The Importance of Continuing Education

Industries are constantly changing. Continuing education is required for workers to stay current with the latest developments, skills, and new technologies required for their fields.

Certain professions also require continuing education to comply with laws, remain licensed or certified, or maintain membership in an association or licensing body. Overall, continuing education is considered a way for professionals to keep abreast of their fields so they don’t lag behind.

Many careers require continuing education. For example, teachers, real estate agents, and engineers are required to have a base of education and then receive updated education as they continue to work in their fields. Nursing, pharmacy, accounting, and criminal justice are additional fields in which professionals must continue to develop the skills necessary for ever-changing environments.

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For nurses, there are typically two types of continuing education. The first is required for them to remain licensed in their states. The second type of continuing education allows them to get more advanced degrees and qualify for higher-level nursing positions.

In the fast-paced pharmacy field, continuing education is important for career growth and licensure. Pharmacists need continuing education to renew their state licenses. Continuing education focuses on subject areas in health care, including pharmacology, patient counseling, regulatory issues, and other topics that contribute to professional pharmacy practice.

Certified public accountants (CPAs) must meet continuing education requirements established by the State Board of Accountancy of the states where their CPA licenses are held. The requirements vary from state to state. The American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) also requires certain continuing education for CPAs to maintain membership.

Today’s professionals must, therefore, commit to a ‘life-long learning’ philosophy that enhances effectiveness, diagnose and more quickly solves problems, while moving away from the traditional autocratic management styles.

Meanwhile, criminal justice professionals need to stay up-to-date on the new laws, procedures, and technologies to reinforce the knowledge they have already gained.

“Today, law enforcement, probation and parole, juvenile justice, and emergency management officers are asked to ‘prevent’ as well as confront,” says Dr. Melvin L. Howard, Ph.D., program director of Criminal Justice at South University, Columbia. “This requires critical thinking, addressing unique community or individual problems, enhancing quality of life, serving an ever-changing, multicultural society, and coordination of sensitive multi-agency operations.”

“It is therefore, critically important that professionals stay current and in compliance with changes in laws and regulations, as well as technological advancements; particularly, forensic science, intelligence gathering and analysis, surveillance, financial crime detection, and investigation techniques,” Howard continues.

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Education requirements for criminal justice professionals are established mainly at the agency level. According to Howard, professionals working in the legal arena have education requirements established by the state, or in some cases the federal level.

Criminal justice and legal fields include a variety of jobs, such as probation and parole officers, summary court officials, emergency management personnel, and crime scene technicians. Many of these careers require an undergraduate degree for entry, and then professionals must complete continuing education
courses as they progress in their careers.

Crime scene investigators and evidence technicians must maintain certifications specific to the collection, processing, and maintenance of evidence. Traffic crash reconstructionists must maintain accredited certifications. Emergency management professionals must complete and maintain certifications for their respective states and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

“In many agencies, continuing education is essential in advancement above the first-line supervision levels,” Howard explains. “Criminal justice professionals must consider and debate thoughts that are sometimes immensely different from their own. Today’s professionals must, therefore, commit to a ‘life-long learning’ philosophy that enhances effectiveness, diagnose and more quickly solves problems, while moving away from the traditional autocratic management styles.”

**Continuing Education Formats**

Continuing education is offered in different formats, with many being flexible to accommodate work schedules. These programs can take place at colleges and universities, training centers, or at the workplace. Continuing education is often delivered as degree-completion programs, certificate programs, and diploma programs at colleges.

“Non-traditional higher and continuing education programs are available now to a greater degree than ever,” Howard says. “In addition to the formats mentioned, e-learning (Blackboard and WebEx) is becoming more widespread, along with other technology-based, interactive instruction, and electronic conferencing.”

Whether it is required or not, continuing education can be important for career satisfaction. Continuing education can boost confidence and lead to opportunities for career advancement.