

The ABCs of Work: Learn

Career Development



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Is there a formula for success at work? Are there simple rules that you can follow to increase your chances of getting what you want? Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau thinks the answer is yes. In this series of articles, *The ABCs of Work*, he shares the formula with you.

Greetings readers and congratulations! Simply by virtue of being here you are already on the path to increasing your odds of success. While luck plays a gigantic role in life, that does not mean you are helpless to control your fate. If you want to think of it this way, the tips we'll explore are ways to increase your odds that luck will find you.

Today's topic is all about finding ways to **Learn** throughout your career.

Last time we talked about why you should demonstrate Kindness, which allows you to advance

together with your colleagues. Today, we explore why learning is one of the key levers to a successful career.

Isn't that what I went to law school for?

It’s true, law school represents a learning threshold. We need to learn to think and build our substantive know-how. The bar exam represents a key threshold. Once passed, many people say, “I’m done with studying, done with memorizing, let me get down to work!”

I get it, and I sympathize. Take a break, switch gears. But not for too long. Can you think of any skills that don’t get better with practice? Why should the lawyer’s basic skills, thinking and analysis, be any different? The people who invest in lifelong learning are steadily improving their skills. And it shows.



Lawyers that are always open to learning sharpen their minds and consistently improve their skills over time. Stmool / *Shutterstock.com*

But fear not. Being a diligent student is much easier when you're doing it for yourself, and no one is grading you. Here are some excellent opportunities to weave learning into your work:

- **Read widely**. This should be easy, because there are no limits on what you read. Read science fiction, read professional journals, read newspapers, read blogs (Hey, read my blog!), read user's manuals. A reading habit helps you stay curious, engaged, and well-informed with little effort.
- **Research work topics**. You must deal with novel topics for work all the time. Treat these as more than just the need to answer a question. Why not build some expertise along the way? With each topic, you learn a little about you become more valuable.
- **Give training presentations**. In preparation for training others, you master your subject that much more. This is because you want to do well and so spend more time on the details than you otherwise would.

  Build some expertise along way.



Presenting to others gives you the opportunity to master certain subjects. Julia Tim / *Shutterstock.com*

- **Offer to speak at events**. Besides internal training, be alert for external training events. ACC events are, of course, superb opportunities. These expose you to other interesting people, including the organizers, speakers, and audience members.
- **Network**. Talking with interesting people is a great way to learn new things in a social setting. You often make serendipitous connections between diverse bits of knowledge.
- **Take Continuing Legal Education courses**. If school didn't leave you cold, consider also formal learning opportunities. You must carefully consider benefits and costs, including the time commitment. There are more convenient programs than ever, including online offerings.

Question, comment? Contact Career Path columnist James Bellerjeau.

Is learning ever harmful?

I suppose anyone who's spilled the beans to their kids that Santa Claus isn't real can question whether knowledge is universally good. That's usually less a concern at work. The one area I'd suggest exercising caution is being nosy when it doesn't concern you. There will always be sensitive business or employment topics that you're curious about but not involved in. Let those go and focus your learning elsewhere.

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Honorable mentions

Leveraging a single tip to drive work success is a heavy lift, even a tip as important as learning. Our formula will necessarily be incomplete. But the formula has impact, and all the more so because we've kept things simple. Here, to finish, are some honorable mention tips to serve as food for thought:

Lazy — You will work hard, so you will appear the very opposite of lazy. Working hard can be a crutch in the sense that you must power through otherwise inefficient uses of your time. If you're occasionally lazy, motivate yourself to invest in improving processes to save yourself more time later.

> Lean on others for help because knowing when you need help is a mark of strength not weakness.

Lean — I originally made a typo in the title of this article and immediately thought about two merits of this fine word: First, lean on others for help because knowing when you need help is a mark of strength not weakness. And second, keep a lean organization, i.e., be efficient.

Be well.

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James Bellerjeau



Lecturer

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Bellerjeau served for two decades as group general counsel for Mettler-Toledo International Inc., an S&P 500 company with its worldwide headquarters in Greifensee, Switzerland. He then led Mettler-Toledo's global Sustainability program for several years through June 2021.

Bellerjeau shares thoughts on how to live a good life at Klugne. You can also follow him on LinkedIn.