening hard enough!

taking time out ... to think. (Why, one might ask, is this seen as increasingly important? Well, think about it.)